

# Communal Narcissism, Leadership Perception and Leader Selection Recommendations in the Context of Indonesian Collective Culture

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## ABSTRACT

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The role of a leader within an organization is crucial for the company's advancement, especially amidst the rapidly changing dynamics of organizations. However, selecting the right leader often remains a primary challenge. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the influence of communal narcissism on leadership perception and leader selection recommendations within Indonesia's collective culture. This study employs a quasi-experimental method, with student activists as participants. Sampling was conducted using convenience sampling, resulting in a total of 416 samples of student activists. The experimental group (n = 236) was tasked with viewing an interview recording of a leadership candidate exhibiting high communal narcissism. In contrast, the control group (n = 180) watched a video recording of a candidate with low communal narcissism. Subsequently, both groups were required to complete a leadership perception questionnaire and provide leader selection recommendations. Data analysis was performed using Independent Sample T-Tests to ascertain differences between the two groups. The research findings reveal significant differences in leadership perception and recommendations between leadership candidates with high and low levels of communal narcissism. Thus, candidates with high levels of communal narcissism were perceived more positively as leaders and were recommended for leadership positions compared to candidates with low levels of communal narcissism.

## INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, organizations face rapid changes and challenges. Every day brings demands to innovate, especially as humans coexist with constantly evolving technology. Consider artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT), for instance. However, despite technology's ability to replace some human functions, this does not mean that human resources, especially effective leaders, are irrelevant. Research has shown that the role of leaders is crucial for the advancement of industries

and organizations (Nolan-McSweeney et al., 2023; Stahl & De Luque, 2014). This leadership role is reflected in organizational practices such as shaping values and missions (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers, 2016), building a work culture that aligns with organizational values (Houmanfar et al., 2015), and determining appropriate strategies for organizational survival and growth (Thakhathi et al., 2019). The importance of leadership underscores the critical nature of leader selection (Holsen et al., 2015; Bowers et al., 2017). The selection of an inappropriate leader can result in the organization being unable to adapt to changes in the external environment and can also impede the creativity of its resources (Wang et al., 2024). Therefore, organizations must choose the right leaders (Cortellazzo et al., 2019).

In selecting a leader, many aspects are considered, one of which is personality (Maldonado et al., 2022). Personality is an important aspect because it serves as the basis for someone's actions and behaviors (Fleeson et al., 2014), both in everyday life and in work contexts. Goldstein (2017) explains the importance of using personality tests in job and organizational selection, as personality tests can be used from initial recruitment, and promotion, to leader selection. It is so crucial that personality tests are rarely omitted from the selection process. In the same research, the personality frequently discussed is the Big Five Personality traits, consisting of Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism (Goldstein et al., 2017). Apart from the Big Five Personality traits, there is one personality trait worth discussing that has been proven to positively influence leader selection, namely narcissism (Spurk et al., 2016; Grijalva & Newman, 2015; Jonason et al., 2012) which is one component of the Dark Triad Personality consisting of narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Jones, 2015).

A more detailed examination of narcissism reveals that it can be classified into two distinct categories. Firstly, there is agentic narcissism, and secondly, there is communal narcissism (Gebauer et al., 2012). In essence, agentic narcissism is defined by a desire to be perceived as the most intelligent, capable, and accomplished individual in comparison to others (Gebauer et al., 2013; Gebauer et al., 2012). In contrast, individuals with communal narcissism exhibit characteristics such as a desire to be perceived as the most influential member of the group and a sense of being the most useful to others (Gebauer et al., 2013; Gebauer et al., 2012). In the context of

leadership, narcissism has yielded intriguing findings in various previous studies of the personality triad. These studies have demonstrated that narcissism is the most influential component in terms of leadership (Grijalva & Newman, 2015; Paulhus et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2011). In a similar vein, Grijalva (2015) found that individuals with high levels of narcissism were more likely to be selected as leaders. This is an intriguing finding, as narcissism is a personality trait that is often associated with negative characteristics in organizational and work settings (Williams & Williams, 2017; Grijalva & Newman, 2015; O'Boyle et al., 2012). Furthermore, other findings indicate that narcissistic leaders may have long-term detrimental effects (Ong et al., 2016).

Reflecting on previous research on narcissism and leadership, the results are still varied, ranging from positive (Grijalva & Newman, 2015; Paulhus et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2011) to negative (Williams & Williams, 2017; Ong et al., 2016; Grijalva & Newman, 2015; O'Boyle et al., 2012). This indicates that there is still inconsistency in research findings, hence the need to strengthen the results of previous findings. Furthermore, previous studies discussing narcissism and leadership have been limited to narcissism without distinguishing between agentic narcissism and communal narcissism (Nuzulia & Why, 2020; Grijalva & Newman, 2015; Paulhus et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2011). However, both forms of narcissism have different characteristics (Gebauer et al., 2012). Therefore, the lack of research differentiating between agentic narcissism and communal narcissism about leadership presents an interesting gap for further investigation.

