

THE SEEDS OF LEADERSHIP: FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR MALAYSIAN WOMEN LEADERS

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Abstract: The scarcity of women holding top leadership positions in organisations not only reflects the gender equity issue, which is faced globally including Malaysia, but also indicates it as a phenomenon for the women leaders who managed to climb to the top as head of business organisations. This paper attempts to identify the ‘seeds of leadership’ that contributed towards women’s success as head of business organisations. The lived leadership journeys of seven Malaysian women from the technology, private university, manufacturing, hospitality, and legal industry were examined. A hermeneutical phenomenological approach was used, and a purposive sampling technique was carried out. In-depth interviews were utilised, and data were analysed using the Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. The leadership identity construction theory (LICT) was employed in this study. Early personal developmental relationships and experiences contribute as antecedents to the leadership identity construction (LIC) of the senior women leaders. These formative relationships and experiences are concluded as being the ‘seeds of leadership’ that contributed to the development of the women’s future LIC. While this study may not be generalised for profiling other women leaders in Malaysia, its novelty lies in the unique insights.

Key words: Leadership, identity construction, women, development, relationships, experiences, hermeneutical phenomenology.

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Introduction

Having women as leaders has proven to be beneficial for organisations. Kim and Starks’s (2016) study on public listed organisations in the USA, for instance, found that functional diversity contributes to the firm’s performance and that women bring specific functional expertise to the boards of US firms, thereby enhancing their performance. Besides, Woetzel *et al.* (2018) believe that a collective GDP amounting to \$4.5 trillion a year could be realised by 2025 if the Asia Pacific economies advance in women’s equality. Furthermore, a meta-analysis by Hoobler *et al.* (2018) suggests that women’s leadership may affect a firm’s performance, in general, and, in particular, its sales performance. In Malaysia, the need to tackle the gender equity issue (or issue of diversity) is critical, particularly as the country

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declared 2018 as the year of women empowerment (Goh, 2017). Moreover, the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report identified women as representing only 20.4% of the total number of legislators, senior officials, and managers in Malaysia even though enrolment in tertiary education for females is higher at 49.9% compared to males (40.7%)(WEF, 2020).

The leadership development journey of women to the top is not linear but is likened to a 'labyrinth' that needs to be navigated (Carli & Eagly, 2016). For women to ascend successfully to senior leadership roles, they must be able to envision themselves as leaders. In short, women not only undertake journeys related to what they do and experience in their leadership, but, more fundamentally, they take the journey of identifying themselves and being identified by others as a leader. DeRue and Ashford (2010) termed this process as internalising a leader identity. The complex process of identity work required for one to develop a leadership identity necessarily involves other people, and women often lack that relational capital and experience (Ely *et al.*, 2011). For this study, leadership refers to the process of mutual influence that unfolds across time and situations as individuals claim and grant leader and follower roles (Marchiondo *et al.*, 2015).

This research extends the use of the LICT (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) to the formative years of the women leaders, which provides insights into the types of relationships and experiences that influenced their leadership identity development, and which appear to be important antecedents of the leadership identity construction(LIC). Instead of questioning why women are not making it to the upper echelons of leadership, this research focuses on women who have successfully navigated to the peak.

Literature Review

Very often, women leaders are found trapped within an 'identity conflict' caused by behavioural expectations (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016). Eagly and Karau (2002) talk about the role congruity theory, which examines the contextual influences on the mismatch between stereotypes of women and leaders. Ibarra *et al.* (2013) argued about subtle, institutionalised forms of gender bias stemming from workplace structures, cultures, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favour men, and often interfere with the identity work of women leaders.

A leader identity is defined as the "sub-component of one's identity that relates to being a leader or how one thinks of oneself as a leader" (Day & Harrison, 2007, p. 365). Additionally, a leader identity could be constructed in the more complex interplay of interpersonal relationships and organisational hierarchies, and, as such, there might not be one single method or site where the leader identity construction can take place. Ibarra *et al.* (2014) managed to categorise the emerging research about identity and leadership into three areas of theoretical research, namely; 1) role identity, 2) social identity, and 3) social construction. The role-based theory

focused mainly on the possession of leadership skills and experiences as very influential in the development of the leader's self-concept (Day & Harrison, 2007). According to this theory, a leadership identity is seen as one of the numerous social roles that the individual could enact. The view is that a leader's identity emerges from the interactions with the complementary identity of the follower. The limitation of this theory is that it fails to explain how a leader's identity can then be constructed outside of a social role, or how come the identity could not be constructed even if the leader is conferred with the social role.

