

IDENTITY MATTERS: UNPACKING THE EFFECTS OF PROTOTYPICALITY ON PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP IN INDONESIA

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The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research collaboration supported by the Australian Government.

DLP investigates the crucial role that leaders, networks and coalitions play in achieving development outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

What do people want from their leaders? Why are some leaders perceived as naturally more trustworthy than others? And what matters more to followers – a leaders' identity, or how effectively they perform?

KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

- The identity of a leader – including their age, gender and perceived values – strongly influences people's willingness to support them.
- Leaders who reflect the identity and characteristics of a group – who we might term 'prototypical' leaders – are more likely to be considered trustworthy, effective and likely to represent followers' interests than those who don't reflect their identity.
- The identity of prototypical leaders provides a buffer against failure: they can retain support even when they are perceived to be ineffective.
- Prototypical leaders may also be able to go against the group's interests while retaining their legitimacy and support base.
- On the other hand, non-prototypical leaders may find it harder to build trustworthiness, even when they are perceived to be effective.

This brief sets out some initial findings from research that examined these questions in Indonesia. In December 2018, Cakra Wikara Indonesia (CWI) and the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) undertook a large survey of perceptions of leadership across five provinces (Jakarta, North Sumatra, West Java, East Java, and South Sulawesi) (n= 2,003). The survey used an embedded experiment to test how different identity characteristics – such as the gender, religion, age, and the perceived fairness of a leader – affects people's trust in leaders, how effective or capable they think they are, and whether they believe they would represent their interests.

WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT FROM THEIR LEADERS?

Across the world, people evaluate leaders differently. In different spaces, at different times, what makes a leader worthy of support is likely to depend on a complex formula, including a leader's identity and personality traits, the position they hold, or the particular issue they stand for (Hudson and Mcloughlin, 2019). Why we choose our leaders matters because it shapes how we expect them to behave. It sets the criteria against which we judge them as successful or not. It can influence whether we confer or withdraw our support. And in turn, it can shape how far leaders act in our interests.

From a development perspective, understanding how people evaluate leaders is therefore key to understanding when and how change happens. In practice, we often see puzzling relationships between what might be perceived to be in followers' interests, and how leaders act: charismatic leaders can be extremely popular, but ultimately ineffective at driving change, while transformational leaders may be extremely effective at improving lives, but highly unpopular. By uncovering what's going on beneath the surface of the leader-follower relationship, we can start to unpick when and how it might be enabling or

disabling progressive, developmental reform. For example, if we want to understand why leaders sometimes retain their legitimacy when they fail to deliver on their promises, or when leaders who do deliver may fail to hold onto power, we may need to look more closely at how their followers are evaluating them.

WHEN IDENTITY MATTERS

A popular theory from the leadership and social psychology literature says that above all else, people evaluate leaders based on their identity. This social identity theory of leadership predicts that people will look for leaders who reflect the identity and characteristics of the group they feel most closely associated with. Groups matter for how individuals perceive leaders because they ‘define who we are, and influence what we think, feel, and do, and how others perceive and treat us’ (Hogg, van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012). Our perceived group identity can be based on ethnicity, religion, gender, or certain values or traditions. Leaders who reflect this identity can be thought of as ‘prototypical’ leaders (see Box 1).



BOX 1: WHAT IS A PROTOTYPICAL LEADER?

A leader is prototypical when people think they represent the identity of a group. This could be based on their ethnicity, religion, gender, or the values they hold. A prototypical leader is likely to be thought of as ‘one of us’ – someone who best understands and is willing to defend the interests of a group. These leaders often have a strong, built-in reservoir of trust based on their identity. Sometimes they can retain this trust even when they are ineffective at delivering benefits for the group. They may also become identity entrepreneurs, meaning they can change the group’s identity and shift norms and values without harming their legitimacy.

Looking or behaving like a prototypical leader matters because it can have real effects on how followers judge them. In the literature, there are two particularly striking propositions about the effects of prototypicality on follower perceptions:

First, people are more likely to trust prototypical leaders:

Social identity theory suggests people are more likely to judge ‘ingroup’ members more favourably than ‘outgroup’ members with the same characteristics (Marques & Paez, 1994). Several studies, mainly in social psychology, have previously found a strong preference towards prototypical group members (Hogg & Knippenberg, 2003; Reicher, Haslam, & Platow, 2018). This is because people tend to think that prototypical members are more likely to be invested in the group, inherently trustworthy, and better able to promote group interests.