Moreover, studies on narcissism and leadership have been predominantly conducted abroad in cultures characterized by individualism. There is still limited research on the relationship between narcissism and leadership within the context of a collectivist culture, especially in Indonesia. Indonesian collectivist culture is closely associated with group dynamism, cooperation, and prioritizing group interests over individual interests (Al & Mandar, 2022). Previous research by Nuzulia (2020) focusing on Indonesian collectivist culture mentioned that narcissism, without distinguishing between agentic or communal narcissism, plays a positive role in occupying leadership roles. Therefore, it would be very interesting to investigate narcissism separately, especially communal narcissism, given its characteristics that are similar to those of collectivist culture, namely, both are focused on the group.

Based on the background provided, this study aims to investigate the influence of communal narcissism on leadership perception and recommendations in selecting leaders within the context of Indonesian collectivist culture. The study seeks to determine whether leadership candidates with high levels of communal narcissism will be perceived positively or negatively compared to candidates with low levels of communal narcissism. Furthermore, the study also aims to examine whether the level of communal narcissism exhibited by leadership candidates will affect the recommendations given to these candidates. In practical terms, this research will provide recommendations for organizations and companies to address the challenges arising from this phenomenon in increasingly complex and diverse work environments.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Communal Narcissism**

Narcissism represents one of three primary components of the psychological construct known as the Dark Triad Personality, which is further defined by the additional traits of Machiavellianism and psychopathy (Muris et al., 2017). The Dark Triad Personality construct is a psychological entity that is defined by the combination of three discrete personality traits. The three personality traits are machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. Machiavellianism is defined as the inclination to manipulate and exploit others for the attainment of personal objectives (Jones & Paulhus, 2017). Psychopathy is typified by a deficiency in empathy, impulsivity, and antisocial conduct (Jonason et al., 2015). As a component of the Dark Triad Personality, narcissism is characterized by a need for recognition and admiration, as well as an exaggerated self-image (Paulhus & Jones, 2015). Narcissism is typified by feelings of grandiose self-importance, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy for others (Hermann et al., 2018).

Communal narcissism represents a distinct subtype of narcissism, differing from both traditional narcissism and grandiose narcissism. In contrast to grandiose narcissism, which is characterized by a preoccupation with personal superiority and social dominance, communal narcissism is defined by a focus on feelings of superiority within the context of social relationships and community (Gebauer et al., 2012). Those who exhibit communal narcissism tend to perceive themselves as highly caring, empathetic, and dedicated to assisting others. Nevertheless, they still seek recognition and admiration for their actions (Nehrlich et al., 2019). Individuals with communal narcissism often engage in behaviors that appear altruistic and prosocial. However, their underlying motive is often the reinforcement of their self-image and the acquisition of praise from others. Such individuals may engage in charitable activities, community service, or assume leadership roles within social organizations, motivated by the desire

to gain recognition and validation for their contributions (Fatfouta & Schröder-Abé, 2018a).

The extant literature demonstrates that narcissism has a pronounced effect on organizational and industrial contexts. Narcissists are frequently appointed to leadership roles due to their charismatic personalities and self-assurance (Nuzulia & Why, 2020; Grijalva et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the presence of narcissism in organizations has been linked to adverse outcomes, including unethical decision-making, interpersonal conflict, and challenges in teamwork (O'Reilly et al., 2014). In industrial and organizational contexts, the presence of communal narcissism has the potential to influence group dynamics and organizational effectiveness. Research indicates that while communal narcissism can facilitate collaboration and involvement, it can also engender a less genuine and manipulative atmosphere (Braun, 2017).

### **Perceptions of Leadership and Leader Recommendations**

The concept of leadership perception can be defined as the manner in which individuals within an organizational setting assess and interpret the actions and characteristics of their leaders (Breevaart et al., 2014; Agote et al., 2016; Trichas et al., 2017). The term "leader recommendation" denotes the process by which organizational members or other stakeholders proffer counsel or assistance to an individual deemed suitable for a leadership role (Breevaart et al., 2014; Braun et al., 2013). In the context of evaluating and selecting effective leaders in an organization, leadership perception and leader recommendation are two interrelated variables. The combination of the variables of leadership perception and leader recommendation provides a robust framework for the assessment and selection of leaders in organizations. One of the most relevant theories is that of transformational leadership. In order to gain a comprehensive picture of leadership effectiveness and member preferences, a survey or questionnaire has been created that combines items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) with questions regarding leader perceptions and recommendations (Avolio et al., 1999a).

