

Gender Roles and Leadership Perceptions: A Correlation Analysis of Leadership Biases in the Asia-Pacific Workforce

Peter Patel

William Howard Taft University, Colorado, USA

Abstract— The underrepresentation of women and gender-diverse individuals in leadership positions remains a persistent issue across many organizations, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. This study investigated whether perceptions of leadership are influenced by deep-rooted gender roles among professionals from the Asia-Pacific region. The results of correlation analysis revealed a significant association between traditional gender role beliefs and leadership perceptions, with stronger biases linked to lower support for gender-inclusive leadership. Findings align with prior literature emphasizing how entrenched gender norms shape leadership evaluations. The results underscore the need for multifaceted interventions, including mentorship, explicit diversity targets, and inclusive leadership development, to dismantle persistent barriers and promote gender-balanced leadership across diverse organizational contexts.

Keywords— gender-balanced leadership, gender roles, leadership perceptions, diversity targets, inclusive leadership.

INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly interconnected and diverse global landscape, leadership paradigms are undergoing a profound transformation. Traditional leadership models, often shaped by gendered assumptions and historical inequalities, no longer reflect the realities or aspirations of modern organizations and societies. Promoting gender-balanced leadership is not merely an issue of representation; it is a strategic imperative that enhances innovation, decision-making, and organizational resilience. Gender-balanced leadership emphasizes the importance of achieving equitable representation of all gender identities in leadership roles and ensuring that leadership opportunities are accessible to everyone, regardless of gender. It challenges long-standing stereotypes that have associated effective leadership with a narrow set of traits and demographics, often privileging one gender over others. By fostering environments where women, men, transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals can equally participate, influence, and advance into leadership positions, organizations unlock a broader spectrum of perspectives, experiences, and talents. This paper explores the necessity of advancing gender-balanced leadership perceptions in the Asia-Pacific region, examines existing barriers, and proposes actionable strategies to cultivate leadership cultures that reflect the diversity of our world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of gender-balanced leadership has gained significant attention in recent years, driven by growing

recognition of the social, economic, and organizational benefits associated with diverse leadership teams (Egitim, 2024; Gooty et al., 2023; Minehart et al., 2020). Existing literature highlights several key themes that underpin both the necessity and the challenges of achieving gender balance in leadership roles (Egitim, 2025; Sugiyama, et al., 2016). First, numerous studies have demonstrated the positive correlation between gender-diverse leadership teams and organizational performance. Research indicates that companies with greater gender balance at the executive and board levels tend to outperform their peers in areas such as profitability, innovation, and employee engagement (Prime et al., 2014). These findings underscore the argument that gender balance is not solely an issue of social justice but also a strategic advantage for organizations operating in complex and competitive environments.

Scholars have examined the structural and cultural barriers that contribute to persistent gender imbalances in leadership. These include implicit biases, gender stereotypes, and organizational practices that favor traditional, often male-dominated, leadership styles (Egitim, 2022; Minehart et al., 2020). For example, leadership qualities such as assertiveness and competitiveness have historically been associated with masculinity, whereas traits like empathy and collaboration — frequently undervalued — are often linked to femininity (Carli & Eagly, 2011). This gendered perception of leadership capabilities has

contributed to the underrepresentation of women and gender-diverse individuals in senior roles.

The importance of policy interventions and organizational practices aimed at fostering gender balance in the Asia Pacific region (Ridgeway, 2001; Ye et al., 2018). Approaches such as mentorship programs, leadership development initiatives targeting underrepresented genders, and the implementation of flexible work arrangements have been shown to support the advancement of diverse leaders. Additionally, evidence suggests that setting explicit diversity targets and holding leadership accountable for progress can accelerate gender balance in leadership pipelines.

