

# Collective Feminist Leadership

## What is it and why does it matter?

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**Welcome!**



**FAIR SHARE**  
of Women Leaders

## **Our Vision**

We envision a global social impact sector that walks the talk on gender equality and embraces feminist principles and culture at all levels of our organisations.

**We work towards this through:**

- 1) Data and monitoring
- 2) Advocating for Feminist Leadership



# **Shared Principles**

Confidentiality  
Listening  
Self-awareness  
Discomfort  
Interrupting power  
Equal thinkers

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# Agenda

- 15:00 Welcome
- 15:10 What is feminist leadership and what are its principles?
- 15:25 Why collective leadership?
- 15:40 Sharing your stories & Group activity
- 16:55 Closing remarks

# FINGERHOLDING:



**When you hear the term  
“collective feminist leadership”  
what are the first thoughts that  
come to mind?**

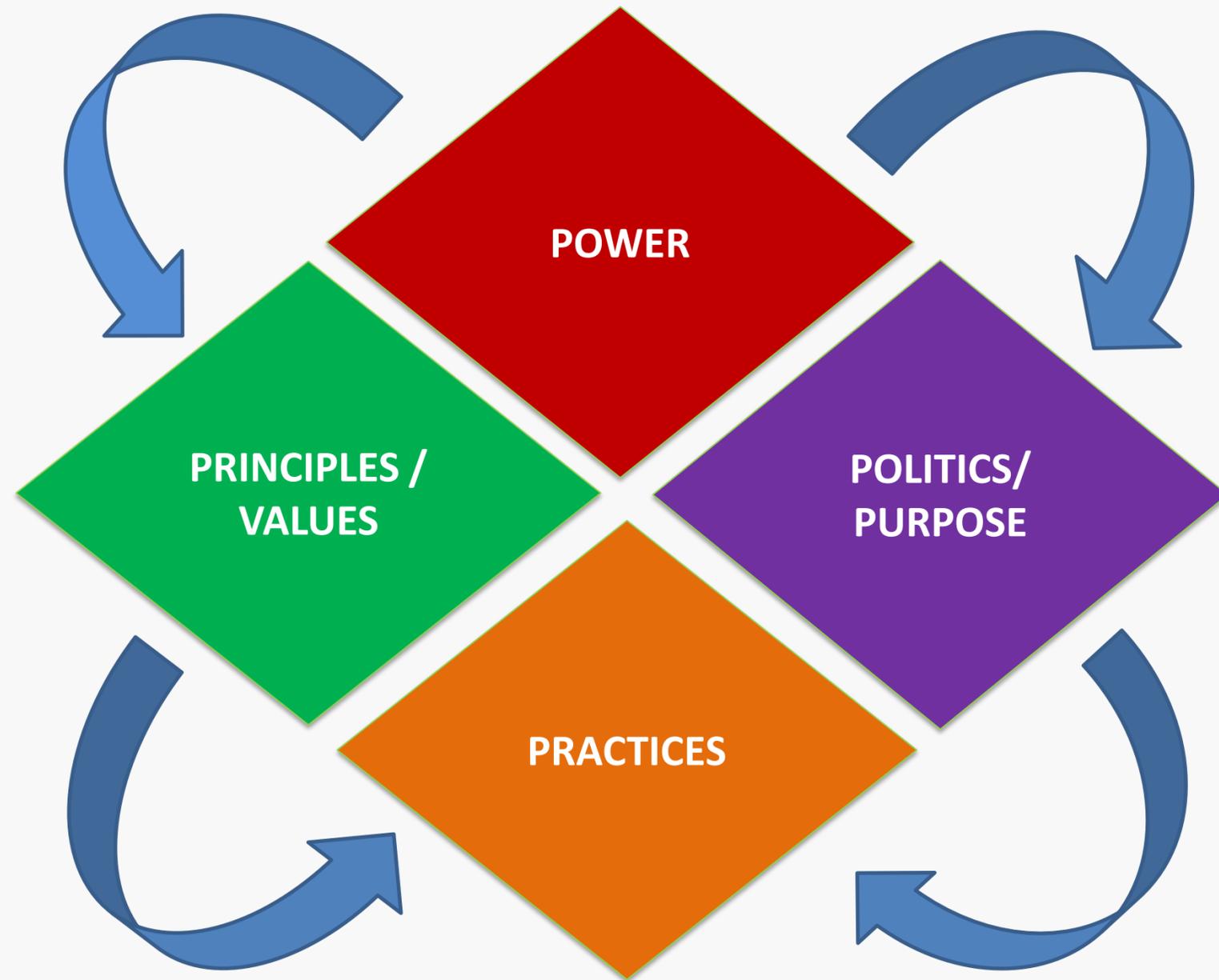
**Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com)  
Use code 9836 7096**



