



Pacific and Asian  
Communication Association



UNIVERSITAS PADJADJARAN  
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INDONESIA

10th Biennial Convention of the  
Pacific and Asian Communication Association (PACA) 2014

**Beyond Asia: Communicating Asian Culture to the World**

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**“BEYOND ASIA:  
COMMUNICATING  
ASIAN CULTURE  
TO THE WORLD”**

**PROCEEDING**

10TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION  
OF THE PACIFIC AND ASIAN  
COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION  
(PACA) 2014

Universitas Padjadjaran  
June 24-26, 2014

PUBLISHED BY  
LP3 (Lembaga Penelitian, Pengabdian, dan Penerbitan)  
Fakultas Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas Padjadjaran

## ***PROCEEDING***

10<sup>TH</sup> BIENNIAL CONVENTION OF THE PACIFIC AND ASIAN COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION  
(PACA) 2014

“BEYOND ASIA: COMMUNICATING ASIAN CULTURE TO THE WORLD”

**Universitas Padjadjaran**

**June 24-26, 2014**

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Faculty of Communication Science, Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia

Pacific and Asian Communication Association (PACA)

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Indiana University, USA
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**ISBN: 978-602-7060-35-7**

## ***Speakers of Plenary Session***

### **Carolyn Calloway-Thomas**

(USA, President of World Communication Association, Professor, Indiana University)

*calloway@indiana.edu*

### **Mellisa Beall**

(USA, Professor, University of Northern IOWA)

*melissa.beall@uni.edu*

### **Seon-Gi Baek**

(Korea, President of PACA, Sungkyunkwan University)

*baek99@skku.edu*

### **Anter Venus**

(Indonesia, Universitas Padjadjaran)

*antar.venus@facebook.com*

### **Susanne Dida**

(Indonesia, Universitas Padjadjaran)

*susannedida@gmail.com*

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# REVIEWING THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN LEADING FEMALE SUBORDINATES WITHIN SMALL BUSINESS

Rini Sudarmanti

(Paramadina University, rini.sudarmanti@paramadina.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

*The performance of women entrepreneurs in small business demonstrates important role in economic development of Indonesia. The rising number of women entrepreneur will bring better bargaining position for women to achieve equality in the society. They also can lead other women to enhance their capacity to participate within society.*

*In fact, many studies noted that the image of being an entrepreneur is still male-oriented. Within this context, women entrepreneurs will continue facing hindrances in building their businesses. It will become more challenging for female entrepreneurs while they lead female subordinates. Expanding focus beyond economic perspectives is needed in order to understand the nature of them. Studying the communication skill they use to lead or manage business would give new insights. However, it should consider the understanding of cultural background of the society.*

*This paper aims to discuss whether cultural competency still considered in the mind of women entrepreneurs while leading their business. Data were obtained from interview and observation. Further research is needed to have comprehensive description of women entrepreneurs' communication competency, cultural, and their role in leading female subordinates.*

*Key words; women, small business, female subordinate*

*Rini Sudarmanti is lecturer in Communication Sciences Dept. of Paramadina University, Jakarta, Indonesia. She granted URGE and BPPS scholarship from Indonesian government to complete master degree and doctoral program at the University of Padjadjaran, Bandung, also Lotus Project Erasmus Mundus Action 2 for 6 month post doctoral program at Gent University in Belgium. She is actively researching, writing articles and speaking at several events, especially regarding to communication and cultures, women's issues, and public relations. She can be reached at or rini.sudarmanti@paramadina.ac.id*



The performance of women entrepreneurs in small business shows important role in economic development of Indonesia. The Indonesian Business Women's Association (IWAPI, 2012) noted that Indonesian women own approximately 40,000 small–medium enterprises which about 85% of them are in small businesses. That report indicates that Indonesian women starting to enhance their capacity for society.

Reading from the result of population census, the proportion of women in Indonesia is about 49,7%. This number is almost as much as male population. However women's welfare is not as good as men. Their opportunity to participate in the workforce ranks is only about one-fifth of men. Women are potentially unemployed, which is 1, 14 times than men. It indicates that women's participation in the workforce access is still lower than men. However, the rising number of women entrepreneurs shows better bargaining position for women to achieve equality in the society.

Unfortunately, being an entrepreneur involves playing a gender role. Some studies noted that being an entrepreneur is male-oriented (Moult and Anderson, 2005; Ahl, 2006; Mirchandani, 1999). Male point of view will be more considered than female ones in solving problem of business progress. Most of people believe that male entrepreneurs have more abilities in rising and making successful business than female does. Thus, organization or management policies, rules or orientation will be more suitable and environment friendly for men, but it may not the same for women. It could be more complicated for women.