This theory Avolio (1999) employs seven indicators or dimensions. Idealized Influence (Attributed & Behavior) refers to leaders who serve as role models for their subordinates and are held in high regard and esteem. The capacity to inspire and motivate subordinates through the presentation of an attractive vision and the facilitation of challenging tasks is a defining characteristic of inspirational motivation. Intellectual stimulation refers to leaders who encourage creativity and innovation among their subordinates by challenging assumptions and encouraging new ways of thinking. Individualized consideration refers to leaders who demonstrate a commitment to addressing the unique developmental needs of each subordinate. Contingent reward:

a leader who provides rewards contingent on the achievement of tasks or goals. Management by Exception (Active) entails leaders monitoring and correcting subordinates in the event of deviations from established standards or errors. Management by Exception (Passive) is a leadership style in which the leader only intervenes if a problem has already occurred or if standards are not met. In conclusion, the integration of leadership perceptions and leader recommendations offers profound insights into the dynamics of leadership in organizations, thereby facilitating the creation of a productive and harmonious work environment (Gagné et al., 2020).

### **Communal Narcissism Leaders in Collective Culture**

One of the most salient characteristics of Indonesian society is its collective culture, which is a key differentiating factor from individualist cultures (Abbott, 2017). Indonesia, a country with a rich tapestry of cultural and ethnic diversity, is characterised by a strong culture of collectivism (Pasteruk, 2020). This concept underscores the primacy of collective objectives over individual ones, as well as the preeminence of collective obligations over individual rights. In a collectivist culture, group members provide mutual support and accept protection from other members in order to maintain harmony (Rahman et al., 2020). The practice of *gotong royong*, or mutual cooperation between citizens in society, represents a tangible manifestation of the collective values that are deeply entrenched in Indonesian culture (Slikkerveer, 2019). These values exert an influence on a number of different aspects of life, including the selection of leaders in organizations (Maksum et al., 2023).

In the context of leadership, the collective culture in Indonesia is conducive to an inclusive and participatory leadership style (Maksum et al., 2023). The cultural values attached to these leaders constitute the construct of their leadership excellence (Sahertian & Jawas, 2021). A leadership style that promotes collective values is perceived to be more effective in fostering stability and cohesion within groups or organizations (Rijal et al., 2024). In light of these findings and the characteristics of communal narcissism, the hypothesis emerges that leaders who exhibit communal narcissism are perceived more favourably within the context of Indonesia's collective culture. Moreover, research conducted by Rijal (2024) in a region of Indonesia indicates that leadership based on collectivity fosters increased trust and enhanced results. The relationship between leaders and their members is based on the principles of mutual respect and trust (Arief Kurnianto Yuliar, Mangisi Simanjuntak, 2021). This also gives rise to the hypothesis that an individual with a communal narcissism personality would be more likely to be recommended as a leader.

## METHOD

The research design utilizes a Quasi-Experiment where participants are not assigned randomly (Creswell, 2016). The participants in this study consist of 416 active student organization members. The minimum target number of participants is 80 in each group. The determination of the number of participants is based on previous research by (Nuzulia & Why, 2020) with an odds ratio of 3.043, effect size of 0.614, statistical power of 0.95, and alpha of 0.5. Sample size calculation uses Calculator G\*Power 3.1.9.7. Sampling is done using Convenience sampling, where participants are selected based on convenience and availability (Creswell, 2016). Participants are divided into two groups, the experimental group ( $n = 236$ ) and the control group ( $n = 180$ ). The age of participants ranges from 17 to 23 years old, with a mean [SD] = 19 [0.92]. The gender distribution is 33% male and 67% female.

The research instrument for measuring narcissism personality traits uses the Communal Narcissism Inventory-Short Version (CNI) scale, which has been translated into Indonesian with a total of 16 items (Gebauer et al., 2012). Each item consists of seven response options from Strongly Disagree (score 1) to Strongly Agree (score 7). Example items include: "I am the person who likes to help the most" and "I will bring peace and justice to the world." Higher scores indicate higher levels of communal narcissism. Perceptions of leadership are measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) with 7 closed-ended items (Avolio et al., 1999b). Each item consists of seven response options from Strongly Disagree (score 1) to Strongly Agree (score 7). Example items include: "In my opinion, the candidate can be a good example in the organization," and "In my opinion, the candidate can be an inspirational motivation." Higher scores indicate higher perceptions of leadership. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of MLQ in this study is 0.914, with item discrimination ranging from 0.662 to 0.811. Furthermore, for leader recommendations, the answer options include four choices: 'strongly not recommended' (Score 1), 'not recommended' (Score 2), 'recommended' (Score 3), and 'strongly recommended' (Score 4).