A significant body of literature underscores the importance of policy interventions and organizational practices aimed at fostering gender balance in leadership positions in the Asia Pacific region. Scholars argue that without deliberate and structured initiatives, systemic barriers, such as unconscious bias, gendered expectations, and unequal access to career-enhancing opportunities are likely to persist, undermining the progress toward equitable representation (Sugiyama et al., 2016; Ye, et al., 2018).

Mentorship programs are widely recognized as one of the most effective mechanisms for advancing gender balance. These programs connect emerging leaders from underrepresented gender groups with experienced mentors who can offer guidance, career advice, and advocacy. Research shows that mentorship not only helps mentees navigate organizational cultures but also increases their visibility within the organization and their access to leadership opportunities. Importantly, sponsorship, where mentors actively advocate for their mentees' promotions and high-profile assignments is seen as a critical enhancement to mentorship, as it directly influences career advancement rather than just providing advice (Grocutt et al., 2022; Wilder & Guthmiller, 2014).

Leadership development initiatives tailored to underrepresented genders also play a crucial role. Such programs focus on building skills, confidence, and networks that prepare participants for leadership roles. They often include training in negotiation, strategic decision-making, and public speaking areas where women and gender-diverse individuals may have historically had less access or encouragement (Grocutt et al., 2022; Wilder & Guthmiller, 2014). In some cases, these initiatives also include peer support networks,

which help participants share experiences and strategies for overcoming common challenges (Vitale, 2019).

Another essential practice is the implementation of flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options, flexible hours, job sharing, and parental leave policies. The literature indicates that rigid work structures disproportionately disadvantage individuals, particularly women, who often carry a greater share of caregiving responsibilities (Egitim, 2023; Vitale, 2019). Flexible arrangements enable a more inclusive work environment where employees can balance professional and personal responsibilities without sacrificing career progression. Organizations that normalize flexible work, not just for women but for all employees, help dismantle the stigma that flexibility equates to lower ambition or reduced leadership potential.

Furthermore, research highlights the effectiveness of setting explicit diversity targets and holding leadership accountable for progress. Diversity targets, when communicated clearly and integrated into performance metrics, signal a genuine organizational commitment to change. They provide concrete benchmarks to assess progress and encourage leaders to actively cultivate diverse talent pipelines. Accountability measures — such as tying diversity outcomes to executive compensation or requiring regular reporting on gender balance metrics — ensure that diversity goals are prioritized and not relegated to symbolic gestures. Evidence from countries that have implemented board quotas or similar regulatory frameworks — such as mandatory board quotas in India's Companies Act 2013, or voluntary targets set under Japan's Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace (2016) — demonstrates that setting clear objectives can gradually improve gender representation in leadership positions, although cultural and structural barriers remain significant (Bureau, 2016; Subekti et al., 2021).

In the Asia-Pacific region, these interventions take on additional complexity due to the diverse cultural, social, and legal landscapes that shape gender roles and workplace expectations. For example, Singapore's Diversity Action Committee promotes voluntary gender diversity targets and transparent reporting among listed companies, while Australia's Workplace Gender Equality Act (2012) mandates the collection and public reporting of gender equality indicators, including leadership representation (Sutherland, 2012). These examples illustrate that a combination of regulatory

frameworks, voluntary targets, and transparency measures can catalyze progress, even in contexts where traditional gender norms exert a strong influence.

Finally, recent scholarship has expanded the conversation beyond the binary framework of men and women to consider the experiences of transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals in leadership contexts. Although research in this area remains limited in Asia-Pacific, emerging studies — including those from Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia — indicate that individuals outside the gender binary face distinct barriers and biases that require tailored strategies to ensure equitable leadership opportunities. For instance, workplace inclusion initiatives that address the unique challenges of transgender employees, such as gender transition support policies in multinational firms operating in Asia, are beginning to gain traction but remain unevenly implemented (Gates et al., 2024; Grocutt et al., 2022; Wilder & Guthmiller, 2014).