# Feminist Leadership is:

- A process of transforming ourselves, our societies, and the larger world to embrace and advance a feminist vision of social justice.
  - Not about authority and control. It is about dismantling discriminatory structures of power – visible, hidden, and invisible – including within ourselves; it is about modeling feminist values and politics, every day, in every space
  - To mobilize and unleash our individual and collective power to build a world where there is peace, equality, respect for the Earth, and resources for securing the rights and wellbeing of *all* people – regardless of their gender identity, race, nationality, ability, class, caste, ethnicity, sexual expression, religion, or location
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# THE FEMINIST LEADERSHIP DIAMOND



The Feminist Leadership “Diamond” is balanced when our individual and collective practice of power is shaped by our principles and purpose

# THE SELF

Psychic & Physical wellbeing or ill-being

PRINCIPLES / VALUES

Internalized victimhood, oppression, fear, social norms

POWER

Our socio-economic location & internalized biases, privilege

POLITICS / PURPOSE

Personality traits, talents, abilities

PRACTICES

Social capital, "intangible" power

# THE SELF IMPACTS THE DIAMOND!

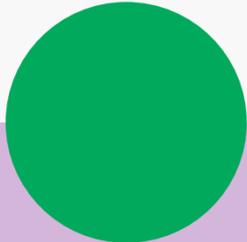
# Some key reflections

- Feminist leadership seeks the redistribution of power and the transformation of its practice not just externally, but within its own spaces, especially within the self....
- The self is a site of change and of feminist social transformation...we cannot transform society without transforming ourselves, particularly our internalization of dominant narratives, biases, privileges, behaviours
- Feminist leadership addresses power dynamics – visible, hidden, and invisible – AND models new norms and practices - in
  1. its own spaces (organizations, collectives, movements) as well as
  2. in the larger society / communities in which these spaces are located



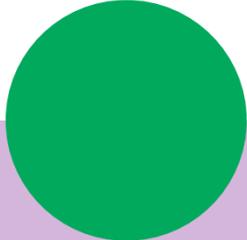
## Feminist leadership principles

What are the critical feminist principles that must shape our individual and collective practice of power? These are a few:

- The personal is political – practice what you believe in, in all the spaces you occupy – personal, collective, societal
  - Equality and equity – ensure power is shared – monitor and challenge the concentration and aggregation of power in the hands of either privileged groups or privileged individuals.
  - Inclusion and non-discrimination – Always ask who has been left out? Whose voices are not being heard?
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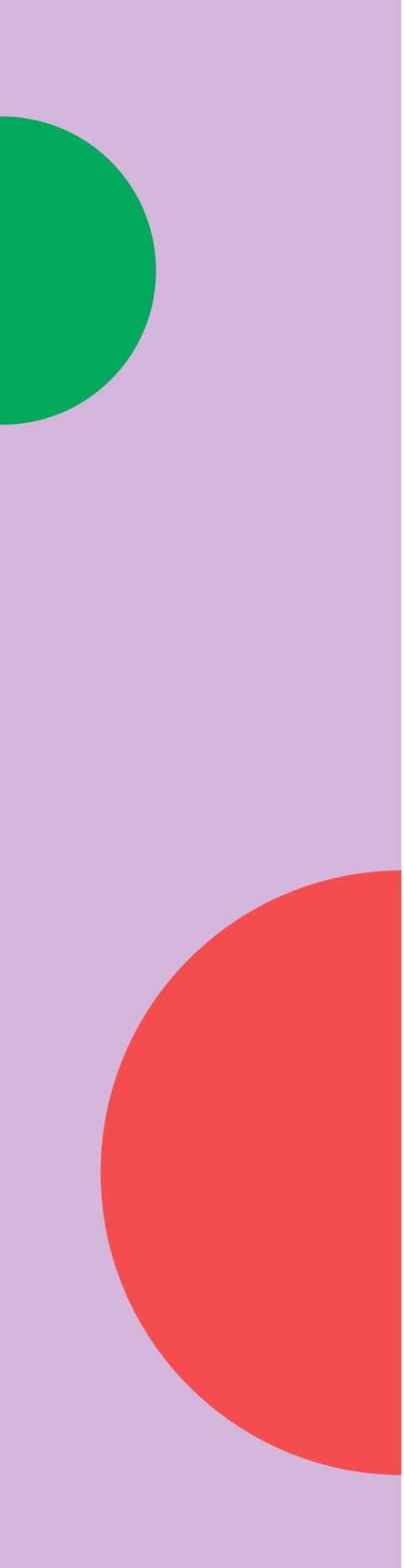
# Feminist leadership principles

- Intersectionality – are we practicing awareness of how multiple power structures & systems of oppression are operating on us, individually and collectively?
  - Inter-generationality – are we ensuring power in our spaces is shared across generations, and that we do not revert to ageism of various kinds?
  - Peace and non-violence – are we modelling non-violent ways of dealing with tensions and conflict?
  - Ecological / environmental justice & sustainability – are we greening our individual and collective
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# Feminist leadership & collective leadership – how are they connected?