Second, prototypical leaders have more license to fail or transform:

Studies have found that because prototypical members are perceived to be more legitimate and trustworthy, they do not always need to act in followers’ interests, or be effective, to retain support. While non-prototypical leaders may have to perform well to gain trust, prototypical leaders can sometimes earn a “license to fail” through their identity (Giessner, Knippenberg, & Sleebos, 2008). Because people trust these leaders, they can also more easily diverge from group norms, or seek to change them (Abrams, de Moura, Marques, & Hutchison, 2008). In other words, prototypical leaders may also have more leeway to be transformational – to push the boundaries of norms, and even go against the interests of the group, while retaining their legitimacy.

The research reported in this brief set out to test these propositions in the Indonesian context. The survey was designed to answer three specific questions:

- What does a prototypical leader look like, and does this vary by individuals, groups and across different parts of Indonesia?
- What effect does prototypicality have on perceptions of trustworthiness, effectiveness, and representation of interests?
- Are prototypical leaders more likely than non-prototypical leaders to be supported, even when they are ineffective?

THE INDONESIAN SURVEY

To study people's perceptions of what makes a leader effective and trustworthy in Indonesia, we focused on the lowest elected level of political leadership. In Indonesia, this is the heads of districts, the *Bupatis* or *Walikota*. We surveyed five provinces: Jakarta, North Sumatra, West Java, East Java, and South Sulawesi¹. These were chosen because they are among the most densely populated areas, and also because each has particular political dynamics which allow us to test whether the theory holds across different contexts.

Purposive non-probability sampling was used in selecting survey locations/sites. We used a stratified sampling frame that targeted a representative sample by gender and age within the five provinces of interest. Weights were used to correct the differences between the sample regional population. The respondents were taken from an online panel². The survey was conducted by Deltapoll, in partnership with Viga. We collected a range of demographic data on survey respondents, including their age, gender, profession, level of education, religion, ethnicity, and personal monthly income.

TABLE 1: SAMPLE DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

| | EAST JAVA | | JAKARTA SPECIAL CAPITAL REGION | | NORTH SUMATRA | | SOUTH SULAWESI | | WEST JAVA | |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|---------------|-------|----------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| RESPONDENTS | 483 | | 624 | | 246 | | 128 | | 522 | |
| AGE MEAN | 33.4 | | 32.2 | | 31.2 | | 31.8 | | 31.5 | |
| AGE STANDARD DEVIATION | 15.0 | | 13.9 | | 16.3 | | 16.4 | | 13.0 | |
| GENDER | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| PERCENTAGE | 49.4% | 50.6% | 49.1% | 50.9% | 49.6% | 50.4% | 50.3% | 49.7% | 48.9% | 51.1% |

TABLE 2: PROVINCES IN INDONESIA

| PROVINCE | RATIONALE FOR SELECTION |
|----------------|--|
| JAKARTA | As the capital city, Jakarta is an important political, cultural and economic hub. The leadership system is also slightly different here to elsewhere: there is no <i>Kabupaten</i> in Jakarta. Jakarta's heads of districts are not elected, but appointed. Respondents were asked about the Governor position. |
| EAST JAVA | The second most populated province after West Java. While ethnic Javanese make up the majority of the population, the province also has a significant portion of minority groups. It is led by a female governor, elected in the most recent 2018 local election. |
| WEST JAVA | The most populated province in Indonesia. A business and political centre, and also the native homeland of Sundanese people, who form the largest ethnic group. This province is known to be politically conservative, with a predominant religious (Islam) influence. |
| NORTH SUMATRA | The most populous province outside of Java, this has been repeatedly identified by survey and electoral reports as having one of the highest rates of clientelism in politics. |
| SOUTH SULAWESI | This province has a diverse range of ethnic groups. It is widely known as having a political system influenced by dynasty politics, strong traditional communities as well as religion. |

- 1 The survey was also fielded in two further provinces: East Nusa Tenggara and Bali. Unfortunately, response rates in these provinces were not high enough to be representative and therefore are not included in the sample.
- 2 While the survey sample is representative by age and gender for each province, the sample does skew towards being more educated and wealthier than a fully representative sample. This is common in online samples. However, we argue that this does not threaten the results or implications as we assume that the preference for a traditional leadership identity holds more strongly in a fully representative sample.