Women as entrepreneurs will be challenged to resolve problems and difficulties while running business. They will have to serve problems which are usually resolved by men perspective which could not suitable for women. Thus, women have to find another alternative way to resolve it other than commonly done by men.

From different starting point, there were some studies that portray women entrepreneurs having various views and it is impacted on the style of their managing business. For example researched by Leitch and Hill (2006) who were noted that women represent different experiences when managing their businesses. Also Hunter and Boyd (2004) who concluded that having different experiences gave varied choices in managing their businesses.

Bardasi, Sabarwal, and Terrell (2011) found that female entrepreneurs were having different choices pursuing financial loans in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Cliff (1998) also found that female entrepreneurs were expanding their businesses



reluctantly in North America. They put time and energy in priority for balancing their personal life, and domestic responsibilities.

Some researchers also mentioned problems which mostly appear for women entrepreneurs. There were lack of access to credit, management experience, limited social networks, and also in general, women are still trying to align his responsibility to take care of the household. (Teoh and Chong, 2008, Fairlie and Robb, 2009; Coleman, 2007; Watson and Robinson, 2003; Bird, Sapp, and Lee, 2001; Cliff, 1998). It linked with Indonesian population census findings that women are more comfortable working within 10-14 hours a week. That is one of reasons why women are choosing to be an entrepreneur. It will be accommodate them balancing between family responsibilities and business.

Research on women entrepreneur which expanding its focus not just economic perspectives such as communication studies will give new insights. Some studies noted that that communication plays an important key in building relationships or networks for business women or women entrepreneurs (Werhane, Posig, Gundry, Ofstein, and Powell's, 2007; Buttner, 2001). It is quite reasonable considering McCreskey who is stated that, "the ability to communicate effectively is essential for success in many walks of life" (as cited in Hargie, 2006, p. 2). Communication process could not be separate from culture. The ability to communicate mostly depends on how deep their understanding on cultural context. Thus, how do the women entrepreneurs of the cultural understanding imply on their communication activities, especially while leading their female subordinates?

This article is a result of preliminary research which was trying to represent the description about leadership communication of women entrepreneurs. The discussion is focusing on whether cultural competency still considered in the mind of women entrepreneurs, especially when they are leading their progressing business. It is emphasizing on women issue as a leader for other women. In fact, this issue is important because women entrepreneurs are assumed as an agent of change for other women. Woman leader is a role model for other women. For this discussion, data were obtained from interview and limited observation of some women entrepreneurs, who have running small business enterprises more than two years in the field of restaurant and clothes. They are located in Bandung and Jakarta, Indonesia.

## Women as a Leader of Small Business

The motivation that drives women to create small businesses are escaping their self from daily office routines, accommodating their creativity, and pursuing their own passion (Reaves, 2008). For Indonesia women, there is another reasons mention. They become an entrepreneur as an alternative way to get away from family economic problem. For them who do not work as career women, being an entrepreneur makes them feel empowered by having their own money (Sudarmanti, 2008). Overall, it seems that not every woman determined handling business for economic reason at the beginning. They are never imaging before that they are going to be a leader of an organization business system.

Meanwhile, leadership and management are different concept. Management is concerning about the implementation of organization system; while leadership is correspond with the performance of human creativities outcome. Daft (2000, 353) noted that leadership is “a force that creates a capacity among a group of people to do something that is different or better.” However, both of them are linked one another.

Being a leader, a woman entrepreneur does not only maintaining her management business, but also her subordinate’s human resources. When her business growing in progress or becomes bigger so that it needs more resources, she will be forced to enter public sphere and does not have any other way unless have to be ready trying to be a good leader. She becomes an agent of change. She has to maintain business as well as a role model for others, especially for female subordinates.

Most people argue that being a leader is always in the male’s context. It will be male orientation. Leader stereotype were never considered ideal for women. It is often associated with physical capabilities of women who are considered weaker than men. Women are also labelled more emotional and irrational. Besides, women are also labelled as less motivation, less assertive, less powerful, more talkative but reluctant to work, and also less intelligent.

These kinds of stereotypes are rooted from gender construction. Women usually associated with feminine nature as warm, expressive, accommodating and pleasant. That is why women are not considered to lead because it shows indecision, ‘too soft’, weak and powerless. However, if women lead ‘too hard’, they will be considered as rigid and assumed as not being a real woman. Whatever it is, women position as a leader are demanded to make any wise decision and determine varied norms, rules and policies to control business.