- If the redistribution of power and transforming the self are at the core of feminist leadership, then they are pointing us clearly towards the need for transforming traditional leadership paradigm of the single, s/hero, “strong man” or “strong woman” leader!
- We are being asked to reimagine and reinvent leadership structures that radically depart from this paradigm towards.....





# Feminist leadership is inherently collective!

- Feminist leadership demands the transformation of our leadership structures through new architectures based on shared power, responsibility and accountability
- It is about collectively holding responsibility and accountability in terms of:
  - resources (both financial and other),
  - decision-making
  - activism
  - dealing with backlash, failures, or success, and
  - the safety, security and wellbeing of each other....

# Challenges / Dilemmas of collective leadership

## External:

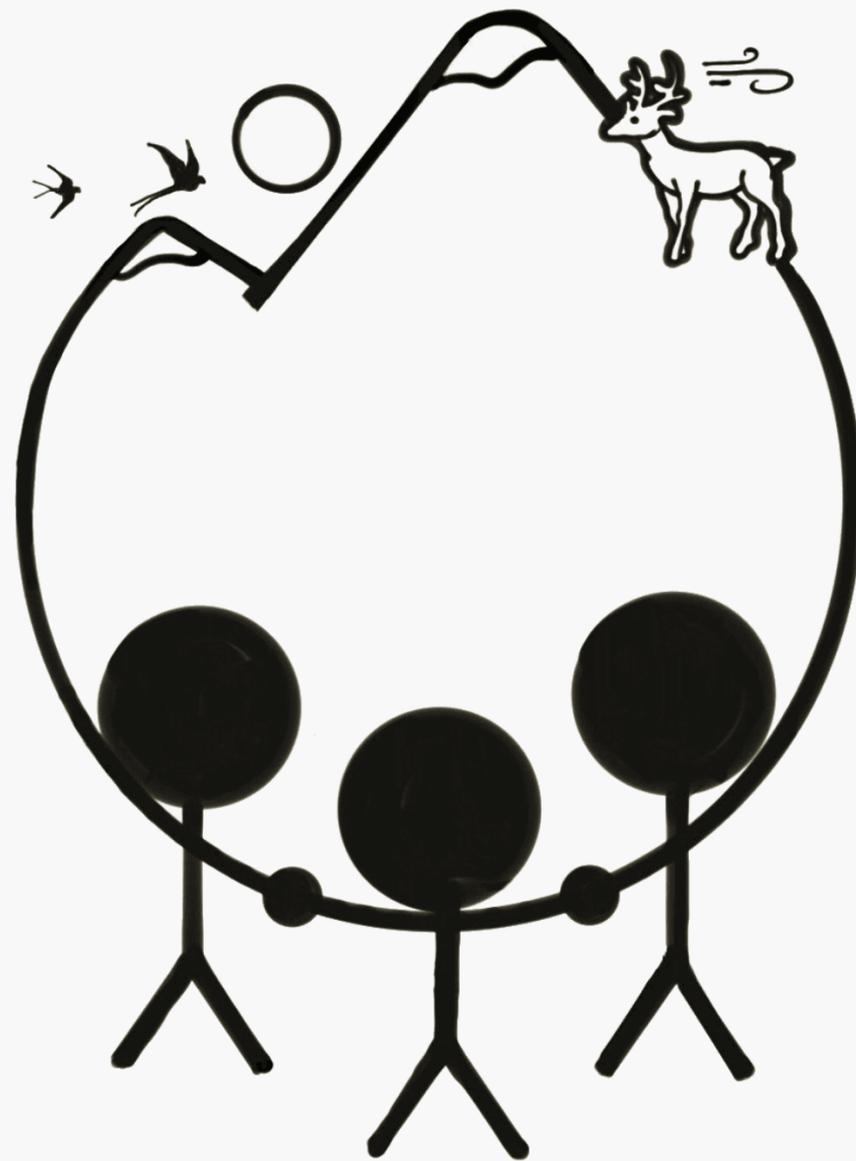
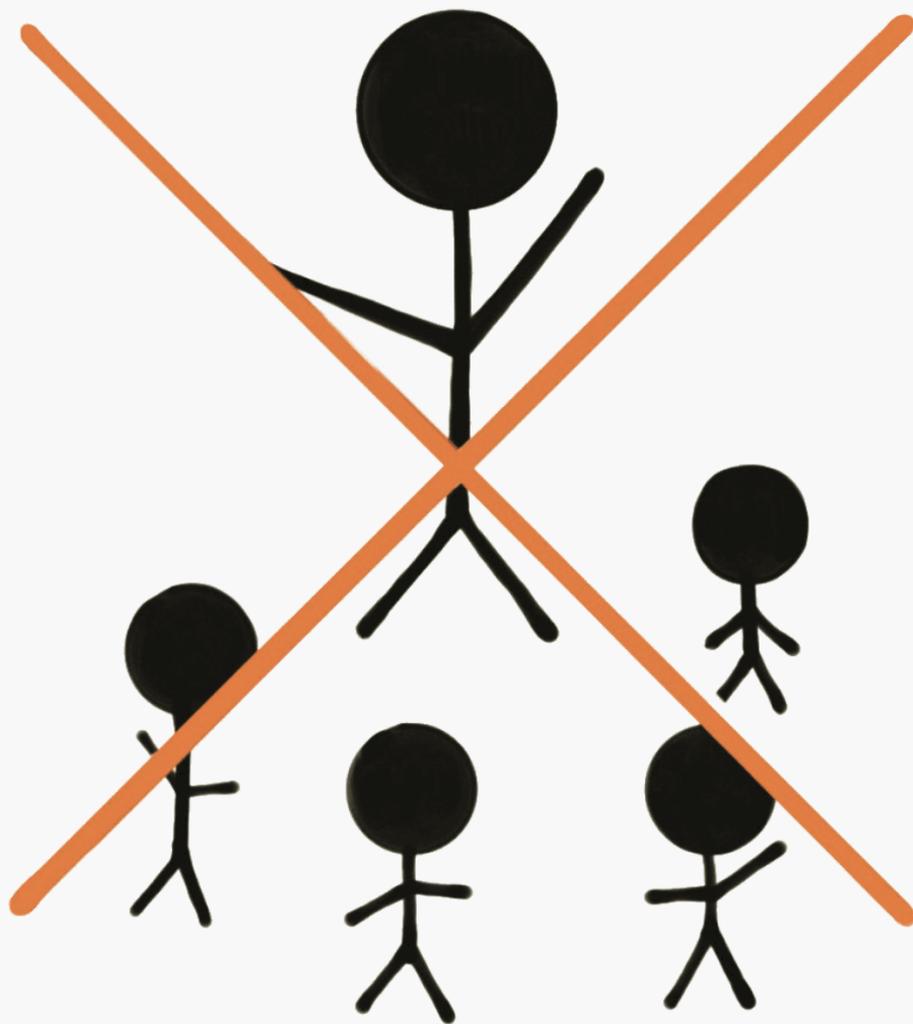
- Legal, fiscal, donor requirements
- Representation constraints of many key advocacy spaces
- Manipulations by media (choosing / valourizing individual spokespeople)
- Dominant narratives demanding one “leader”