FINDING I: WHAT DOES A PROTOTYPICAL LEADER LOOK LIKE ACROSS DIFFERENT PARTS OF INDONESIA?

In order to understand what a prototypical leader looks like in Indonesia, respondents were asked a number of questions about their group identity and the characteristics they think leaders should have. Respondents were first asked to indicate the three most important characteristics that matter to their group identity. The options were; age, gender, ethnicity, religion, education, province and nationality.

Respondents were then asked to construct two different leader profiles. Based on social identity theory, we identified 7 key characteristics for them to select from: gender, age, faith, ethnicity, leadership style, religiosity, and attitude towards existing traditions. Each of these characteristics could be selected on a number of levels, which are shown in Table 3, overleaf. Respondents were told that the first leader profile should represent the kind of leader that they personally would prefer to see in power. The second leader profile should look like the kind of leader they believe is most likely to represent the wider interests of the group that they identify with. They were told that the two profiles may look the same, or be different from one another.

While there is no single prototypical leader among respondents, several patterns emerged in respect to our key criteria:

Gender: Of our surveyed respondents, 85% choose a male leader and 15% choose a female leader. Women (22%) are more likely to choose a female leader than male respondents (7%). Respondents from North Sumatra are most likely to prefer women leaders (23%) and those in the Jakarta Special Capital Region the least (9%).

Age: Given the choice of a 27, 37, 47, 57, or 67-year old leader, 45% of respondents preferred a 47-year old. Women (48%) are more likely to choose a 47-year old than men (41%), whereas men (15%) are more than twice as likely to choose a 27-year old leader than female respondents (6%). There were no significant differences

across the provinces.

Religious faith: 77% of respondents prefer a Muslim leader. There are no significant differences between men and women. West Java (86%) and East Java (83%) are most likely to prefer Muslim leaders across the provinces. Respondents from North Sumatra (16%) and Jakarta Special Capital Region (14%) are most likely to choose a Protestant Christian leader.

Ethnicity: 52% of respondents choose a Javanese leader. But more relevantly, across all respondents, 59% choose a leader with the same ethnicity as them. Men are more likely to do so (63%) than women (55%). East Javan (74%) respondents are most likely to choose a leader with the same ethnicity as them and South Sulawesi (40%) respondents are the least likely to do so.

Religiosity: In terms of the importance of a leader's faith, 52% want a leader who has a very strong faith and make religion central to their life and work and another 37% wanted a leader who regularly attends their place of worship. There are no significant differences between men and women. West Java (58%) are more likely to choose a leader who have a very strong faith and make religion central to their life, and respondents from South Sulawesi are least likely (39%).

Tradition: A majority (59%) choose a leader who would protect existing traditions to keep things how they are. There are no significant differences between men and women respondents, or across the provinces.

When given the choice between a leader who was either honest and fair, humble and forgiving, able to inspire people to follow them, confident and outspoken, or able to get things done, 66% of respondents want a leader to be honest and fair. There are no significant differences between men and women. Jakarta Special Capital Region (19%) are more likely to choose a leader who could get things done than respondents from North Sumatra (9%).

TABLE 3: LEADER PROFILE CHARACTERISTICS AND LEVELS

| | LEVELS | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| GENDER | Female | Male | | | | |
| AGE | 27 years old | 37 years old | 47 years old | 57 years old | 67 years old | |
| RELIGIOUS FAITH | Muslim | Protestant Christian | Catholic Christian | Hindu | Buddhist | Confucian |
| ETHNICITY | Javanese | Sundanese | Batak | Madurese | Betawi | Minangkabau |
| | Buginese | Malay | Bantenese | Banjarese | Acehnese | Balinese |
| | Sasak | Dayak | Chinese Indonesian | Papuan | Makasseresese | Moluccans |
| | Cirebonese | Gorontaloan | Minahasan | Nias | Other | |
| RELIGIOSITY | They do not regularly attend a place of worship. | They observe major festivals, but do not regularly attend a place of worship. | They regularly attend their place of worship. | They have a very strong faith and make religion central to their life and work. | They are able to get things done. | |
| TRADITION | They want to restore traditions and return things to how they were. | They want to protect existing traditions to keep things how they are. | They tend to overlook existing traditions and go their own way. | They want to abolish traditions and replace them with a new vision. | | |

FINDING II: WHAT EFFECT DOES PROTOTYPICALITY HAVE ON PERCEPTIONS OF TRUSTWORTHINESS, EFFECTIVENESS AND INTERESTS?

