

The Role of Cynism and Affective Commitment in Mediating Empowering Leadership Style with Gender Bias Moderation on Suborits' Compliance Towards Female District Heads in District Governments across East Java

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of cynicism and affective commitment in mediating the influence of empowering leadership style on subordinate compliance, with gender bias as a moderating variable, among female sub-district heads (camat) in East Java. The background of this research is rooted in the persistent gender stereotypes and discrimination that affect the legitimacy of women's leadership in the public sector. The research employed a quantitative survey design, involving a population of 39 female sub-district heads and 285 subordinate respondents from 666 sub-districts across East Java, using a two-stage cluster sampling technique. The results of the study indicate that the direct influence of a leadership style that empowers female superiors on subordinate compliance is not significant or has not been proven to directly increase subordinate compliance, while the leadership style has a positive and significant influence on affective commitment, the higher the value of the leadership style, the higher the level of individual affective commitment, as well as subordinate cynicism. Although the empowering leadership style is successful in increasing affective commitment, it has not been proven to make subordinates more obedient to superiors, so it is unable to bridge the relationship between the empowering leadership style and compliance. There is a clear and significant indirect path, that the empowering leadership style affects subordinate compliance through the mechanism of reducing subordinate cynicism. This means that changes in compliance occur because empowering leadership changes the level of subordinate cynicism. Gender bias does not change how strong the influence of the empowering leadership style on affective commitment. Whether low or high gender bias, the effect of the empowering leadership style on effective commitment is more or less the same, as is the effect of cynicism which does not differ in conditions of high or low gender. The implications of this study highlight the importance of managing subordinate cynicism, increasing organizational transparency, and providing training for female leaders to integrate empowerment with role clarity and assertive communication. The theoretical contribution of this research enriches Social Exchange Theory (SET) by emphasizing cynicism as a critical mediator and gender bias as a complex moderator within the public bureaucracy context.

Keywords: Empowering Leadership Style, Cynicism, Affective Commitment, Gender Bias, Compliance, Public Sector.

INTRODUCTION

The greater opportunities for women in the professional world, the increasing number of women occupying managerial positions. Data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that in 2022, the proportion

of women holding managerial positions reached 32.26%. Female leaders tend to increase effectiveness, bring diverse perspectives, and demonstrate more empathetic behavior. They also employ a more collaborative leadership style, characterized by improved communication and support (Chadwick and Dawson, 2018). They are also preferred because they demonstrate greater benevolence, universalism, a tendency to comply with rules and laws, ethical behavior, and empathy, making female leadership more community-minded and stakeholder-oriented (Sun et al., 2022). Despite the increase in the number of female leaders, the reality is that women face many barriers to occupying leadership positions in healthcare, social, and community settings globally (Pérez-Sánchez, Madueño & Montaner, 2021), may experience discrimination, stereotypes, prejudice (Samuel Amakye, 2022), and are underrepresented in male-dominated leadership roles, as well as in government organizations. Women are perceived as non-leaders (Glass Cook, 2016) the majority of female leaders may experience discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudice (Samuel Amakye et al., 2022), Followers also tend to believe that women are less suited to pressure, resulting in a lack of trust and intergroup conflict (Asif Husain Samo, et al., 2018), often face different perceptions from their subordinates who are accustomed to male leadership, giving rise to resistance attitudes with the concept of cynicism (Sinan Y & Kavas E, 2016), and with a culture *power distance relationship* (Hofstede) and a strict hierarchy, making cynicism difficult to detect. While progress has been made in gender inclusion in government, it faces numerous challenges in gaining equal support with male leaders, stemming from cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and the lack of representation that supports women in high-ranking political positions.