This research consists of two phases. The first phase aimed to select candidate leaders with high and low levels of communal narcissism, with the following procedures:

1. The researcher gathered participants through campus announcements. A total of 103 prospective participants expressed willingness to participate in the study.



Subsequently, these participants were assessed for narcissism levels using the CNI-16 scale.

2. The researcher conducted interviews with the 103 participants to explore their work motivation, strengths and weaknesses, and achievements. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded using a smartphone.
3. The researcher selected 2 interview videos from participants with the lowest and highest scores of communal narcissism. These 2 participants, whose videos were selected, are referred to as the leader candidates.

The second phase aimed to measure the perception of leadership and recommendations for leaders, with the following procedures:

1. The researcher made announcements on campus to recruit research participants. A total of 419 individuals expressed their willingness to participate in the study.
2. The 419 individuals were divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. The grouping was based on available classes or groups. The experimental group consisted of 236 participants, while the control group consisted of 180 participants.
3. Participants in the experimental group were asked to watch interview videos of candidates with high levels of communal narcissism, while the control group watched interview videos of candidates with low levels of communal narcissism.
4. After watching the videos, participants were asked to assess whether the candidates in the videos were perceived as leaders by completing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). They were then asked to evaluate whether the candidates in the videos were recommended as leaders. This was measured using a four-point scale: 'strongly not recommended' (Score 1), 'not recommended' (Score 2), 'recommended' (Score 3), and 'strongly recommended' (Score 4).

The data analysis utilized an Independent Sample T-Test to determine whether there were significant differences between the experimental and control groups. The Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) for Windows version 25 software was employed for this purpose.



## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The research results that differentiate perceptions of leadership and recommendations for selecting leaders between candidates with high and low levels of communal narcissism are presented in Table 1.

| Variable              | Group        |              | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
|                       | Experiment   | Control      |          |           |                 |                 |                  |
|                       | Mean (SD)    | Mean (SD)    |          |           |                 |                 |                  |
| Leader perception     | 33.45 (5.58) | 30.82 (6.63) | 4.39     | 414       | 0.001           | 2.63            | 0.429            |
| Leader recommendation | 2.80 (0.57)  | 2.54 (0.65)  | 4.17     | 357.40    | 0.001           | 0.26            | 0.416            |

**Table 1.** Results of Independent Sample T-Test

Based on the results of Table 1, the variable of leadership perception shows a significant difference between the leadership perception of the experimental group and the leadership perception of the control group ( $t [414] = 4.39, p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ). It can be concluded that candidates with high levels of communal narcissism ( $M = 33.45, SD = 5.58$ ) are perceived more as leaders compared to candidates with low levels of communal narcissism ( $M = 30.82, SD = 6.63$ ). The effect size is small to moderate, with Cohen's *d* equal to 0.429.

Similar results were found for the variable of leader recommendation, which indicates a significant difference between the leader recommendations of the experimental group and the leader recommendations of the control group ( $t [357.40] = 4.17, p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ). It can be concluded that candidates with high levels of communal narcissism ( $M = 2.80, SD = 0.57$ ) are more recommended to be leaders compared to candidates with low levels of communal narcissism ( $M = 2.54, SD = 0.65$ ). The effect size is small to moderate, with Cohen's *d* equal to 0.416.

### Discussion

The results indicate a significant difference in leadership perception and recommendation for leadership between leader candidates with high and low levels of communal narcissism. This finding supports previous research where narcissism serves as a positive predictor in leadership roles (Nuzulia & Why, 2020) and leader selection (Grijalva & Newman, 2015). This study also provides a new insight into how

individuals with high levels of communal narcissism are perceived and recommended as leaders by their members. This is because individuals with high levels of communal narcissism tend to appear nurturing (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2021; Magdalena & Fatfouta, 2019) and have a desire to advocate for their group (Fatfouta & Schröder-Abé, 2018a). Moreover, individuals with high communal narcissism also seem to be more charismatic (Rogoza & Fatfouta, 2020). Therefore, it is not surprising that individuals with high communal narcissism are more likely to be recommended as leaders. These reasons seem relevant considering this research was conducted in Indonesia, which has a collective cultural background.