The information presented in the previous section tells us what each respondent’s prototypical leader looks like. To test the difference a prototypical leader makes on people’s perceptions, our 2,003 respondents were randomly assigned to two groups. The first group were shown a leader profile that matched their prototypical leader (Group P) – i.e. the kind of leader they had identified as most likely to represent the wider interests of the group that they identify with. The second group were shown a randomly created leader profile that was non-prototypical (Group NP). Both groups received a manifesto statement from either their prototypical leader or a non-prototypical leader. The manifesto statement was identical for the two groups, the only difference being the leader profile (see Figure 1 for an example).

Respondents were then asked to indicate the extent to which they (1) could trust this leader, (2) thought they would be a capable leader, and (3) felt the leader would represent their interests. We also asked respondents to indicate the extent to which the leader resembles their group. All responses were on a scale of zero to nine, where zero indicates strongly disagree and nine indicates strongly agree.

Figure 2 shows the difference in responses between the two groups on the three indicators of interest. The results demonstrate a clear effect of prototypicality. Prototypical leaders are more trusted (36% more), considered more capable or effective (33% more), and felt more likely to protect the interests of the group (38% more).

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FIGURE 1: EXAMPLE LEADER PROFILE AND MANIFESTO STATEMENT

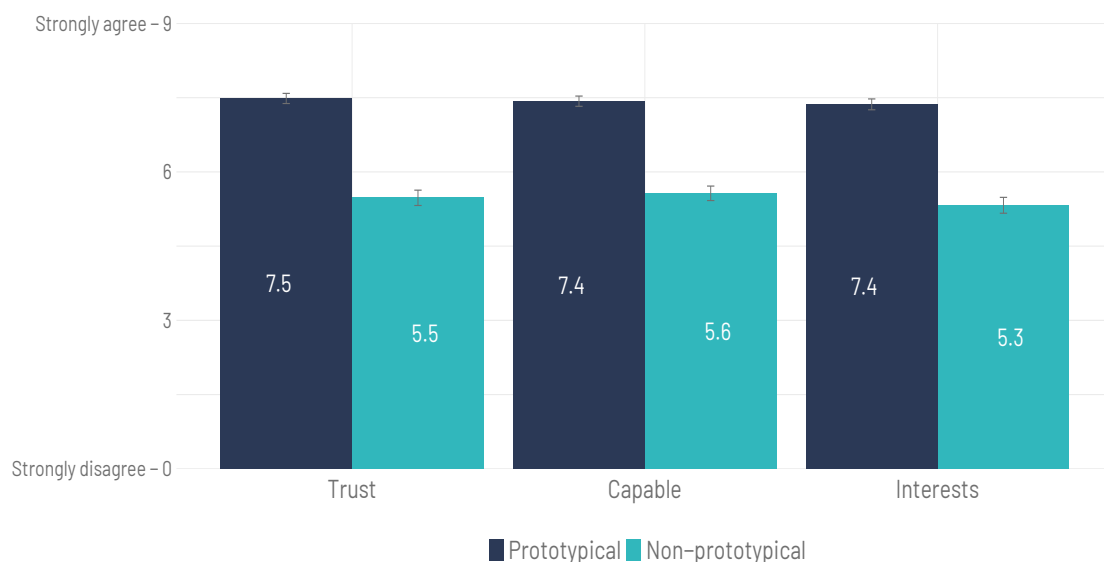
| LEADER PROFILE |
|---|
| Male |
| 37 years old |
| Muslim |
| Javanese |
| They are able to get things done. |
| They regularly attend their place of worship. |
| They seek to protect existing traditions to keep things how they are. |

—

"I am proud to be selected as your representative. My number one priority in office is to reform our community's schools and health clinics to make sure that they go to the people most in need and are the people who will benefit the most. Reform will not be easy and it will involve many costs, but I am determined to succeed."