The presence of female leaders will affect the compliance of subordinates, often considered less competent in the traditional view (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The duties and functions of sub-district heads that require coordination skills, territorial supervision, and quick decision-making are often considered to fit the traditional stereotype of more "masculine" leadership. Men and women are concentrated in different jobs (Jacobs, 1989), widely associated with gender stereotypes (Heilman, 1997) female leaders in male-dominated organizations often experience discrimination (Derks et al., 2011), devaluation and stereotyping (Derks et al., 2006). Women are more often seen as less assertive or less experienced in making important decisions, even though many of them are highly competent, more emotional (Murniati, 2019), labeled as Queen Bee behavior (Derks et al., 2016), male subordinates are less willing to accept female leaders than their female colleagues (Gouri Mohan et al., 2022), female power holders are considered less legitimate than male power holders (Vial et al., 2016), lack of examples or models of successful female leaders (McKinsey et al., 2021) leading to subordinate cynicism towards superiors (Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly, 2003) are considered less suitable because of conflicting expectations (Vial et al., 2016). Ellemers (2018) highlights that gender stereotypes not only influence the perceptions of others but also influence women's self-perceptions. Brescoll (2016) examines how female leaders who express emotions such as anger are perceived negatively, because women are more emotional. Cynicism arising from disapproval or distrust of women as leaders can be a serious obstacle to their leadership effectiveness (Eagly, 1990). As a result, these female leaders often perceive their gender as a potential barrier to their career advancement, experiencing what is known as social identity threat (Steele et al., 2002). Stereotyping and discrimination can lead to feelings of disrespect and increase cynicism toward superiors or organizational policies.

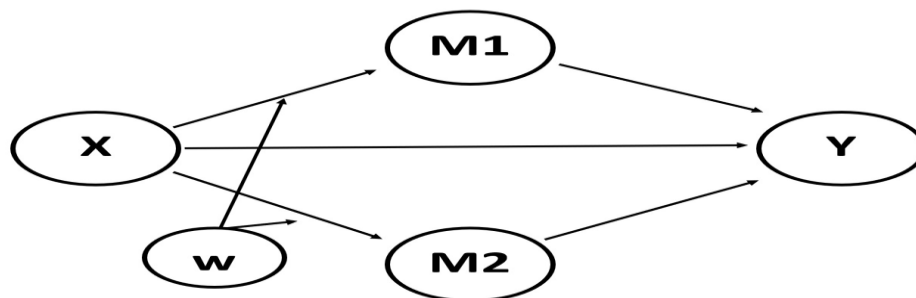
The complication is that female leaders often face different perceptions from their subordinates (Eagly & Karau, 2002). How gender stereotypes influence leadership emergence highlights the mismatch between societal expectations of women and the attributes associated with leadership roles. Subordinate reactions to women holding leadership positions in organizations often face greater challenges than those of men, as they must overcome mistrust and gender bias. One important construct to study is the stereotypes that employees harbor about their leaders. Employees, due to cultural influences, tend to develop stereotypes about different phenomena (Yzerbyt et al., 1998), so significant efforts and resources are needed to understand resistance towards institutions, organizations, managers, or employers and to minimize such resistance. Gender discrimination in the corporate world is widely recognized as a pressing issue that requires thorough examination (McKinsey et al., 2021). The presence of female leaders will influence the compliance of subordinates, who are accustomed to being led by men, accompanied by cynicism of organizational members (Lamm and Gordon, 2010), organizational cynicism is considered a negative attitude of employees (Emre, Sisman, & Bektan, 2013), the negative impact of cynicism on the organization and work contributes to lower employee satisfaction in their workplace (Chiaburu et al., 2013) and has a negative impact on their performance (Dean et al., 1998) and level of trust (Stanley et al., 2005). On the other hand, organizational cynicism has an impact on increasing levels of employee absenteeism and grievances, which in turn, cause tension, arrogance, unethical behavior (Andersson and Bateman, 1997) and organizational alienation (Abraham, 2000), especially when combined with emotional exhaustion (Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly, 2003), it can also be considered as one of the initial phases or precursors of burnout and marks a response to frustration (Wilkerson et al., 2008) or the way individuals try to cope with (undesirable) situations (Brandes et al., 2008). Leaders can cause stress in their employees or they can have a positive impact resulting in satisfaction and a positive work environment (Bass, 1990). Factors such as decreased organizational commitment increased when leaving work, job

dissatisfaction, job alienation and decreased organizational performance can be indicated among the results of organizational cynicism (Peng, Z., & Zhou, F. 2009).