The next theory that is commonly used in explaining leadership identity is the Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT is used to understand how individuals come to be recognised as leaders through social categories and also through group-level processes. With this perspective, a leadership identity is the outcome of defining oneself and others based on the groups in which one belongs (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Based on the SIT, leaders then emerge in groups because of their prototypicality within a group. Hogg (2001) also argues that the focus on the most prototypical of the group gives rise to greater difficulty for "social minorities" (p.195) to gain access to leadership positions; and, if when they achieve formal positions, they would likely find it more challenging to gain acceptance. These two theories have their limitations and are not able to account for more dynamic leader identities, shifting and negotiated. A more recently proposed theory is the leadership identity construction theory (LICT) by DeRue and Ashford (2010). The main difference with Hogg's (2001) proposal is that this theory advocates that leadership identities are much more dynamic, shifting, and that they occur through key processes known as 'claiming' and 'granting'. This theory is based on social constructionism and is found to be more suitable to address this research on the women's leadership journey.

Rather than an individual process, internalising a leadership identity happens through relational and social processes. DeRue and Ashford (2010) state that "claiming and granting" is part of the LIC process where individuals start to see themselves as leaders. At the most fundamental level, "claiming" refers to actions associated with the assertion of a leadership identity whereas "granting" refers to the actions that are associated with the bestowal of a leadership identity to this leader. The acts of "claiming" can be verbal, non-verbal, direct, non-direct behaviours and actions, and of course, other people can choose to accept or reject such claims (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). If they accept such a claim, it means that they decide to grant this individual the leadership. DeRue and Ashford (2010) further added that if the initial claim is not supported, then there is a failure in the internalisation of leadership identity at the individual level. Therefore, the individual is not recognised as a leader at the relational level and will not be endorsed at the collective level. Ashford and DeRue (2012) posit that "a leadership identity must be granted by others for it to be internalised, recognised, and endorsed by other individuals and the organisation more broadly" (p.148). The

researchers use the terms individualised internalisation, relational recognition, and collective endorsement.

Individual internalisation is the state in which individuals proceed to incorporate an identity of either a leader or a follower as part of their self-concept (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). After individuals have internalised a leader or follower identity, their leadership identity will be more robust to the extent where it is relationally recognised. This is when the adoption of reciprocal role identities as leader or follower takes place. This relational recognition may not be necessarily dependant on positional titles held by individuals. Collective endorsement is the visibility within the broader social environment as a part of a particular social group; for example, leaders or followers (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). An example of collective endorsement might be from a higher-level manager openly addressing the member of a group as a leader, or it may be treating a person as a leader in the broader social context. This endorsement may then trigger the leadership identity construction process.

Following are some studies that show empirical support for the LICT. Guillen *et al.*'s (2015) study mentioned that individual experiences could be used in developing leadership prototypes, and that this can either encourage or inhibit their leadership motivation. Marchiondo *et al.* (2015) suggests that observers would be more likely to accept 'claims' by individuals that they perceive as more leader-like during the claiming and granting process. This means that leaders that have more credibility in the past are more likely to be granted the claims. Miscenko *et al.* (2017) found that the level of leadership of an individual is positively related to the changes in the individual's leader identity. This means that when participants perceive themselves to be having a higher level of skills, their leadership identity has increased. In short, the studies found that leadership identity changes, is dynamic, and depends on the individual's perception of themselves as a leader. Fox-Kirk *et al.* (2017), in a study on women's leadership identity, stressed the importance of understanding the significant influence of context on women's leadership identity. Lanka *et al.*'s (2020) study provides insights into the subjective experience of constructing a leadership identity within the context of organisations. The participants had identified the identity catalyst as well as the identity barriers that had impacted their LIC process.