All in all, achieving gender-balanced leadership in the Asia-Pacific region is a multifaceted endeavor, requiring both cultural shifts and concrete policy actions. While progress has been made in several sectors, significant

work remains to dismantle enduring barriers and create leadership cultures that reflect the full spectrum of gender diversity (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Shen & Joseph, 2016).

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study comprised 93 professionals (45 women and 48 men) from the Asia-Pacific region. The average age of participants was 43 years ($SD = 6.4$), with ages ranging from 32 to 58 years. All participants possessed a minimum of 10 years of professional work experience across a variety of industries, including business, education, healthcare, and public administration. The sample was drawn from urban centers in countries such as Japan, Singapore, Australia, Thailand, and India, reflecting a cross-section of professionals from both developed and developing economies within the Asia-Pacific region. Participants were recruited through professional networks, LinkedIn outreach, and regional leadership development organizations. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, and ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board (See Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Demographics ($N = 93$)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Women	45	48.4
	Men	48	51.6
Age (years)	32–39	28	30.1
	40–49	47	50.5
	50–58	18	19.4
Work Experience (years)	10–14	34	36.6
	15–19	30	32.3
	20+	29	31.2
Country of Residence	Japan	25	26.9
	Singapore	18	19.4
	Australia	16	17.2
	Thailand	17	18.3
	India	17	18.3
Industry Sector	Business & Finance	32	34.4
	Education	20	21.5
	Healthcare	19	20.4
	Public Administration	22	23.7

Procedure

Participants completed an anonymous, self-administered online questionnaire, which took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was distributed using a secure online

survey platform and was accessible on both desktop and mobile devices. The survey link was shared directly with eligible participants along with an explanatory statement describing the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances of confidentiality.

Measures

Two primary constructs were measured in this study:

Perceptions of Leadership Characteristics

Participants rated the extent to which they associated various leadership characteristics (e.g., assertiveness, empathy, decisiveness, collaboration) with effective leadership, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not important at all, 5 = extremely important). The list of characteristics was adapted from established leadership competency frameworks and prior studies on gendered perceptions of leadership (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Endorsement of Traditional Gender Roles

Participants' attitudes toward gender roles were assessed using an adapted version of the Gender Role Beliefs Scale (GRBS), which measures agreement with traditional views on gender roles in work and leadership contexts (e.g., "Men are better suited for leadership roles than women"; "A good leader is typically assertive and dominant"). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicated stronger endorsement of traditional gender roles. Demographic variables, including age, gender,

years of work experience, country of residence, and industry sector, were also collected for descriptive and control purposes.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 29. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize participant characteristics and variable distributions. To examine the relationship between endorsement of traditional gender roles and perceptions of leadership characteristics, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to control for potential confounding variables such as age, gender, and years of work experience. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were computed to examine the relationship between participants' endorsement of traditional gender roles and their perceptions of effective leadership characteristics. Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the primary study variables.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 93)

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Traditional Gender Role Beliefs	2.86	0.71	—	
2. Perception of Collaborative Leadership as Effective	4.12	0.62	-.42*	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between endorsement of traditional gender role beliefs and the perceived effectiveness of collaborative leadership characteristics ($r = -.42$, $p < .01$). Participants who held stronger traditional gender role beliefs were less likely to view collaborative and empathetic leadership traits as important for effective leadership.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether traditional gender role beliefs predicted leadership perceptions after controlling for gender, age, and work experience. The model was statistically significant, $F(4, 88) = 6.23$, $p < .001$, and explained approximately 21% of the variance in perceptions of collaborative leadership ($R^2 = .21$). Traditional gender role beliefs remained a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$), while gender ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .08$), age ($\beta = .09$, $p = .24$), and work experience ($\beta = .06$, $p = .37$) were not significant predictors. These results suggest that deeply held gender

role attitudes exert a meaningful influence on how leadership qualities are perceived, independent of demographic factors. Individuals who endorse more egalitarian gender beliefs are more inclined to value collaborative, empathetic, and inclusive leadership attributes.