## Internal:

- Everyone likes a share of power; not everyone likes to share responsibility (especially the “donkey work”!!)
- Where does the “buck stop”? How is collective accountability practiced?
- Complicated, time-consuming decision-making processes and loss of agility and rapid responses in fast-changing situations
- The larger mission loses ground to internal problem-solving / interpersonal dynamics
- Are feminist hierarchies possible and/or desirable?

# Structural roots of the mainstream leadership paradigm and narrative

- The current hegemonic Western-dominated society is based on a (neo)colonial, capitalist, neoliberal patriarchal system which encompasses all forms of discrimination, violence, oppression and dominance.
- This “way of perceiving and living” has literally led to putting life on Earth at risk. Central to this system and dominant society, there are individualism and egocentrism, thus framing personalised leadership, and a lack of connection and sense of belonging as beings of nature.



To move away from this system, collective feminist leadership creates a different “how”: a meaning, structures and processes around leadership and power that are based on really different principles - feminist principles: opposite to the neoliberal patriarchal paradigm.

# How collective feminist leadership disrupts the hegemonic system

(Some of the) tools used to maintain the status quo:

- Individualised self-centred significance and metrics of achievement and success, measures visible to some larger audience - “mass” visibility - based on ego and scarcity.
- Expectations on the individual - internalised and coming from outside.
- Competition and individual awards - including economic: youngest/first/most - this is foregrounded and rewarded - not the impact, not the cause, but the person.
- Individualistic/personalised narratives of inspiration and aspiration, who is worth, who is influential, who is powerful, who is the leader – invisible power of media/social media.