Research Methodology

This study was carried out to gain deep insights into the lived experiences of Malaysian women leaders who are serving as heads of organisations in business corporations in Malaysia. The phenomenology strategy is used for this study, and the research design followed the prescribed design for hermeneutical phenomenology. Understanding the "lived experiences" marks phenomenology as a philosophy and a method with procedures that involve prolonged, extensive study and engagement with a small number of subjects to develop patterns as well as

relationships of meanings (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the ‘text’ of life, and semiotics is used here to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of the methodology of hermeneutics (Van Manen, 2016).

For this study, women in senior leadership was defined as heads of business organisations who have served or were currently serving as the head of the organisation in Malaysia for a minimum of 2 years. These heads held titles such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Managing Director (MD), Vice-Chancellor, Vice President (VP), Senior Partner and General Manager (GM). The researcher managed to network with the Penang Women’s Development Corporation (PWDC), TalentCorp, and also the Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce (MICCI) to obtain referrals to the women leaders. All of the women heads are married and have children. Three of them hold Master’s qualifications, one with a PhD, and the rest have their specialised skills, such as Diploma in Engineering, Bachelor in Computer Science, and LLB (Hons). Of these, two are currently doctoral candidates. Three are within the 40-49 age range, and the other three are within the 50-59 age range. One participant is within the 60-69 age range. In terms of race, there were five Chinese, one Malay, and one Indian. Table 1 shows a partial summary of their demographics.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

Senior Leader(SL)	Age Range	Race	Position	Industry	Number of employees	Years of experience as Head of Organization
SL1	60-69	Malay	Vice-Chancellor (1.5 years) CEO(13 years)	Private University/ Transportation	15(Private University) 2500(Transportation)	14.5
SL2	40-49	Chinese	CEO	Manufacturing	350	2 years 8 months
SL3	40-49	Indian	Managing Director	Technology	550	4 years 8 months
SL4	50-59	Chinese	Managing Director	Technology	3500	3.5 years
SL5	50-59	Chinese	Senior Partner	Legal	15	22 years
SL6	50-	Chinese	General	Hospitality	680	15 years

Senior Leader(SL)	Age Range	Race	Position	Industry	Number of employees	Years of experience as Head of Organization
	59	e	Manager			
SL7	40-49	Chinese	Vice President General Manager	Technology	450(global) 4000(site)	1.5 years(VP) 7 years (site GM)

The data which was collected from July 2019 to February 2020 include curriculum vitae, demographic profile form, documents (press release, etc.), interviews, field notes, researcher's journal, anecdotes, and psychometric surveys. The primary data collection was through semi-structured interviews that lasted for a maximum of 90 minutes for each senior leader. The interviews were in-depth and part of research question 1 asked: What personal and professional relationships and experiences contributed to the leadership development of Malaysian senior women leaders who have served as heads of organisations in their respective business organisations? Each interview was recorded with permission, and the data were transcribed using the Otter.Ai software; the data were manually checked and corrected for accuracy. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, member checking was also done. Thematic analysis was done based on Braun's and Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework. Data analysis is also often performed, applying the hermeneutic cycle that constitutes reading, reflective writing, and interpretation in a rigorous fashion (Laverty, 2003). The thematic analysis steps are as follows: become familiar with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define themes, and, finally, the write-up (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher used the Atlas.ti qualitative software for a more systematic and in-depth process of coding. Though the themes were related to the research questions, there were subcategories (codes) rooted under them. The themes were then named as 'personal developmental relationships' and 'personal developmental experiences'. Two major themes and 11 codes were finalised (refer to figures 1 and 2). As part of the triangulation, the researcher subjected all the findings for verification by two academicians who are experts in the field.