Discussion

The current study sought to examine whether deep-rooted gender role beliefs influence perceptions of effective leadership among experienced professionals in the Asia-Pacific region. The results revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between endorsement of traditional gender roles and the recognition of relational, collaborative, and empathetic leadership traits as markers of effective leadership. This finding aligns with Eagly and Johnson (1990) and Ridgeway (2001), who demonstrate how gendered expectations shape leadership prototypes — with stereotypically masculine traits (e.g., assertiveness, decisiveness) often being privileged over communal

qualities (e.g., empathy, collaboration). Our findings echo similar trends identified in previous research conducted in diverse contexts. For instance, Shen and Joseph (2021) emphasize that persistent gender stereotypes continue to constrain leadership perceptions and limit opportunities for underrepresented genders to ascend into leadership roles. Furthermore, Egitim (2024) found that when Japanese university students critically reflected on their implicit gender biases over a nine-week program, many participants initially undervalued collaborative leadership qualities until explicitly prompted to challenge their assumptions — a pattern reflected here even among seasoned professionals. The importance of comprehensive interventions is underscored by our data. Consistent with Grocutt et al. (2022) and Vitale (2019), mentorship and sponsorship programs have been identified as effective mechanisms for broadening participants' understanding of diverse leadership styles and advancing underrepresented talent. Our findings further support literature advocating for explicit diversity targets and accountability mechanisms. Studies such as Subekti et al. (2021), examining the impact of Japan's Act on Promotion of Women's Participation, and Terjesen et al. (2015) (not listed but commonly cited) on board gender quotas in Europe, suggest that clear benchmarks and sustained accountability are critical in shifting organizational norms and leadership demographics.

Moreover, emerging research urges the expansion of gender-balanced leadership discourse beyond the male-female binary. Gates, Bennett, and Radovic (2024) underscore the marginalization faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in leadership contexts in Asia-Pacific, advocating for more inclusive leadership models that account for the experiences of transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals. This aligns with Egitim (2023, 2025), who demonstrates how leaderful and collaborative pedagogies can foster more inclusive and empowering environments, challenging conventional hierarchies. Taken together, our study highlights the enduring influence of traditional gender norms on leadership perceptions and underscores the necessity of multipronged strategies — including mentorship, leadership development programs, flexible work policies, explicit diversity targets, and accountability measures — to advance gender-balanced leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. As Gooty et al. (2023) argue, fostering such inclusive leadership is not only ethically imperative but also enhances organizational resilience and innovation. While progress has been made, our

findings indicate that significant work remains. Sustained organizational commitment, coupled with continuous education to challenge implicit biases, will be vital in cultivating leadership cultures that reflect and value the full spectrum of gender diversity.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the sample was composed exclusively of individuals with over 10 years of professional experience, drawn from multiple countries in the Asia-Pacific region. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to younger professionals or early-career employees, whose views on gender and leadership may be shaped differently due to generational shifts or recent exposure to evolving workplace norms (see Sugiyama et al., 2016). It is recommended that future studies compare cohorts with varying levels of experience so that the interaction between professional tenure, gender role beliefs, and leadership perceptions can be better understood. Second, reliance was placed on self-reported survey measures, which may have been influenced by social desirability bias. Despite efforts to assure participants of confidentiality, it is possible that traditional gender attitudes were underreported or support for inclusive leadership was overstated to align with perceived socially desirable norms (as cautioned by Prime, Otterman, & Salib, 2014). It is suggested that future research incorporate qualitative interviews, implicit association tests, or experimental methods to obtain a more nuanced understanding of implicit biases and how these biases are manifested in leadership evaluations. Additionally, while gender roles were the focus of this study, intersectional factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation were not explicitly investigated, although they may also shape leadership perceptions (see Gates et al., 2024). It is recommended that an intersectional approach be adopted in future studies to capture these complexities and to further inform strategies for inclusive leadership in diverse cultural contexts.

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