

# When follower believe in co-production leadership: why do personal characteristics matters?

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The present study aims to analyze personal characteristics that potentially affect the belief in co-production leadership and its effect on behavior based on the belief. This study also attempted to determine the impact of the leadership romance role on the relationship between coproduction leadership and the intention to obey the leader.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The research used a survey method with a quantitative approach. Out of 250 distributed questionnaires, only 149 questionnaires met the criteria. Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the proposed hypotheses.

**Findings** – The result of the study showed that the values of collectivism positively associated with the co-production leadership belief. However, the study also found that the values of individualism had no significant effect on the co-production leadership belief. Surprisingly, the result also showed that the co-production leadership belief positively affected the leader's intention to obey.

**Research limitations/implications** – This study addressed political parties as the object of the study, so thoroughness in generalizing the result of the study to other objects is needed. The study's design is cross-sectional, which limits the researcher's in-depth analysis of workplace violence phenomena since the data being studied is only based on one period of time. Lastly, the data for analysis were limited to the respondents' responses to statements in the questionnaire. More information could be obtained by conducting an in-depth interview with the respondents.

**Practical implications** – The result of this study indicated that the romance of leadership moderates the relationship between the co-production leadership and the intention to obey the leader. This study opens new avenues for research on organizational cynicism and carries implications for theory and practice.

**Originality/value** – This study attempts to answer the question about whether each individual with different characteristics (high values on individualism-collectivism) possess a different belief related to followership role orientation (i.e. co-production leadership). The study also examines whether this belief determines followers' behavior on leadership process.

**Keywords:** Co-Production leadership, individualism, collectivism, proactive personality, constructive resistance

## Introduction

Various challenges of globalization, the increasing competition, and rapid growth in sociocultural and technological domains result in more organizational complexity. This makes the work context,

leadership, and followership stand in a more complex business environment, full of uncertainty and dynamics in many realities based on values, priorities, and requirements (Küpers, 2007). In the context of leadership and followership, most leadership studies are leader-focused, while studies on followership tend to be neglected or are separated from leadership studies (Carsten et al. 2010; Malakyan, 2014; Uhl-bien et al. 2014). Traditional views think that organizational success lies on the head of its employees, and a bad leader contributes to the decrease in organizational performance. Likewise, a fish rots from its head down (Bufalino, 2018). Whereas, to answer these challenges, being leader-focused is not enough. In tight business competition, the role of a follower becomes more crucial (Carsten et al. 2014). Besides, no leadership exists without followership; leaders need followers to implement their strategies (Bufalino, 2018).

Moreover, Bufalino (2018) asserts that leadership and followership synergize reciprocally to form unity. It supports and completes each other. Therefore, where a competent and skilled follower will lead to good leadership. In other words, leadership and followership are like two sides of the same coin.

Many previous studies examine the follower's attitude and behavior as an outcome of leader's behavior. However, the number of studies examining how followers view their role when attached to their leader is still limited. Therefore, this concept needs to be developed (Uhl-bien et al., 2014). In traditional views, a follower is considered a deferent party and blindly obeys their leader's command (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2012). They just accept what their leader order to do without considering whether or not the order is good for organizational goals. However, a quicker and more competitive business environment makes the follower's role more critical since the leaders rely on their followers to offer new ideas, insight, and strategies to challenge the status quo. Even, according to (Kelley, 2008), followers contribute to 80% of organizational success, while leaders contribute only 20%. Therefore, in modern views, followers are not only seen as leaders' subordinate but also as an active contributor in the leadership process (Uhl-bien et al., 2014).

The present study attempts to examine how followers believe the orientation of a certain role in leadership affects their behavior when they are attached to the leader in the leadership process. As we know, every individual relies on their belief to behave. This proposition is stated in Reasoned Action Theory (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), a belief is a foundation of attitude which then affects behavioral intentions. Conner & Armitage (1998) assert that belief is a stronger predictor of behavior than attitude is. Accordingly, to change someone's behavior, it is better to change the belief he/she relies on.

Co-production leadership is one of the beliefs regarding the orientation in which a follower's role is capable of providing a better contribution for the organization. Unlike traditional views, in co-production leadership, the followers believe that their role in the leadership process is as a leader's partner in the attempt to create positive leadership outcomes (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2012). When followers hold co-production leadership beliefs, their role should be active followers who engage in proactive behavior such as take initiative, give advice, and voice critical opinions to their leader when necessary (Carsten et al., 2010). Many previous studies (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Shamir, 2007; Uhl-Bien et al. 2014) suggest that further examination to better understand followers' beliefs regarding their roles in co-production leadership and its effect on their beliefs in the organization. According to Carsten et al. (2010), the followers choose a role in working with their leadership based on personal characteristics and their beliefs regarding leadership, followership, and organizational structure. Therefore, the present study aims to analyze followers' unique factors that potentially affect the belief in co-production leadership and its effect on behavior based on the belief. Individual's personal characteristic difference is supposed to affect their perception of the follower's role in the leadership process. In other words, an individual who holds high values of individualism-collectivism may have a different perception regarding belief in co-production leadership. Accordingly, the present study attempts to answer the question of whether each individual with different characteristics (high values on individualism-collectivism) possess a different belief related to followership role orientation (i.e. co-production leadership). The study also seeks to examines whether this kind of belief determines followers' behavior on leadership process.