FIGURE 2: THE EFFECTS OF PROTOTYPICALITY ON TRUST, CAPABILITY, AND INTERESTS



Sample: Deltapoll | Indonesia | 24-28 December 2018 | Sample size n=2,097 | Data weighted to be representative at the Province
 Question: I could absolutely trust this person as a Bupati/Walikota | This person would be a very capable leader as a Bupati/Walikota | This leader would represent my group's interests as a Bupati/Walikota

FINDING III: ARE PROTOTYPICAL LEADERS MORE LIKELY THAN NON-PROTOTYPICAL LEADERS TO BE SUPPORTED, EVEN WHEN THEY ARE INEFFECTIVE?

Next, we wanted to find out whether people judge the performance of prototypical and non-prototypical leaders differently. The literature suggests that prototypical leaders can retain trust and legitimacy even if they fail or go against followers’ interests, while non-prototypical leaders struggle to build trust or legitimacy even when they deliver developmental goods.

To test this, we added a second randomisation where the respondents kept their prototypical or non-prototypical leader profile but were given further information about whether the leader was successful or failed to achieve

their manifesto goals (see Table 4 for the statements). Of the group that kept their prototypical leader profile, half of them were told that five years later the leader had been successful. The other half were told that their prototypical leader had failed. The same treatment was given to the group who had a non-prototypical leader profile. Half of them were told that five years later the non-prototypical leader had been successful, and the other half were told that the non-prototypical leader had failed. In effect, the sample was split across four treatment groups, as per the 2x2 shown in Table 5.

TABLE 4: SUCCESS AND FAILURE TREATMENTS

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| SUCCESS TREATMENT | 5 years later, at the end of their term of office, this leader had successfully delivered on their promise to reform the schools and health clinics in the Kabupaten. The reforms were hard won, but resulted in improved literacy levels and access to essential medicines. |
| FAILURE TREATMENT | 5 years later, at the end of their term of office, this leader had failed to deliver on their promise to reform the schools and health clinics in the Kabupaten. The reforms were unsuccessful: the investment and hard work was wasted and there was no improvement in literacy levels or access to essential medicines. |

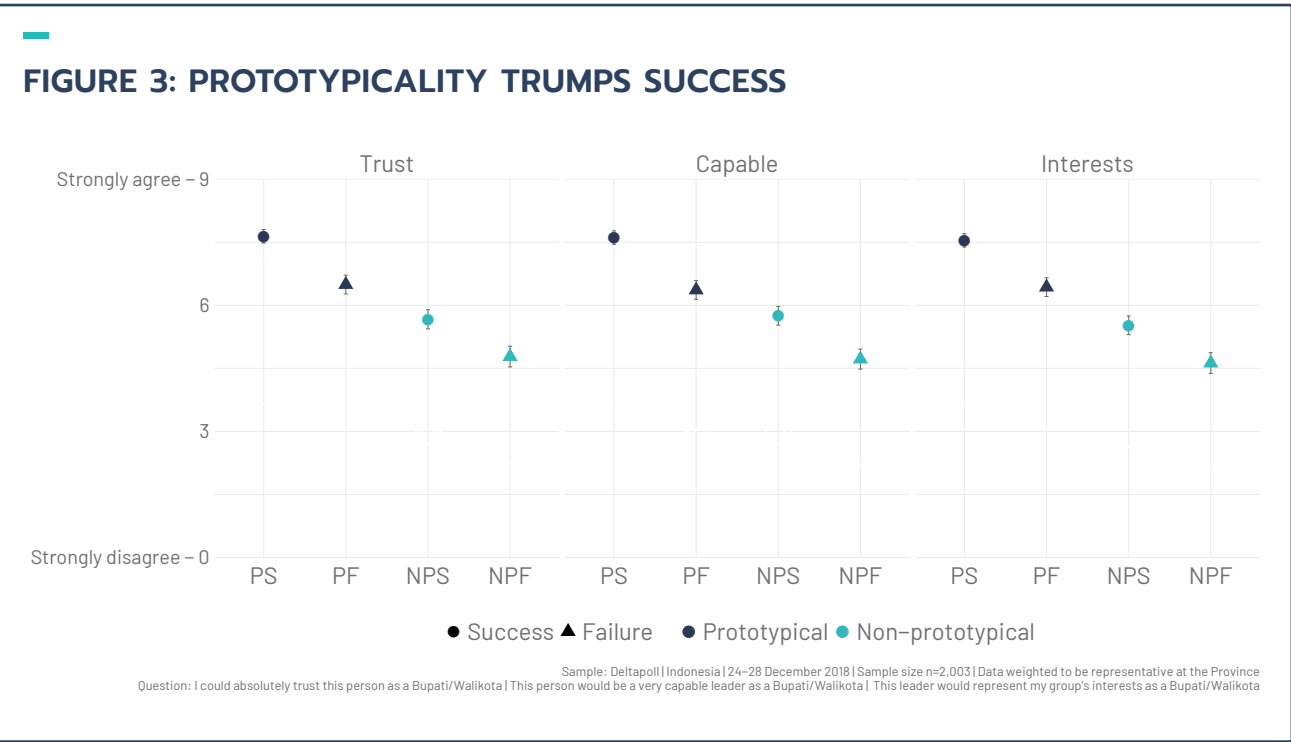
TABLE 5: THE FOUR TREATMENT GROUPS BASED ON PROTOTYPICALITY AND NON-PROTOTYPICALITY AND POLICY SUCCESS AND FAILURE