# How collective feminist leadership disrupts the hegemonic system

(Some of the many, diverse, pluralistic) tools of collective feminist leadership:

- Collective framing of impact and achievement.
- Everyone is equally important: mission and collective care are at core. Metrics that are largely “invisible” externally, focus on deep relationships, small scale as key, interdependence, trust, deep lasting impact.
- Collective accountability and responsibility: everyone has a specific role to play and looks after different areas, interconnectedly - clear structures, processes and decision-making tools. Space to re-balance responsibilities and resolve conflict, balance between accountability to mission and collective nurturing.
- Narratives focus on the co-creation and on the vision - aim to inspire others to join: not to follow a leader or “be like them”, but to bring their energy and talent and join the co-creation - taking responsibility.

# The case for collective feminist leadership - why it matters

- The *how* matters in shifting and transforming the status quo.
- Leadership = collectively working for change!
- if we don't shift how we use those tools, narratives, and power more generally, we are just perpetuating the same dynamics that have led us to a violent, divided, unjust society.
- Only if we build collective agency will we take collective responsibility for our future.
- Collective feminist leadership is essential to build a feminist future together. If we are all collectively leading in a feminist way, that forms the groundwork for a society without oppression, violence and discrimination.
- Collective feminist leadership in action: joy, essence, transformation, power and liberation!

# Focus on dimension “within”: the self

- Three broad dimensions to work on: self, collective spaces (e.g. organizations/movements) and broader society.
- Importance of transforming ourselves and letting go of ego in order to transform the status quo: unlearning the “*me, me, me*”.
- Freeing ourselves of the neoliberal narrative of personal success and visible achievement and individualized recognition, from the metrics that directly or indirectly pressure us to be the best, smartest, most productive, etc.
- Core importance of collective care and radical healing.

# Focus on dimension “within”: the self

- Self-awareness and transformation require constant practice, profound reflection and analysis of the different layers and faces of power - the ones we have experienced and practiced: unlearning, unpacking, re-learning, sharing, practising, and so on.
- Grounding us in the question: what are we doing this for?
- Liberating ourselves from ego and neoliberal individualistic framework unleashes our collective power! When we co-create, it's magic, and it draws others to wish to be part of this co-creation, where everyone is worth, key role and fundamental, not following, and not more or less/above or below anyone else.

**Share your own collective  
leadership stories  
and struggles, focusing on  
both the positives and the  
challenges**

**What insights and  
commonalities do  
we draw?**

**Groups discussions: what would be the possibilities as well as the challenges in transforming individualistic leadership into collective leadership?**

Questions for the exercise:

- What are the barriers to making the change – inner "self" barriers, internal organizational barriers, external barriers?
- What would be the gains of making the change – for individuals, for organizations, for achieving the mission, for society at large?

# It's not utopia!

- Wide diverse experiences from past and present across the world.
- Antidote to the risk of the “tyranny of the structurelessness” and “deep structures”.
- The experience of the FHC: we wish to co-create a micro-model of the reality we wish to be part of.
- Collective accountability, clear roles, adaptive learning, adaptive structures, tools and processes, open strategy and clarity of priorities, adaptive actions and impact.
- Learning from nature - where we belong!





*“In nature everything works in collaboration. There are hummingbirds and flowers that are in such deep coordination they need each other for survival. How vibrant and alive and successful could our movement be if we moved with such coordination and collaboration?” —Karissa Lewis*

# *From me to we initiative*

- A collective and iterative process that aims to collect and distribute a creative map interweaving and describing the practices of collective feminist leadership, through an open call for submissions renewed on a yearly basis.
- Our hope is to gather the stories of resistance and change in the way leadership is shared and practiced, aligned with feminist values and politics, and highlight how these attempt to dismantle and reconstruct the dominant neoliberal, competitive and self-centred paradigm and narrative of leadership.
- It aims to explore and go deeper into the structures and practices that underpin and sustain collective feminist leadership and power, and their attempts to create new models of collective feminist governance within groups, organisations and movements.
- It's a collective and transformative political process of mapping, documenting and archiving collective feminist leadership experiences across the world, foregrounding their diversity and interconnection.

<https://feministhikingcollective.org/from-me-to-we>

(available in French/Spanish/Portuguese/English)

**Find resources from this session and  
others at [fairsharewl.org/  
explorefeministleadership-resources](https://fairsharewl.org/explorefeministleadership-resources)**



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**Thank you!**