In this kind of situation, a woman leader will manage the climate of their organization communication in order to make their business running smoothly. The assumption of symbolic interaction perspective is supporting the understanding on how a woman uses the symbol to construct meaningful messages as social action. It can be inferred that every human can be freely chose any symbols which they think suitable should be used. They can not only actively, reflectively, but also creatively determine verbal or non verbal symbols.

Social-cultural tradition also gives contribution to explain that a human organization has a certain way to maintain the continuity of its existence. It is based on interaction and interpretation which affecting one another of every organization members. From here it can be concluded that a leader should be mastered in communication; listening, facilitate and support communication within organization. The communication skill is needed for business progression.

The communication process involves how we interpret our social world and then shaping or construct it through communication practices which is done in order to produce something or accordance with our expectations.

### **Culture in the Mind of Women entrepreneurs**

Interaction between people who come from different cultures usually will easily confront one another. Each culture has their own pattern rule of life and communication style. The differences arise would be potential barrier for intercultural understanding such as in the form of prejudice and ethnocentrism.

People see culture as such kind of energy that forcing their lives orderliness. Culture will define each person and bind them into commonness. Thus, cultural norms and its value can shape a communication competence which is directing people on how to interact each other.

Some researcher noted that female leaders tend to play communication style in a certain role while leading and reflecting an ethic of care (Fine and Simmons, 2009; Reaves, 2008; Sudarmanti, 2008). Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody (2000) also noted that women tend to respect their friendship when maintaining business networks. A close-friend social network gives positive effects on both self-efficacy and risk-taking in entrepreneurial activity (Wang, 2010).

Tannen said that, “women uses the language of relationship, whereas men use the language of status and hierarchy” (as cited in Pearson and Cooks, 1995, p. 317). Different communication styles between men and women will construct different communication acts. For women, the used of communication is an open gate to success. However, Tannen said that, “women use the language of relationship, whereas men use the language of status and hierarchy” (as cited in Pearson and Cooks, 1995, p. 317). Different styles between men and women shaped different communication act. For women, the used of communication is an open gate to success. However, Edley (2000) found that women could use hierarchy in their culture for handling their management which showed elements of power and resistance. It can be inferred here that women could develop supportive and flexible organization climate environments simultaneously with pressure or oppression with their subordinate for achievement.

When women lead, they must be forced to meet potential cultural conflict issue. Nevertheless, from data interview, we knew that women have their own uniqueness way to get out from this kind of situation.

Respondent;

*Kru semua untungnya dari suku sunda, yang hubungannya saudara. Budaya sekitar punya etos kerja payah banget. Jadi warga sekitar yang maksa-maksa ngelamar ga ada yang diwaro*

My crew comes from Sundanese ethnic. I do not recruit resources from my neighbourhood because their work ethic was not good. I do not care with their applications, even though they are really trying hard to persuade me.

From this information, we can understand that woman as a leader does not hiring people without any eligibility. It seems that moral ethic and brotherhood more important than people’s skill expertise. She determines her employment criteria from working ethic. Besides, she is also really considering cultural background. It is assumed that being among the same ethnic looks more comfortable for her.

There was also another interesting finding. Woman entrepreneur as a leader did not automatically will recruit other women as her worker or subordinates.

Respondent;

*Saya pernah punya pegawai perempuan, pegang kasir, tapi kecentilan! Sangat memperhatikan penampilan, jadi rasanya kegedean gaji. Untungnya pegawai yang lain laki-laki jadi manjain dia. Datang pas jam buka padahal kudunya prepare minimal sejam sebelumnya. Kebeneran. Dia cepet dapat jodoh, nikah, langsung hamil dan resign, bukan kita yang PHK*

I did have a female subordinate. Her responsibility is holding the cash register. But she was so coquettish! She was really concerned with her appearance. It felt that I paid her for too much salary. Fortunately, another crew are men. They took care of her voluntarily. She always came late, just in the same time of opening hours. By the time she used to be prepared at least an hour earlier. It was a coincidence. She got married quickly, and when she was pregnant, then she resigned. So I did not fire her.

From here we knew that a woman leader reluctant to employ other women who put their physical beauty in the top of their mind. Skilful women still are most preferred. However, she did not want any friction happened. She did not rebuke or fire her. She was letting it go by nature.

There are still other findings which are interesting to discuss. A woman leader who determines scope of work of her subordinates as mention below.