Subordinate cynicism toward organizational politics influences compliance, especially when leaders are perceived as illegitimate or unfair. This compliance is crucial to ensure subordinates adhere to organizational rules and procedures (Rostina CF, Hendry, 2022). following orders or directions (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) achieving goals (Bass, 1990), trust and authority (Chiu TC, Hung Y, 2022), improving performance (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Robinson, 2018), helping manage conflict (Tal A, et al, 2015), reducing conflict (Northouse, 2018), supporting organizational climate (Dobbs J,M. et al, 2019), task ethics (Jane Jollineau. et al, 2012), increasing productivity (Subasic. et al, 2011), building positive relationships (Creary, et al, 2015), appreciation (Mcmanus K, 2005). Compliance is very important to maintain organizational discipline, increase effectiveness, build trust, manage conflict, and promote a positive work environment. Traditional views on women's leadership argue that women are disadvantaged in leadership positions because they are often perceived as less competent (Eagly and Karau, 2002) and exacerbated by gender bias (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007), female leader more prone to triggering subordinate cynicism, which leads to decreased compliance and legitimacy (Rosette et al., 2016).

On the other hand, affective commitment increases compliance through the mechanism of reducing perceptions of organizational politics and cynicism (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007), increased intrinsic motivation and identification with organizational goals (Chen & Jin, 2020) affect employee compliance and performance, including in the public sector (Meyer & Allen, 1991) and women tend to use transformational and participatory leadership styles, which focus on empowering subordinates, sharing information, and building collaborative relationships (Judith Rosener, 1990) in Indonesia often use collaborative and empowering approaches (Dr. Maria Ulfa Anshor, 2017). Subordinate support for change is important for success (Chalwa & Kelloway, 2004) to anticipate the presence of female leaders who will affect subordinate compliance, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of managing cynicism towards compliance and women's leadership styles in government (Blau, 2002), towards and in accordance with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964).

This study aims to answer the question about the Role of Cynicism and Affective Commitment in Mediating the Influence of Empowering Leadership Style on Subordinate Compliance in moderating gender bias in female sub-district heads throughout East Java, as shown in the following diagram;



The research was conducted using quantitative methodology, with a population of 39 female sub-district heads from 666 sub-districts in East Java. In determining the sample, this research used a sampling method *two-stage cluster sampling* (Cochran, 1977; Lohr, 2022), namely the Superior Population (L1) of 39 people (primary sampling unit) and the Subordinate Population (L2) of 390 people (10 subordinates per superior, unit of analysis). From the questionnaire that has been given, a total of 285 people answered the questionnaire which was then analyzed. Each variable has met the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity tests and can therefore be used for further structural analysis. Of all respondents, there were 159 men and 126 women with an average age of 43.6 years. This indicates that most of the civil servant respondents are in the middle-aged age group (Generation X, born between 1965–1980). The median age of respondents is 45 years with a standard deviation of 9.58 years from the mean value. Thus, most respondents are in the age range of 43.6 years plus or minus 9.58 years. The greater the standard deviation value, the higher the variation in the respondents' ages.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative causal study method. The causal study was conducted through the distribution of online research questionnaires using Google Forms, which were shared both personally and through community channels. The study was carried out in East Java Province, which has the highest number of regencies/cities in Indonesia, comprising a total of 38 administrative regions 29 regencies and 9 cities. This

province was chosen due to its large population, which is considered to better represent general characteristics, thereby allowing the research findings to be generalized with a higher level of confidence (Sugiyono, 2017).

Considering these factors, data collection was conducted on the number of female subdistrict heads (*camat*) in East Java Province, totaling 39 individuals out of 666 subdistricts (5.85%). Each female *camat* (39 in total) was assisted by subordinates who were subsequently selected as research samples. The sampling process followed the two-stage cluster sampling method (Cochran, 1977; Lohr, 2022), where the first-level population (L1) consisted of 39 supervisors (primary sampling units) and the second-level population (L2) consisted of 390 subordinates (10 per unit of analysis). Therefore, a multistage sampling design was required (Kish, 1965; Snijders & Bosker, 2012). In selecting the supervisor sample, the Slovin formula was applied for small populations.