In a collective society, an individual's perception of a leader is highly dependent on the social dynamics of that leader, not just their performance alone (Maksum et al., 2023). This is the reason why there is space for someone with communal narcissism to be chosen as a leader, considering their behavior of always presenting themselves as individuals oriented towards others (Fatfouta & Schröder-Abé, 2018a). They tend to strengthen and promote collective identity, appearing as leaders who advocate for their group (Freis & Brunell, 2021; Kristinsdottir et al., 2021). Additionally, they are also perceived to be able to create strong emotional bonds, often receiving praise and positive treatment from their group (Fatfouta & Schröder-Abé, 2018b). Moreover, they possess high confidence and motivation (Rogoza & Fatfouta, 2019) to engage in collective actions that align with the collectivist values embraced in Indonesian culture (Rijal et al., 2024). This further reinforces the perception that they are seemingly advocating for the interests of many (Freis & Brunell, 2021). Considering these characteristics of communal narcissism and on the other hand, collective cultures also value charismatic leaders who are group-oriented (Arief Kurnianto Yuliar, Mangisi Simanjuntak, 2021), it's no wonder that individuals with high communal narcissism are more preferred by collective societies as leaders. This condition is further supported by the collective mindset that has formed within Indonesian society, influencing perceptions of leaders considered suitable and desirable (Wannewitz & Garschagen, 2024).

On the other hand, individuals with low communal narcissism may not stand out as much in the context of Indonesian collective culture. They may be more inclined to withdraw and not assert themselves within the group (Fatfouta & Schröder-Abé, 2018a).

While individuals with high communal narcissism consistently show support for their social environment, those with low communal narcissism may do the opposite (Nehrlich et al., 2019). In a society that values cooperation and solidarity like Indonesia (Wannewitz & Garschagen, 2024), such behavior may be deemed less fitting for the desired leader image. Therefore, even if they may possess the same qualifications and competencies as individuals with high communal narcissism, they may be less recommended as leaders because they fail to leave a strong impression on their group. However, the appealing impression exhibited by individuals with high communal narcissism may only be surface-level (Hermann et al., 2018). In reality, they may only showcase kindness in front of their group to fulfill their ambitions (Nehrlich et al., 2019).

The personal ambition of individuals with high communal narcissism is evident from the superiority they display (Gebauer et al., 2012) and the contributions they make (Giacomin & Jordan, 2015), indicating that their primary goal is power. Therefore, individuals with high communal narcissism often do not genuinely nurture their group; instead, it is one of their needs to be recognized or to stand out more than others (Yang et al., 2018). This need is supported by their ability to manage impressions (Leniarska et al., 2023; Fennimore, 2021). They may appear to advocate for others when in reality, the opposite is true (Yang et al., 2018). This aspect is not widely known by those around them, leading individuals with high communal narcissism to still be perceived positively. Moreover, in societies with a collective culture like Indonesia, communal narcissism is still considered ideal for leadership. Therefore, collectively, these factors explain why individuals with high communal narcissism are more perceived as leaders and more recommended in the context of Indonesian collective culture.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research indicates that individuals with communal narcissism are perceived more positively and recommended to be leaders. The findings of this study assist organizations and companies in the leadership selection process. Personality aspects, especially communal narcissism, are crucial in perceiving leadership candidates and providing recommendations to organizational and corporate leadership candidates. This research recommends companies in Indonesia be more cautious in selecting leaders. The selection process should be re-evaluated considering that individuals with communal narcissism are adept at impression management (Leniarska et al., 2023; Fennimore, 2021). Therefore, in addition to personality aspects, it is also advisable to

reconsider the performance of candidates and the needs of the company when considering leadership selection.

However, if the selection process has already chosen a leader with high communal narcissism, it is important to consider carefully when delegating authority to them, given that communal narcissism can have both positive and negative impacts (Sedikides, 2020; Braun et al., 2018), depending on how authority is granted to them (Fatfouta, 2019). Therefore, one wise option is to maximize the strengths of communal narcissism. Furthermore, this research serves as a reminder to organizations and companies in Indonesia that cultural factors still play a significant role amidst rapid technological advancements. Future research may delve deeper into exploring the cultural factors of Indonesian collectivism alongside the existing organizational cultures in Indonesia.

One aspect that other researchers interested in exploring this topic should consider is the research sample. This study utilized a sample that was predominantly composed of students and had limited diversity in age range. Future research may benefit from investigating similar topics with a more varied sample distribution and a broader age range. Considering that this study examines personality and leadership within organizations and companies, a more diverse sample with a higher age range may yield more varied findings, especially when viewed within the context of Indonesian collectivist culture.

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