The present study gives an essential contribution to the followership literature. First, this study provides insight into how personal characteristics and followers' behavior are associated with belief in co-production leadership. It has been described above, the present study is a response to the suggestion from previous researchers (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Shamir, 2007; Uhl-Bien et al. 2014) to understand further about co-production leadership. This study provides insight into what kinds of individual characteristics affect co-production leadership beliefs

Second, we employ co-production leadership and romance of leadership that we predict to have a role in determining followers' decision to obey or disobey their leaders since the research about such relationships was relatively scarce (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Perreault, 1997). Lastly, the present study employed political parties as the subject, which is very different from the previous study (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2012; Carsten et al., 2017; Torres, 2014). The present study is conducted on several prominent political parties in Indonesia. These parties were selected considering that they have a figure leader whose leadership character and style become a distinctive attractiveness. That attractiveness makes these parties grow with considerable and solid cadres. Hopefully, this study may add a reference, especially regarding the concept of co-production leadership that has not been examined in the political parties, that is undoubtedly different from the nature of general business organizations

## Literature Review and Hypotheses

### Individualism-Collectivism and Co-Production Leadership

Individual self-concept is a personal characteristic that differentiates one from the other (Howell & Mendez, 2008). Lord et al. (1999) note that the follower's self-concept is the source of variance in the follower's behavior. Carsten et al. (2010) note that cultural norms that ultimately form a self-concept influence the followership style. Moreover, Blair & Bligh (2018) argue that cultures could be different in the level of followers' cognitive schemas (implicit followership theories-IFTs). Individualism-Collectivism is the self-concept influenced by cultural expectations or beliefs. Hofstede (1980) proposes the term individualism and collectivism, originally suggested as a way to differentiate cultures. A group with a strong connection that chooses to live together and become part of the group is known as "Collectivists." Therefore, the goal of the group is over the individual goals. It also underlines the importance of the group over and beyond personal importance. In contrast to individualistic individuals, the person has no interest in becoming a member of a party. They also typically see individual objectives beyond the goal of the group and individual rights beyond the interest and responsibility of the group.

The idea of individualism-collectivism has been embraced to individuals and is conceptualized as a dispositional characteristic (Celeste et al. 2011). In Taras, Kirkman, & Steel (2010) individualism-collectivism is viewed as "value", while Triandis (2001) considers it as a personality. Individual possessing the values of individualism is indicated by being independent, autonomous, and self-determinism, as well as focused on self-fulfillment. In the leadership process, individuals possessing high values of individualism are supposed to be active followers and think critically (Thomas, 2014; Torres, 2014). Individualist followers tend to be braver in criticizing their leaders when the policy is inappropriate (Chaleff, 2009).

Moreover, Urbach et al. (2020) conceptualized that the higher level of individualism in a society, the more proactive followers' will be in the leadership process. In other words, followers who possess high values of individualism tend to be active contributors who work together with leaders to attain successful organizational outcomes (higher belief in co-production leadership). On the other side, individuals possessing high values of collectivism are supposed to be more passive and think less critically, which is the opposite of belief in co-production leadership (Thomas, 2014; Torres, 2014). It occurs because, by holding the values of collectivism, the possibility of they taking a significant role in the process of leadership inclines to be small (Markus et al., 1991). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that:

H1: Individualism values positively affect belief in co-production leadership.

H2: Collectivism values negatively affect belief in co-production leadership.

### **Co-Production Leadership and Follower Behavior**

Studies on followership begin to examine the belief held by individuals related to the follower's role in the leadership process, one of which is co-production leadership. Co-production leadership refers to the belief that followers shall actively be involved and partner with leaders to improve the effectiveness of the work unit (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2012). This belief starts to grow when the followers interact with leaders and might influence how follower interact with leaders (Carsten et al., 2017). This belief becomes the basis of followers behavior in the process of leadership. This is in line with Reasoned Action Theory, which states that belief shapes the foundation of attitude, affecting the intention to behave (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Even Conner & Armitage (1998) states that belief is a stronger predictor of behavior than attitude, so when we want to change someone's behavior, it is better to change their belief first. In line with Reasoned Action Theory, belief in co-production may affect subordinates' behavior in the process of leadership such as obedience.