Respondent;

*biasanya aku sesuaikan antara scope kerjaan dengan background etnis mereka. Misalkan yang dari Sumatera Utara, aku taruh di pekerjaan yang banyak bertemu dengan 3rd party yang banyak nego/adu argument/ debat verbal Untuk yang temen-temen dari Jawa cenderung kalem dan teliti, aku taruh di scope pekerjaan yang lebih banyak di paper work. Selain rapi juga telaten pada umumnya*

I usually adjust the scope of work with their ethnic background. For instance, from North Sumatra background, I put them in the scope of work which will be met a lot of work with third party, such as negotiation, debating arguments verbally. For my friends who came from Java ethnic, they usually tend to calm and meticulous. I put them in the scope of work that will be much more in the paper work. Besides of their neatness, they also painstaking in general.

People from North Sumatera usually extrovert, and like to speak up with a loud voice. Respondent was thinking smartly by putting her female subordinates in the work position whereas people with high self confidence are needed. The cultural characteristic is fit with the requirements. She put Java's people for back office work oppositely. Those positions do not need negotiation skill, which is need more communication competences, but only clerical administration.

From these arguments, we can make a note that woman as a leader has a strategy based on cultural background. Her knowledge about characteristic or stereotype of a cultural background is used to consider the main demand of expected job performance. This can be an indication that cultural consideration is still in the in the mind of a woman's leader.

Other thing that we should underline is the use term of "friend" while talking about female subordinates. It was an indication that a woman leader does not want to show verbal or non verbal symbols which could define meaning of "distance" or hierarchy. She wants to perceive as a person who treat other people equally. She calls her subordinates with "their name". This decision is remaining closest relationship and assuming "no distance between us." However, from observation, some respondents were still showing "soft power" in other non verbal forms such as space distance. It also can be seen from their behaviour which was folding their arms across their chest whilst nodding head while having conversation. It means that they are willing to listen but it tends to say "I am not the same and I am better than you". I assumed that there should be another research to reveal findings whether they are really equal or not.

Another respondent also mentioned almost the same experiences as below;

*aku cenderung cari yang se suku. Karena ada factor trust dan lebih nyaman kalau misalkan kerja dengan yang berbudaya sama. Jadi walaupun mau "marah-marah" atau mau*

*“ngasih tau” nggak akan ada nada salah paham, karena sama-sama tahu budaya dan gaya bahasanya gimana.*

I tend to recruit from the same ethnics. Because there is a trust factor and I feel more convenient if we are in the same culture. So if I have to yell or telling something, it would not be misunderstanding, because we both know the culture and also the language style.

From here, it can be inferred that commonality is important for a woman's leader. She reduces potential conflict which might be easily arises while different cultures interact in the same situation. She will tries building relationship or network based on the same norm, values or pattern of lives. She can find it from the same culture background.

Some other respondents admit that they have to learn local practice if they come from different culture background. They acknowledge it by inserting some local words which are daily used by their subordinates. This recognition can establish the closeness relationship.

I assume that this strategy could be done only in the prone-conflict situation. For example if they are angry or have to direct something, this kind of strategy will clearly demonstrate power. I assume that they really understand the type of their female subordinates which are usually emotional. Talking with a load voice or extremely or delicate words will cause offenses.

From here it can be concluded that for a woman - who is playing a role as being a leader – Leading is the same as making other people feel comfortable, secure and happy. She likes peace climate organization. She will do so many alternatives way to push as hard as she can do to avoid conflict. For instance, she likes to use the same language as the open gate for building rapport with her female subordinates. She will try hard to adapt with local culture but still she does not leave their own culture.

Women will always look for similarities rather than differences. A woman prefers peacefulness, safety and serenity. They cope prone-conflict situation by selecting the closest people around them based on similarities. Women will prefer to restraint rather than acting aggressively which promotes conflict. However, being differ is something that we could not avoid. In fact, the most important is how to deal with those differences. Open minded is needed to grasp ideas and find alternative ways to cope it.



## CONCLUSION

Female leaders are using uniqueness approach which might be different with male leaders. Male leaders often more incline to be a task leader oriented to achieve result. Female leaders often more incline to be a sisterhood leader oriented. She will become a social leader who will not evoke frictions or conflicts by acting as a sister for her female subordinates. Female leaders seems to be far from competition and individualistic. They tend to be more concerned with relationship building, equal, and caring. In doing so, cultural consideration aspects are still mainly in the mind most of women leaders. They communicate with the same language and style, in the same values and norms corridor. These considerations can reduce frictions which are potentially happened while different cultural background having interaction in the business context which is in growth progress.

Finally, it should be noted that to be an effective leader is not because of gender or sex. It is also not because of masculinity or femininity. It is more forcing on people capacity to lead others. People will prefer on inspired leaders who can empower them to perform. However, this discussion review suggests researchers to take any approaches on the topic of women entrepreneurs through broader lens of communication point of views. Further research is needed to have comprehensive description of women entrepreneurs' communication competency, cultural and the role of their leading female subordinates.

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