

Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

An authenticity approach to role congruity theory, leader effectiveness, and team performance

Jasmien Khattab
khattab@rsm.nl

Hannes Leroy

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Recommended Citation

Khattab, J., and Leroy, H. (2016). *An authenticity approach to role congruity theory, leader effectiveness, and team performance*. Paper presented at Closing the Gender Gap: Advancing Leadership and Organizations. DOI: 10.5703/1288284316072

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Authenticity is a highly valued feature of leadership: leaders that are seen as authentic have positive effects on their followers' individual and team-level outcomes, which in turn impact a leader's career progression. We draw from attribution theory (Jones & Nisbett, 1971) and implicit leadership theories (Eagly & Karau, 2002) to argue that female leaders face more challenges in being seen as authentic compared to male leaders, and that this leads to lower evaluations of leadership effectiveness for female leaders compared to male leaders. More specifically, we argue that the evaluation of female leaders' authenticity suffers more when female leaders are both communal and agentic compared to when female leaders are only communal or only agentic (Hypothesis 1) and that this explains the lowered perceptions of leader effectiveness for female leaders (Hypothesis 2). Data from 48 organizational teams provide support for our hypotheses. The results show that female leaders who are both agentic and communal are perceived as least authentic, whereas male leaders do not seem to have restrictions in terms of being agentic and communal. Furthermore, we find that perceptions of the leader's authenticity is the mediating mechanism between gender, agency, and communality to perceptions of leader effectiveness. These results offer support for the contention that perceptions of effective leadership are biased, and that this might be another explanation for why women in higher leadership positions are still underrepresented.