According to (Carsten et al., 2010), individuals with low belief in co-production leadership tend to be more obedient and have high respect towards the leader since they think that the leader possesses more skill and agent, and knows what action is best for the group importance. Even in a situation where the leader gives an ethically questionable order, the follower with low belief in co-production will just obey it. These followers think that their role is to serve the leader as best as they can and follow their leaders' directions without question (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2012). Otherwise, an individual with a strong belief in co-production will constructively resist the leader's order when they think it is ethically questionable or deviates from the organizational goal. This kind of follower is not reluctant to express their opinion to the leader for the sake of organizational goals without worrying about the status and power difference (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2009). These individuals think that followers play a role as the leader's partner to improve the function of the work unit together to reach the organizational goal (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2012; Carsten et al., 2017).

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that individuals with a low belief in co-production leadership tend to obey their leader's orders and are more passive in nature. They tend not to dare to express their opinion. On the other side, the individual with a high belief in co-production leadership will resist blind obedience and constructively resist, especially when things contradict the organizational importance or are ethically questionable. Based on the explanation above, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H3: Belief in co-production leadership negatively affects intention to obey the leader

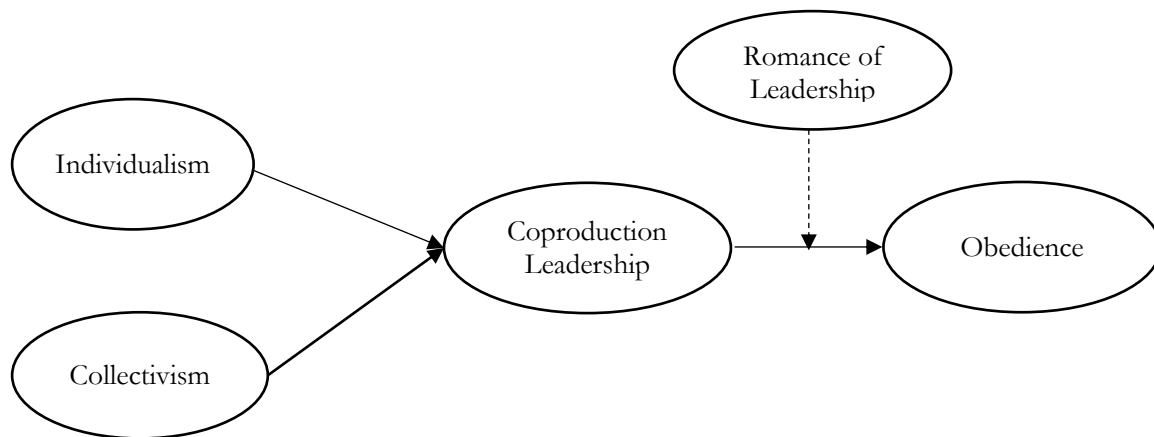
### **Romance of Leadership as Moderator**

Besides the belief in co-production leadership, we predict that followers' belief in romance of leadership will affect their behavior. Romance of leadership is conceptualized as the belief followers hold about leadership's importance in determining an organization's success or failure relative to other contextual factors (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2012; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). Followers with a high belief in the romance of leadership tend to assume overly that the leader has a strong impact on the organizational outcome (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2012). Moreover, followers who romanticize leaders are more likely to attribute the success or failure of organization to leader's competency and effectiveness rather than other factors that could produce an organizational outcome.

In the present study, we examine the influence of interaction between romance of leadership and co-production leadership on followers' intention to obey the leader. We predict that individuals with a lower level of co-production leadership who romanticize leader tends to have a higher level of intention to obey the leaders. This is in line with the notion that followers with high level of romance of leadership are more likely to have high trust to leader's decisions and choices given that they see leader as ultimate importance factors for success or failure of organization (Carsten & Uhl-bien, 2012; Meindl et al., 1985; Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007). In turn, followers with a high level of co-production leadership who do not romanticize leader tends to have lower-level intention to obey the leader. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H4: Belief in the romance of leadership moderates the relationship between co-production of leadership and intention to obey the leader. When the belief in a romance of leadership is high,

the negative influence of co-production leadership on the intention to obey the leader is weaker.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model

## Research Method

### Sample and Procedures

This type of research is a survey study. Survey is the primary data collection method by asking questions to individual respondents (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). Information collected from respondents by using questionnaires. The population of the present study was the whole cadre of several prominent political parties in Indonesia. We distributed questionnaires in an organized political party activity to perform coordination and internal consolidation related to the party's working programs. By choosing cadres that follow that activity as a respondent, the sampling technique used was purposive sampling, can be defined as the selection of samples based on certain considerations (Sekaran, 2000). In this case, researchers considered that cadres who participated in that event were intensively involved in coordinating and consolidating the party's activities, so they knew and understood how higher-level leadership was performed and followed by the level below.