Results and Discussions

In answering this part of the research question, Theme 1 was about the influential relationships that helped facilitate the early leadership development of the senior women heads. Six categories emerged. These people were the father, mother, siblings, schoolteachers, and friends. Uniquely, the personal relationship with

God/a higher power that they modelled upon was also mentioned by four of the women leaders. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

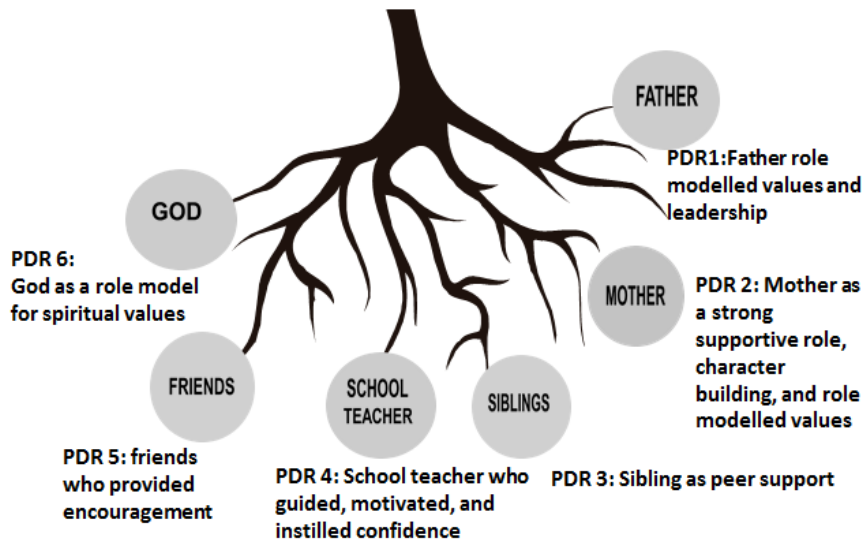


Figure 1: Theme 1- Personal Developmental Relationships (PDR)

The second theme on personal developmental experiences brought about another five categories. These experiences occurred mostly during the foundational years where these women leaders were exposed to good upbringing at home, early leadership teachings by the father, or early leadership opportunities at school/university. It also included experiences from volunteerism. Uniquely, the hardships they faced turned out to be useful lessons in life for these women. This can be referred to in Figure 2 below.

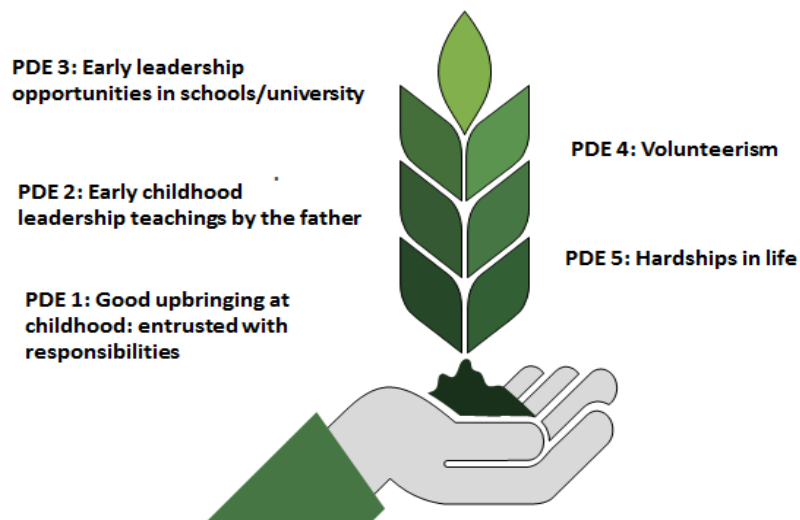


Figure 2: Theme 2- Personal Developmental Experiences (PDE)

Together, these two themes reflected the foundational phase in the leadership journey of the women leaders. This phase is the most critical phase for leadership identity development as the leadership identity had been internalised. This term is known as individual internalisation (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) whereby the leadership identity begins to be incorporated into the self-concept. What sets this phase apart is that the young female leader had been granted a leadership identity before she started claiming it. Different influential and developmental relationships during the formative years of the women's life journey that helped develop and strengthen their leader identity. These contexts were from home, school and university. Accordingly, these were relationships that helped nurture self-confidence in them providing affirmation, encouragement and a safe space and environment to grow. The role of fathers in building their daughter's leadership identity was reported. When asked, four (SL3, SL4, SL5, SL7) of these women immediately mentioned their father as the most influential person in the development of their leadership. The father-daughter relationship was a special bond that was mentioned by these women heads. The fathers themselves were role modelling ethical values to their daughters. Some of these fathers themselves were visionary and goal-oriented as leaders in their field. As a child and a young daughter, they were observing and emulating the values practised by their fathers. For example, SL3 said, "Yes, sure. I think the first person that comes up and I tell this a lot of times when I speak as well, my father is a very influencing character, especially in building leadership in me... from childhood, my father, he himself, has been a very good role model leader." SL4 shared about her father as well, "He himself is a leader. And I think to a large extent, how he brought us up made that

difference.” SL 7 also shared, “...my dad taught me one thing was to drive your dreams.”