After this adjustment, the effective sample size (n) used in the study was 194 respondents. Based on the division into 39 clusters, the average sample per cluster (m) was 5 respondents ($194/39$). This figure was then further adjusted by multiplying it with the design effect value, resulting in a total of 233 respondents. Thus, if the researcher intends to collect data across all clusters, each supervisor (39 clusters) would have approximately six subordinates ($233/39 \approx 5.97$). The study utilized three primary data sources: primary, secondary, and tertiary data. Data processing included validity and reliability testing, where convergent and discriminant validity were assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) within a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) framework, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.7$), following Nunnally & Bernstein (1994). Classical assumption tests were also conducted to ensure the suitability of the regression or SEM model, including normality tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov/Shapiro-Wilk, $p > 0.05$), multicollinearity tests ($VIF < 10$, Tolerance > 0.1), and heteroscedasticity tests (Glejser Test, $p > 0.05$). The causal relationships involving mediation and moderation were analyzed using the SmartPLS software.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Hypothesis Testing Results

The following are the results of the SEM-PLS data analysis regarding H0 (null hypothesis) which is the initial assumption statement stating that there is no influence, relationship or difference between the variables studied using Mann-Whitney test, the analysis was carried out by testing two groups based on gender. The results of this **is known that the H0 hypothesis in this study shows that**, there was no significant difference in perception between the two groups of respondents regarding female sub-district heads on this indicator.

Reporting Results

H1 Direct Effect of Leadership Style on Compliance $X \rightarrow Y$, $\beta = 0.156$; $p = 0.078$, ($p = 0.078 > 0.05$). The direct effect of empowering leadership style of female superiors on subordinate compliance is not significant. This means that increasing empowering leadership style has not been proven to directly increase subordinate compliance.

H2 Direct influence of leadership style on affective commitment $X \rightarrow M1$, $\beta = 0.798$; $p = 0.000$ (significant), ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), Leadership style has a positive and significant influence on affective commitment (M1). The higher the leadership style value, the higher the level of individual affective commitment. The more empowering the superior, the more subordinates will have a sense of "comfortable and emotionally loyal" attachment (affective commitment) to the organization. This effect is strong and clear.

H3 Direct influence of leadership style on cynicism, $X \rightarrow M2$, $\beta = -0.261$; $p = 0.000$ (significant), ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), Leadership style has a negative and significant influence on cynicism (M2). When superiors increasingly empower subordinates, subordinate cynicism decreases. So the empowering leadership style has a strong and clear influence, helping to reduce negative/suspicious/pessimistic attitudes in subordinates.

H4 Mediation of affective commitment ($X \rightarrow M1 \rightarrow Y$), $\beta = -0.022$; $p = 0.739$ (not significant), Supporting the path: $M1 \rightarrow Y$ $\beta = -0.028$; $p = 0.738$ (not significant), Although the empowering leadership style is successful in increasing affective commitment, affective commitment is not proven to make subordinates more obedient to superiors. So, affective commitment does not become a "bridge" that connects the empowering leadership style of superiors with subordinate compliance.

H5 Mediation of cynicism ($X \rightarrow M2 \rightarrow Y$), Indirect results: $\beta = -0.148$; $p = 0.000$ (significant), Supporting path: $X \rightarrow M2$ significant; $M2 \rightarrow Y$ $\beta = 0.565$; $p = 0.000$ significant or reject H0, H5 is supported. There is a clear and significant indirect path, that empowering leadership style affects subordinate compliance through the

mechanism of reducing subordinate cynicism. This means that changes in compliance occur because empowering leadership changes the level of subordinate cynicism.

H6 Moderation of gender bias in the relationship $X \rightarrow M1$ ($X \times W \rightarrow M1$), Results: $\beta = 0.000$; $p = 0.996$ (not significant) or accepting H0, H6 is not supported. Gender bias does not change how strong the influence of empowering leadership style is on affective commitment. Whether the gender bias is low or high, the effect of empowering leadership style on affective commitment is more or less the same.

