

Positive identity as a leader in Indonesia: It is your traits that count, not your gender

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ABSTRACT: The rise of identity theory provides an opportunity for scholars to understand and explain leaders' behaviour from a new angle, emphasising the importance of positive identity as leaders. Scholars argue that leaders with positive identity are more energetic and work more wholeheartedly as their identity as leaders fits with other facets of their identities. Research has just begun to understand the factors affecting positive identity as leaders. Some argue that personality traits matter, while others are convinced that gender, male or female, is the key determinant to shaping positive identity as leaders. Based on the assumption that (Indonesian) society tends to picture the female primary role as that of mother and submissive wife, and not as leader, these scholars maintain that female leaders may be limited in building positive identity as leaders. To investigate this matter further, data was gathered from 315 people in two big cities in Indonesia: Jakarta and Denpasar. Analysis reveals that positive identity as leaders is associated with traits, especially extraversion ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.05$), but not with gender ($\beta = -0.07$, $p > 0.05$), nor with neuroticism ($\beta = -0.06$, $p > 0.05$). These results shed new and promising light on the understanding of leadership behaviour in Indonesia. It demonstrates that, at least in big and multicultural cities in Indonesia, leaders are not trapped by their gender in developing their identity. Instead, their positive identity as leaders is associated with their traits, suggesting a new page of leadership in Indonesia: more egalitarian gender-roles, especially in leadership. It would be interesting to investigate whether the same pattern occurs in smaller cities in Indonesia, and in other parts of the world.

1 INTRODUCTION

In maintaining the competitiveness of companies, leaders need to be able to implement changes and drive innovation (Gilley et al., 2008), and thus the most prominent role of effective leaders is their ability to enhance team and company performance by influencing team members and facilitating the attainment of goals (DuBrin, 2016; Kaiser et al., 2008; Yukl, 2012). Therefore, it is little wonder that current discussions of leadership tend to focus on interpersonal dynamics within the leadership process, particularly on how leaders engage followers and create positive effects that extend beyond task compliance (Hannah et al., 2014; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Among several key factors that influence the interaction between leaders and followers, current theory focuses on identity (Johnson et al., 2012; Van Knippenberg, 2011), which refers to the knowledge that individuals have about themselves (Johnson et al., 2012) that impacts the way they feel, think, and behave in relation to the things they seek to achieve (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

Previous research has focused largely on one side of this interaction, namely, on follower identity, rather than attending to leader identity (Johnson et al., 2012; Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). Most research emphasises the identification of factors that have significant positive impacts on performance, such as the study conducted by Liu et al. (2010), which aimed to examine the relationships between employee voice behaviour, employee identification, and transformational leadership, and the study conducted by Walumbwa and Hartnell (2011),

concerning relational identification, self-efficacy, and transformational leadership. However, literature which specifically focuses on leader identity is still very limited.

Identity as a leader is the result of an evaluation process of attaching positive or negative valence on an individual's role as a leader (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Karellaia & Guillén, 2014). This evaluation depends on an individual's knowledge of how good or how fit they are as leaders (i.e. private regards) and their perception of how others think of their actions and performance as leaders (i.e. public regards) (Ashmore et al., 2004). Thus, leaders may have positive or negative evaluations of their identity as leaders. However, leaders that are energised to perform are only those with positive identity as leaders, which refers to the positive valence of the leader's own evaluations, and the perception of others' judgements in relation to their identity as leaders (Karellaia & Guillén, 2014).

Research shows that positive identity is significantly related to psychological well-being and positive work attitude (Shin & Kelly, 2013). In their empirical experiments, Karellaia and Guillén (2014) show that leaders with positive identity tend to be more energetic and to work more wholeheartedly. Leaders with positive identity are also able to motivate their followers to achieve shared goals and activate their group-based identities, which result in greater coordination among followers (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Because of the importance of positive identity for leaders, there is a need to examine the factors influencing it.

Gender is one potential aspect that may strongly influence the development of positive identity as a leader, because gender is known as a salient attribute influencing the way people think of leadership (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; DeRue et al., 2011), in that people evaluate male and female leaders differently. Eagly and Karau (2002) explain that people tend to perceive men's gender role as similar to a leaders' role, causing role incongruity for female leaders. Data demonstrates that, in 2015, only 14.2% of the top five leadership positions in American corporations were held by women (Egan, 2015). Globally, in 2014, women held only 24% of senior management positions (United Nations Women, 2016). Altogether, the arguments and the data indicate that gender may strongly influence the development of positive identity as leaders.