White et al. (1992) reported that “35% of the successful women identified their fathers as being the most influential parent in terms of their development. These women felt that they were similar to their fathers in temperament” (White et al., 1992, p. 32). Hoyt and Kennedy (2008) concur that the vital period in nurturing leadership in females is during the adolescent years. According to them, this is the time that females would benefit most from the positive role modelling of leadership. The mother’s role was also important, and it seemed that many of the mothers (SL3, SL4, SL5, SL6, SL7) played a supportive role in their growing up days. Some of them stayed at home and cared for the family, while others had to work very hard to earn a living to supplement the father’s income. Their mothers portrayed women of strength who were always there to care, love, and sacrifice for the family. Speaking about her mother, SL5 shared, “Uhm, my mom is a very strong character, very good mom. Uhm, always there for us. She actually, she always insisted on the importance of education, er and she actually drew a comparison between education and wealth.” Also, SL6 shared, “My mother is the more... the caring, loving mother, right. My father is actually a very humble person. Very kind, right. Helpful. “According to research, those who have a secure attachment style are shown to be adaptable in their psychosocial functioning as an adult as they have the ego resources for taking up leadership roles. Children’s attachment style is often due to the parenting style, or parenting factors, and this attachment style, which is well-formed at an early stage, is predictive of their outcomes for future leadership (Popper & Mayseless, 2003).

Siblings were essential contributors as well. They were peers to these women leaders (SL3, SL6), and mutual support was shown when help was needed. For example, SL 3 shared, “Yes. Because you see, peer mentoring is also very important. The good part in my family, my older sister, is a doctorate in biochemistry. So, she’s a consultant at ABC. And then my younger sister did engineering as well. She has a doctorate, she an IR and she’s deputy Dean in University EFG. So, the good part is we come together, and I speak to them nearly every day.”

In retrospect, many of these women leaders (SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5) also recalled a teacher, whether they were the class teacher, sports teacher, club or uniform unit teachers, or a teacher advisor who paid attention, encouraged, and motivated them. These teachers saw the abilities, potential, and qualities in these girls and gave them a chance to excel in some form of leadership responsibilities where they took on leadership roles. These girls looked forward to school where they enjoyed these activities. Young women develop their self-perceptions of their leadership capability from the influence of their school environment, which plays a substantial role from the educational perspective (Archard, 2013). SL1 mentioned, “So, and who inspire me of course teachers and leaders in the association yeah. Of course er

when I was in the volunteer in the jubilee home, we, er I can't remember who was the person who took me there er, but there is always someone er trying to put you better, there is always people reaching out to you."SL2 shared about the influence her teacher made in her development, "So, like in primary school, you know my Form Teacher er, er... you know at the same time he was also my basketball teacher or coach. So, he actually gave me a lot of motivation, and he also instilled a lot of discipline in me to be a player in the basketball team."

Friends were another source of encouragement for the women leaders (SL2, SL6, SL7). These were mostly peers from school or their early working life. This relationship was a peer relationship or learning partner where mutual support, encouraging and challenging each other to improve, were the norm. According to SL2, "I do have a very good friend. My best friend. We encouraged each other er to rise up. We have positive er encouragement towards each other." Girls with strong social intelligence and strong social skills who are well-liked by their classmates are more likely seen as a leader, whereas these factors do not predict the same for young boys (Kurdek & Lillie, 1985).