| | PROTOTYPICAL LEADER PROFILE | NON-PROTOTYPICAL LEADER PROFILE |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| SUCCESS TREATMENT | Group PS (25% of sample) | Group NPS (25% of sample) |
| FAILURE TREATMENT | Group PF (25% of sample) | Group NPF (25% of sample) |

Figure 3, below, shows the difference in responses between the four groups on the three indicators of interest. A consistent story appears. Successful prototypical leaders are perceived as more trusted, capable, and likely to represent people’s interests than successful non-prototypical leaders. Unsuccessful prototypical leaders are perceived as more trusted, capable and likely to represent people’s interests than unsuccessful non-prototypical leaders. In other words, failure is punished more harshly when leaders are non-prototypical. Overall, even successful non-prototypical leaders are still perceived as less trusted and likely to represent people’s interests than prototypical leaders that fail. Identity overrides capability in the evaluation of

leadership. Perceptions of trustworthiness, capability and interest representation among successful non-prototypical leaders and failed prototypical leaders are statistically indistinguishable. Success cannot, in other words, consistently match the effects of prototypicality on positive evaluations of leadership.

In short, there is an in-built protection for prototypical leaders. Their identity provides a buffer against failure. On the other hand, non-prototypical leaders seem to face a glass ceiling in terms of how far their success can build perceptions of their trustworthiness and capability.



IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER ANALYSIS

The overall finding from this research is that identity matters for people's willingness to support leaders. There is a significant effect of identity on perceptions of how effective leaders are in Indonesia. Prototypical leaders may have considerably more room for manoeuvre in the sense that they can fail but still be perceived as trustworthy. On the other hand, non-prototypical leaders may have to work harder to gain trust through good performance.

Further analysis of the data will be able to dig deeper into this dynamic, showing whether it holds equally for women and men, across different provinces of Indonesia, and between different ethnic groups. While the overall results are consistent and clear, it may be possible to identify outlier cases where prototypicality does not

trump effectiveness. Likewise, the results may be further explained through reference to the particular political contexts in each province.

These findings are significant for understanding the relationship between leadership and change. Leadership does not follow a 'heroic' model, whereby one person can lead change (Andrews, 2013). All leaders need followers, and leadership works through a political process of interaction between followers' evaluation and leaders' actions (Hudson and Mccloughlin, 2019). In this way, the perceptions of followers matters for understanding what leaders deliver for people. DLP and CWI will therefore continue to analyse the implications of these findings for developmental leadership in Indonesia and beyond.

*All leaders need followers,
and leadership works
through a political
process of interaction
between followers'
evaluation and leaders'
actions.*

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Cakra Wikara Indonesia (CWI) is an association of researchers, based in Indonesia, focusing on social political studies that aim to collectively produce knowledge with gender perspective in order to enhance the quality of public policy and empower people's participation. CWI's scope of work includes research, data mining and publication, as well as education and training programs that promote participatory, fair, and equal political governance.

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