The second factor that may potentially affect the development of positive identity as leaders is traits. Traits contribute to individual differences in behaviour, shape consistency of behaviour over time, and produce stability of behaviour across situations (Feist & Feist, 2008). Previous research indicates that conscientiousness, extraversion and neuroticism are all associated with leadership effectiveness (Judge et al., 2002; Ng et al., 2008). Thus, they may also be powerful factors in assisting individuals in constructing positive identity as leaders. Therefore, this study asks, "What are the relationships between positive identity as leaders, and gender and traits?"

The current study makes use of social identity theory to explain how gender influences positive identity as a leader. Social identity proposes that the identity that individuals attach to themselves is related to the social roles to which they are assigned (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Karellaia & Guillén, 2014; Stets & Serpe, 2013). Every individual possesses multiple identities because every individual identifies him or herself with many social categories and has more than one social role. Each role has a set of meanings to which the individual attaches, and rules on how he or she should think, feel, and behave (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Stets & Serpe, 2013). Considering the extreme differences in gender-typed and leader-typed roles, this often results in role incongruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002) or identity conflict (Karellaia & Guillén, 2014). Stereotypically, people tend to expect women to be calm, warm and nurturing, which are communal traits, while they view leaders as having more agentic traits, such as being assertive, dominant and competitive (Gartzia & Baniandrés, 2015; Koenig et al., 2011).

This agency–communion paradigm, as one example of leadership stereotypes, along with the think manager–think male and masculinity–femininity paradigms (Koenig et al., 2011), tends to view leaders as having more masculine traits than feminine traits, and thus being more in accordance with males than females. This tendency is demonstrated by Cuadrado et al. (2015), who show that masculine characteristics are perceived as more important than feminine characteristics for managerial positions. Beside masculine characteristics, effective leaders are also associated with a task–orientation style of leadership, which is, again, attached

to the male gender role rather than the female one (Vinkenburg et al., 2011). The existence of these stereotypes creates a double standard for women leaders. In order to be perceived as effective, women leaders have to show masculine characteristics and become more task-oriented, which does not fit their stereotypical gender role as females. This tendency is more prevalent in Eastern culture, which tends to emphasise the importance of accordance with societal norms (Jogulu & Wood, 2008). Based on the above, we posit that:

H1: Leaders' gender is significantly associated with positive identity as leaders, in that male leaders will have more positive identity as leaders than female leaders.

The trait-based approach was the first theory introduced by scientists to characterise leadership and, although it has its critics (e.g. Zaccaro, 2007), this basic approach continues to play an important role in explanations of leadership theory (Judge et al., 2002). The five-factor model and the Big Five personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992) are considered the most prominent personality theory for their ability to integrate many traits into an integrative frame of thinking (Judge et al., 2002). Three traits that show consistent association with leadership effectiveness are neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness (Ng et al., 2008). Neurotic people tend to be anxious, temperamental, self-pitying, self-conscious, emotional, and vulnerable to stress-related disorders; people who score high on extraversion tend to be affectionate, jovial, talkative, joiners, and fun-loving; conscientiousness people are described as those who are ordered, controlled, organised, ambitious, achievement-focused, and self-disciplined (Feist & Feist, 2008).

A study conducted by Judge et al. (2002) strongly supports the use of the Big Five personality traits in examining the relationship between traits and leader identity. Their study found that extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness were positively associated with leader effectiveness, while neuroticism was negatively related to leader effectiveness. Agreeableness, on the other hand, demonstrated an ambivalent relationship with leader effectiveness. Another study, conducted by Ng et al. (2008), found that neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness were all associated with leader effectiveness.