One very unique relationship that was referred to many times (SL1, SL2, SL5) was the relationship and influence of a higher power, namely, God from whom the women leaders were role modelling in terms of moral values and drawing strength from. This unique relationship seems unexplainable at first, but it provided strong faith in themselves and a good role model. It appeared that Malaysian women's spirituality and trust in God might be connected to their leadership identity development. They have identified themselves with a higher power. SL1 said, "...God is always there. Whatever faith you are, God is there to reward you if you are honest and sincere. "According to SL5, "And, frankly, my, to me as I shared to you about God. To me, the greatest, the greatest example of leadership is to serve. So, I don't see leadership as something like, but we hold very high and mighty, we don't, for me, I don't do that." Most definitions of spirituality share some common threads; reconnecting to the inner self; a deep search for universal values that helps the individuals go above egocentric striving; a deep sense of empathy with all living beings; and a desire to be in touch with the source of life (whatever name we give it). Spirituality is a deep search for inner identity, connectedness, and transcendence (Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2011).

The second theme was about the 'personal developmental experiences' of these women leaders, and, under this theme, five categories were found (Figure 2). It appeared that different influential and developmental experiences along the formative phase of the journey helped develop and strengthen the leadership identity in the women leaders. Whether these experiences were from home, school, university or community, the learning seemed to be applicable for the women leaders across contexts. Strong family upbringing was where the parents and family members brought them up with strong values and principles. Many of the women leaders also cited that they were given responsibilities at home by their parents at a

young age. Such responsibilities ranged from doing household chores, caring for other siblings, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and other essential duties. In short, from a young age, they were entrusted with responsibilities and were already 'leading' at home. SL 2 shared that: "...I am the eldest girl in the family... My mum would ask me to take care of my three siblings. Make sure that they have taken a shower, make sure that they have had their dinner, make sure that they do their homework and, and, also, I live in er you know my my upbringing is like this." This

responsibility mindset of taking care and taking charge has been nurtured in these Malaysian women since their childhood. Furthermore, a recent study by Kot et al. (2016) comparing female entrepreneurship in Poland and South Africa revealed 'responsibility' as a critical characteristic driving these females to lead organisations as entrepreneurs.

The women leaders (SL3, SL4, SL5) also shared about the intentional teachings and mentoring by their fathers. It was noted that their fathers sat down and imparted valuable lessons and dialogued with their daughters. The topics encompassed their values, vision, goals, and, for some, even their future career. SL3 shared her experience with her father: "So, he always believes that if you set your goal, then you have clarity on how to achieve it... So, and then we try to go ahead and meet the goal. And if we meet obviously, there is a small recognition, not much, but it's a good recognition." SL4 shared, "Well, my late father, I think that the way I was brought up, he's role modelling... you know, how to, he addresses the family, how he teaches us about values." Early parent-child conversation provides a critical foundation for meaning-making in children when they are faced with certain personal events (Reese, Jack, & White, 2010), and this meaning-making is central to the development of narrative identity. The authoritative style of parents produces teenagers who have the best chance of becoming effective leaders (Popper & Mayseless, 2003) as these parents encourage their children to be independent with limits as they give clear standards and monitor the conduct of their children. They are not intrusive nor restrictive but assertive, and their disciplinary methods are not punitive but supportive. They bring up their children to be emotionally intelligent.

When it came to school, very often, it was the extracurricular activities that helped them. Most of them were involved in some form of competitive sports, clubs, and uniform units, as well as early leadership opportunities such as prefects-board, head of boards, etc. SL1 mentioned, "...I was prefect in primary school, standard six, and I was a prefect in the secondary school. So, being chosen as a prefect, the teacher would have recognised your leadership quality..." Leading, working, collaborating, networking with their fellow students, and being active in school was a norm for them. During these formative years, many of them were also involved in volunteerism. It was either volunteering to help in a home or doing some community and charitable works. Two (SL6 & SL7) started their