H7 Moderation of gender bias in the relationship $X \rightarrow M2$ ($X \times W \rightarrow M2$), Results: $\beta = -0.035$; $p = 0.345$ (not significant) or accepting H0, H7 is not supported. Gender bias also does not change the effect of empowering leadership style on cynicism. Thus, the effect of empowering leadership style on reducing cynicism does not differ significantly in conditions of high or low gender bias.

DISCUSSION

Organizational Cynicism Acts as a Significant Mediator.

Mechanism: The empowering leadership style of female superiors significantly reduces organizational cynicism among subordinates. This decrease in cynicism subsequently increases subordinate compliance. This provides a deeper understanding of how empowering leadership styles, particularly those implemented by female superiors, influence subordinate compliance in government agencies. When female superiors provide sufficient autonomy, involvement in decision-making, and psychological support, subordinates feel trusted and valued. This reduces perceptions of unfairness or skepticism toward the organization (cynicism), which in turn encourages voluntary compliance. This aligns with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), where subordinates reciprocate positive behavior by reducing cynicism and increasing adherence to rules, ultimately increasing subordinate compliance.

Affective Commitment Does Not Mediate Significantly

The analysis concluded that affective commitment was not proven to be a mediator. A leadership style that empowers female superiors does not automatically increase subordinates' emotional attachment (affective commitment) in the context of government agencies. This suggests that although empowering female leaders are able to create a participatory and inclusive work climate, this does not automatically strengthen subordinates' emotional ties to the organization as a basis for compliance. In other words, subordinate compliance stems more from instrumental or structural factors than from emotional attachment. In a hierarchical and rigid bureaucracy, structural factors (such as standard rules, reward systems, and organizational culture) have a stronger influence on affective commitment than leadership style. Subordinates may perceive empowerment as an additional burden or role ambiguity, rather than as a form of support that builds emotional attachment. This finding is consistent with a study by Vigoda-Gadot (2007), which stated that affective commitment in the public sector is more influenced by organizational justice than leadership style.

Gender Bias Does Not Moderate the Mediating Path of Affective Commitment and Cynicism

A key finding in this study is that although gender bias does not moderate the direct relationship, it does strengthen the mediating effect of both affective commitment and cynicism. This means that in organizational environments with strict hierarchies such as government, subordinates perceive female superiors as legitimate and authoritative, thereby mitigating the influence of gender bias on both affective commitment and cynicism.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that organizational cynicism was a critical mediator, while affective commitment played no significant role in the context of government agencies. These findings highlight the importance of a contextual approach in applying leadership and social exchange theory. Theoretical contributions include that this study enriches Social Exchange Theory by demonstrating that social exchange in a bureaucratic context is not always linear, that cynicism is a more critical mediator than affective commitment, and that gender bias operates indirectly through psychological mechanisms (cynicism). This study demonstrated that an empowering leadership style significantly influences employee compliance, both directly and indirectly through the mediation of psychological variables. However, the analysis showed that affective commitment did not significantly mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and compliance, while cynicism proved to be a significant mediator.

In other words, the higher the empowerment provided by the leader, the lower the subordinate cynicism, which in turn increased compliance. Furthermore, moderation tests indicated that gender bias did not act as a moderator in the tested relationship paths, either between leadership style and affective commitment or between

leadership style and cynicism. These findings indicate that the effects of empowering leadership are relatively uniform for both male and female employees.

The primary recommendation is to focus on reducing cynicism, as cynicism plays a key role as a psychological mechanism that bridges the influence of empowering leadership styles of female superiors on subordinate compliance. Therefore, strategies to improve employee compliance should focus on reducing cynicism through empowering leadership, organizational transparency, and open and participatory communication.

Government agencies need to prioritize transparency, procedural justice, and psychological support to reduce cynicism. A further focus is on female leaders receiving specialized training to enable female superiors to combine empowerment with role clarity and assertive communication to address gender bias. A further focus is on reviewing bureaucratic policies, as overly rigid bureaucratic structures need to be relaxed to allow for effective empowerment without sacrificing compliance.

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