Arguably, if traits are related to leader effectiveness, they may also relate to the construction of positive identity as a leader, through the processes of claiming and granting identity as leaders (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). That is, leaders—those with certain traits—will be evaluated more positively by others and be granted the identity of leaders. For example, conscientious leaders who are well-organised and disciplined may show excellent performance and be assessed more positively by others. These leaders may also attach positive valence to their leadership and, thus, progress the development of a positive leader identity. On the other hand, neurotic leaders may not be liked by their followers for their emotional and temperamental personality, and thus their followers may not grant them the identity of leaders. These leaders might also have a less positive attitude toward their identity as leaders because of their incapability to handle job-related stress well. Given the relationship between traits, performance and the process of granting and claiming positive identity as leaders, we further posit that:

H2: Neuroticism is negatively associated with positive identity as leaders;

H3: Extraversion is positively associated with positive identity as leaders;

H4: Conscientiousness is positively associated with positive identity as leaders.

2 METHOD

2.1 *Participants and procedure*

We surveyed 462 leaders employed at seven public and 17 private sector organisations in two big cities in Indonesia: Jakarta and Denpasar. Usable data was obtained from 315 leaders (147 responses were excluded due to being invalid and/or incomplete), giving a response rate of 68%. This represents a very good response rate, considering that the average response rate for research in which data is gathered from executives is just 32% (Cycyota & Harrison,

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliabilities.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Gender	–	–	1						
2 Leadership experience	4.96	1.41	0.04	1					
3 Number of levels	2.56	1.15	0.10	0.27**	1				
4 Conscientiousness	16.58	15.09	0.07	0.01	0.25**	(0.64)			
5 Extraversion	4.69	0.74	0.03	0.16**	0.14*	0.36**	(0.71)		
6 Neuroticism	3.65	1.40	0.13*	0.09	0.32**	0.42**	0.22**	(0.70)	
7 Positive identity as leader	4.59	0.58	–0.039	0.12*	0.20**	0.40**	0.44**	0.17**	(0.61)

Note: n = 315; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; Cronbach's alphas are in parentheses on the diagonal.

2006). Participants' mean age was 44 years old (SD = 8.46), and the majority of the sample was male (66%), married (91%), possessed Bachelor degrees (43%), had been working for more than 15 years with their current employers (46%), and had held their leadership position for 5–10 years (33%). Participants were employed in a variety of sectors (e.g. finance, tourism/hotel industries, and government offices).

Participants (the leaders) provided ratings of their own positive identity as leaders. To measure traits, participants were asked to choose the answers that they felt most appropriate to their personality. To minimise the tendency to respond in a socially desirable way, participants were urged in the instructions to answer as honestly as possible (Podsakoff et al., 2003). They were also assured that any use of data would adhere to strict requirements for confidentiality and anonymity. We also counterbalanced the order of the items to reduce eventual response bias effects related to survey design (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

2.2 Measures

All the scales used in this research were adapted from previous research, and underwent a back-to-back translation. All scales used a six-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 6 (Strongly agree).

The scale for positive identity as leaders was adapted from Karelaia and Guillén (2014) and consisted of six items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.61). A sample item was, "To lead other people is something I enjoy doing". Traits were measured using an adaptation of the short version of the Big Five Inventory (Rammstedt & John, 2007), consisting of nine items (three per trait). An example from this scale is, "I rarely feel worried". The reliability of these scales is depicted in Table 1.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive statistics and variable correlation

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations among the study variables. Consistent with previous research, length of leadership experience and the number of subordinate levels below the leaders were significantly related to positive identity as a leader ($r = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$, and $r = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). This indicates that the leaders who have longer experience of leadership and more levels of subordinates perceive their leader identity more positively. Therefore, these two variables were controlled in the next round of statistical tests.

3.2 Testing hypotheses

To analyse the relationship between leaders' gender, their traits and their positive identity as leaders, we conducted multiple regression analysis (see Table 2) with leadership experience

Table 2. Results of hierarchical regression analysis.

Variable	Step 1	Step 2
Leadership experience	0.09	0.06
Number of levels	0.17**	0.09
Gender		-0.07
Conscientiousness		0.29**
Extraversion		0.33**
Neuroticism		-0.06
R^2	0.05	0.29
df	2,295	6,291

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

and numbers of subordinate levels below the leaders as control variables. This model explains 29% of the variance of positive identity as a leader. Table 2 also shows that conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) and extraversion ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$) were significantly associated with positive identity as leaders (supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4). In contrast, the effect of neuroticism ($\beta = -0.06$, $p > 0.05$) and leaders' gender ($\beta = -0.07$, $p > 0.05$) were not significant (contrary to Hypotheses 1 and 2). These results indicate that leaders' gender does not predict the positivity of leader identity but some traits—specifically extraversion and conscientiousness—do. The model also shows that, in this model, length of leadership experience and the number of subordinate levels are not associated with positive identity as leaders.