volunteerism with taking leadership roles at the Interact club, while one was with the rangers and girl guides (SL1), one (SL2) at the church, and another one (SL3) helping the father in his voluntary work. SL6 shared her experience: "So I joined the Interact Club when I was like Form 4, Form 5, where they organised, going and clean up old folks' home, to read for the blind and so on. But I didn't stop there when I came out of the college and start working. I continue my Interact Club." SL 7 also added, "You know, I was the President of the club, right. And Interact Club is very interesting because it's not just a school thing, right? It is; actually, you engage outside, right. So, we do a lot of CSR. We also get to interact with the Interact club, the senior people, so I made a lot of friends, along the way. So yeah." A sense of purpose provides a young person with the motivation to involve themselves in the world and engage in something greater than themselves (Mariano, 2014). Hence, merely practising leadership behaviours, roles, and responsibilities across two or more domains contributes to developing leadership competence (Hammond et al., 2017). Children who are provided with the opportunity to practise their leadership skills at various junctures of their development undoubtedly become more robust in those skills compared to children who have hardly any or no practice at all. These are the same ideas that can be applied to thinking about childhood leader development, and it calls for the systematic development of skills (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Schools provide many opportunities for practising leadership. These activities range from holding leadership positions as prefects, house captains, and numerous sports and club activities. It is no surprise that the involvement in extracurricular activities, including athletics, can predict future leader development (Bartone et al., 2007) Many of the women heads (SL1, SL2, SL6, SL7) experienced some form of hardship in their early life. Such hardships usually stemmed from some events that happened in their family life that put them in challenging situations that they had to navigate. In retrospect, it also appears that hardships in life moulded them to be more resilient, persevering, courageous, and resourceful. Difficulties ensue from unfortunate and unforeseen situations that are beyond the control of organisations and individuals (Wilson & Van Velsor, 2011). SL1 lost her mother at the age of two, and she shared, "When I was small, I always see, oh I don't have a mother; I have aunts who belong to somebody's mother. And I say okay I will do my best to make sure that I learn the most." SL7 shared "So, from very young; I'm already an entrepreneur in that sense. Very, very young you know I sell cakes in the market, we make cakes and all that so, and my dad is a lorry driver..., we don't come from a rich family. We come from a poor family." In general, hardships are transformative. They bring about the feelings of loss of control, meaning, or identity and force introspection, which can redefine values, commitments, and purpose (Moxley & Pulley, 2004). Children who are capable of succeeding despite adversity are identified as resilient, possessing specific strengths, and benefiting from protective factors that help them conquer adverse

conditions and thrive. Resilient individuals are confident in their ability to overcome hurdles (Werner, 1993). Adverse situations can teach resilience and integrity, compassion for others, and a more balanced approach to life (Clerkin & Wilson, 2017). This helped build their self-confidence and enabled them to see themselves as leaders since they were able to 'overcome' or were able to navigate the hardships as well as have positive learning experiences in various forms as described above.

It seems that during the foundational years, these women leaders were given 'grants' to their leadership identity even before they 'claim'. They received more grants of leadership identity from others, and thus they developed an identity of themselves as leaders. These personal developmental relationships and experiences seemed to be strong antecedents to the leadership identity construction (DeRue and Ashford, 2010) later in life. These antecedents led them to see themselves as leaders. Thus they became more receptive to seek out and invest in their leadership development, thereby making them more skilled and more attractive to organisations in terms of filling leadership positions.

Conclusion

This research generated critical conclusions about the women's leadership journey to the peak. Firstly, some early personal developmental relationships and experiences contribute as antecedents to the LIC of the senior women leaders. These formative experiences are the seeds of leadership development that have been planted by those close to them, namely parents/caregivers and schoolteachers. The male figure, which is the father, is a significant role model in this relationship. Uniquely, the relationship and faith in God/higher power affirms the confidence in these women. These relationships and experiences serve as crucial antecedents in the women's leadership identity development where they practised leadership.

Nurturing by stakeholders in the early formative years is essential. These stakeholders are parents/caregivers, schoolteachers, and the community who can play a vital role during this window of opportunity at the leader's early stage. They can begin to nurture the leadership identity in females via value-based teachings, role-modelling, and the inculcation of ethical leadership qualities, as well as teaching the importance of having a goal/purpose in life. Having a close daughter-father, daughter-mother/caregiver relationship, and allowing them to take part in different developmental experiences ranging from household responsibilities, active participation in school extracurricular activities, leadership opportunities in school, and volunteerism will prove to be fruitful. Teachers and school authorities could learn to practice and promote gender equality and allow female students to voice their opinions, permitting them to be assertive and helping them nurture their strengths and gifts. Exposing young females and youth with all kinds of leadership opportunities will certainly help. Faith and spiritual formation also play an essential role in their leadership development, and should not be discounted. When