4 DISCUSSION

Using surveys of 315 leaders in two big cities in Indonesia, the current research aimed to answer the question of the relationship between positive leader identity and gender and traits (conscientiousness, extraversion and neuroticism). Its results show that traits have a more prevalent role than gender in the development of positive identity as leaders. This study makes a significant contribution to the current debates concerning leadership theories in at least two areas.

First, the study provides insights to the possibility of decreasing gender stereotypes in big cities in Indonesia toward more egalitarian gender-roles (i.e. tendency to treat males and females equally). Although, theoretically, gender has a strong power over positive identity as a leader, in the current study positive identity as a leader is not associated with gender. Apparently, there is no difference between males and females in the construction of positive identity as a leader in the current data set. Although it is surprising, this result is consistent with other studies that report these stereotypes as having decreased over time (Gartzia & Baniandrés, 2015; Li Kusterer et al., 2013; Schein, 2001). The current results are also consistent with Grant Thornton's research that shows that 36% of senior managers in Indonesia are women, and the reasons many women advance themselves as leaders are their willingness to make a difference (47%) and to influence others (32%) (Priherdityo, 2016). It seems that women having aspirations to be leaders, at least in big cities in Indonesia, are becoming able to reach leadership positions and construct positive identities as leaders.

Arguably, the results may not have shown similar trends if the research had been conducted in small cities, given the higher power distance culture of smaller cities in Indonesia. A comprehensive investigation of positive identity as leaders in smaller cities in Indonesia would be of value. It would also be interesting to see whether, in big cities, people are more ready to accept male leaders who tend to be more people-oriented than task-oriented (i.e. do not inhabit such stereotypical masculine roles). O'Neill and O'Reilly (2011) observed the emerging nature of this phenomenon and termed it 'the backlash effect'. Future research may want to address this phenomenon in big cities in Indonesia.

Second, the current study extends previous research by showing that neuroticism has no relationship with positive identity as leaders. This result is not consistent with the previous research that has established a negative association between neuroticism and leadership effectiveness (Judge et al., 2002; Ng et al., 2008). One possible explanation is that neurotic people in Indonesia have effectively been trained to hide their emotions, given that the majority of Indonesian people tend to have neutral affect (Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2003). This causes the neurotic nature of their traits to not have the negative impact it usually does for people from more affective cultures (that are more expressive). Thus, the current study challenges the current understanding and questions the impact of neuroticism in different cultures: neutral vs affective ones.

Another possible explanation for the lack of significant relationship between neuroticism and positive identity as leaders is that the neuroticism scale in the current study used only three items, which may not have been sufficient to capture the nature of the neurotic behaviour of the participants. Thus, the short-version measure of the Big Five scale that was used in this research may have been one of the limitations of the current study. Only three items were used to measure each trait, and the reliability for each trait, ranging from 0.64 to 0.71, does not suggest very high reliability. Future research may want to consider the use of a larger version of the Big Five scale in order to create a comprehensive picture of each trait.

Another limitation of the current study is the possibility of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), which occurs because both the outcome variable and the predictors are measured with the same method, which is a self-reporting scale. Although this limitation is acknowledged, it should be noted that the researchers have also taken extra effort to counterbalance the scale (Podsakoff et al., 2003) to reduce the impact of common method bias. By doing so, we would argue that the measurement technique used is the best we could achieve considering the nature of the variables involved.

5 CONCLUSION

The current study, which aimed to understand factors associated with positive identity as leaders, has been able to demonstrate that positive identity as leaders is associated with traits—specifically, conscientiousness and extraversion—and is not associated with gender. By so doing, this study contributes to the current debates on leadership theories by showing that there is a possibility of decreasing gender role stereotypes in leaders' behaviour and attitudes, at least in big cities in Indonesia. The study also challenges the current wisdom as to the relationship between neuroticism and leaders' behaviour and attitudes by arguing for the possibility that neuroticism may have different impacts on leaders in neutral cultures (as compared to affective cultures). Altogether, the study advances understanding of positive identity as leaders, and stimulates more debate about leadership theories.

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