encountering hardships, they should not be shielded but journeyed with and encouraged. Helping them develop a leadership identity that they can internalise could prove to be fruitful. The seeds of leadership serve as a strong antecedent for future LIC. These seeds, when continuously nurtured in fertile soil in the future context, serve as an essential catalyst for these women's future leadership emergence. Past studies have explored the use of the LICT in the organisational context. This study extends the use of this theory by examining the personal relationships and experiences that provide secure 'grants' of a leader identity. Although this phenomenological study cannot be generalised, it provides a unique insight for the on how to support women's leadership trajectory. As a recommendation, future researchers could replicate this study in other emerging countries on how women rise to the top in leadership. Another recommendation is to conduct a comparative research of male and female leaders to explore if there are any differences or any unique factors that enabled their trajectory to the top as heads of business organisations. Finally, future studies may focus on longitudinal studies of female youth. Looking for patterns and critical influences at different stages of development in their life (home, school), the researcher can then better understand the antecedents of their future leadership identity development.

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KORZENIE PRZYWÓDZTWA: Z DOŚWIADCZEŃ STARSZYCH MALAJSKICH LIDEREK KOBIET

Streszczenie: Niedobór kobiet zajmujących najwyższe stanowiska kierownicze w organizacjach nie tylko odzwierciedla problem równości płci, z którym boryka się na całym świecie, w tym Malezja, ale także wskazuje, że jest to zjawisko dla kobiet liderów, którym udało się wspiąć na szczyt jako szefowa organizacji biznesowych. W artykule podjęto próbę zidentyfikowania „załączków przywództwa”, które przyczyniły się do sukcesu kobiet jako szefów organizacji biznesowych. Przeanalizowano życiowe podróże przywódcze siedmiu malezyjskich kobiet z branży technologicznej, prywatnego uniwersytetu, produkcji, hotelarstwa i branży prawniczej. Zastosowano hermeneutyczne podejście fenomenologiczne i zastosowano celową technikę próbkowania. Wykorzystano pogłębione wywiady, a dane przeanalizowano za pomocą oprogramowania do jakościowej analizy danych Atlas.ti. W badaniu wykorzystano teorię konstrukcji tożsamości przywódców (LICT). Wczesne relacje i doświadczenia związane z rozwojem osobistym przyczyniają się do tworzenia tożsamości przywódczej (LIC) starszych kobiet liderów. Te formujące relacje i doświadczenia są uważane za „załączki przywództwa”, które przyczyniły się do rozwoju przyszłej LIC kobiet. Chociaż badanie to może nie być uogólnione w celu profilowania innych liderów w Malezji, jego nowość polega na unikalnych spostrzeżeniach.

Słowa kluczowe: Przywództwo, budowa tożsamości, kobiety, rozwój, relacje, doświadczenia, fenomenologia hermeneutyczna.

领导的根源:从马来西亚高级女性领导者的经验

摘要:在组织中担任高层领导职务的女性稀缺不仅反映了包括马来西亚在内的全球面临的性别平等问题,也表明这对于设法登上企业组织高层的女性领导人来说是一种现象。本文试图找出有助于女性成功地成为企业组织负责人的“领导力种子”。考察了来自技术,私立大学,制造业,酒店和法律行业的七名马来西亚妇女的现场领导之旅。使用了解释现象学方法,并进行了有目的的抽样技术。利用了深度访谈,并使用Atlas.ti定性数据分析软件对数据进行了分析。这项研究采用了领导者身份建构理论(LICT)。早期的个人发展关系和经验是高级女性领导人的领导身份建设(LIC)的先决条件。这些形成性的关系和经验被认为是“领导者的种子”,为妇女未来LIC的发展做出了贡献。虽然这项研究可能不能推广到马来西亚其他女性领导人的介绍,但其新颖之处在于独特的见解。

关键词:领导力,身份建构,女性,发展,人际关系,经验,诠释现象学。