Out of 250 questionnaires that had been administered, there were only 149 questionnaires that fit and were ready for data analysis (the response rate was 59.6 %). The sample was primarily male (74.03 % male, 25.97 % female), with an average age of 46.28 % (SD=9.5). The educational level of respondents as follows: 2.70 % was in senior high school, 58.11 % was Diploma, and 39.19 % was Bachelor. The data analysis technique used to test the hypothesis was Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) by using WarpPLS 7.0 software.

### Measurement

In the present study, co-production leadership was measured by using five items developed by Carsten & Uhl-bien(2009). *Intention to Obey the Leader* was measured by using three items adapted by Carsten & Uhl-bien(2012). Individualism-Collectivism was measured by using sixteen items developed by Triandis & Gelfand (1998) Tepper et al., (2001). Romance of leadership was measured by using the six items Roman of Leadership Scale developed by Meindl (1998). There were 5 (five) points-Likert scale was used to score every item, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

## Results and Discussion

### The Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

Before performing PLS-SEM, the measurement model should be evaluated first, then evaluating the structural model. In evaluating the measurement model, it was done by evaluating the validity and reliability of each construct or latent variable. The validity test consisted of a convergence validity test and discriminant validity. A construct is considered passed convergence validity if its

loading factor value is more than 0.5 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010) and its average variance extracted (AVE) value is greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The analysis showed that all loading factor values for each item of the constructs range from 5.84 to 9.04 (see table 1).

In contrast, the AVE value ranges from 0.512 to 0.679 for each analyzed variable (see table 1). That result indicated that the measurement passed convergence validity. Besides, a construct considered passed discriminant validity if the square root of each construct's AVE has a greater value than the correlations with other latent constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The result showed that all constructs have discriminant validity because the square root of each construct's AVE is a greater value than the correlations with other latent constructs (see table 2). The criteria of reliability of each construct measurement are the value of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability should be above 0.8 but the value above 0.6 is still acceptable (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The result indicated that all construct measurements passed the reliability test since Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability value is greater than 0.60 (see table 1).

**Table 1.** Measurement model evaluation result

Variables	Indicator	Outer loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Co-production leadership	CL_1	0.796	0.678	0.806	0.512
	CL_2	0.741			
	CL_4	0.736			
	CL_5	0.584			
Intention to obey the leader	IO_1	0.728	0.759	0.863	0.679
	IO_2	0.904			
	IO_3	0.830			
Romance of leadership	RL_1	0.663	0.775	0.857	0.601
	RL_4	0.791			
	RL_5	0.864			
Individualism	RL_6	0.771	0.633	0.804	0.582
	ID_2	0.614			
	ID_4	0.837			
Collectivism	ID_5	0.817	0.699	0.817	0.529
	CV_1	0.705			
	CV_4	0.783			
	CV_6	0.619			
	CV_8	0.789			

**Table 2.** Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	CL	IO	RL	ID	CV
Co-Production leadership (CL)	(0.716)				
Intention to obey the leader (IO)	0.133	(0.824)			
Romance of leadership (RL)	0.226	0.128	(0.776)		
Individualism (ID)	0.007	0.247	0.120	(0.763)	
Collectivism (CL)	0.388	0.396	0.301	0.269	(0.727)

Note: Square roots of AVE shown on diagonal

**The Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)**

The structural model was used to test the proposed hypothesis. The result of analysis by using Partial Least Square (PLS) can be seen in Figure 2. The test result using partial least square (PLS) in figure 2 showed that individualism had no significant effect on co-production leadership (CL;  $\beta=-0.105$ ;  $p=0.096 > 0.05$ ). Accordingly, H1 states that individualism values positively affect belief in co-production leadership, is rejected. Surprisingly, collectivism values (CV) positively and significantly affected co-production leadership (CL) ( $\beta=0.416$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). Accordingly, H2, which states that collectivism values negatively affect belief in co-production leadership, is rejected. The

result of the study related to the relationship between co-production leadership and intention to obey the leader also showed different results with the proposed hypothesis. The result indicated that co-production leadership positively and significantly affected the intention to obey the leader (IO;  $\beta=0.152$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). Therefore, H3, which states that belief in co-production leadership negatively affects intention to obey the leader is rejected. Finally, the result showed that the romance of leadership significantly moderated the relationship between co-production and intention to obey the leader ( $\beta=0.139$ ;  $p=0.041$ ). Accordingly, H4, which states that the romance of leadership moderates the relationship between co-production leadership and intention to obey the leader, is accepted. The result of the present study notes that when the followers' belief in romance of leadership are high, the influence of co-production leadership on intention to obey the leader is getting stronger. In turn, when the followers' belief in romance of leadership are low, the influence of co-production leadership on intention to obey the leader is getting weaker.

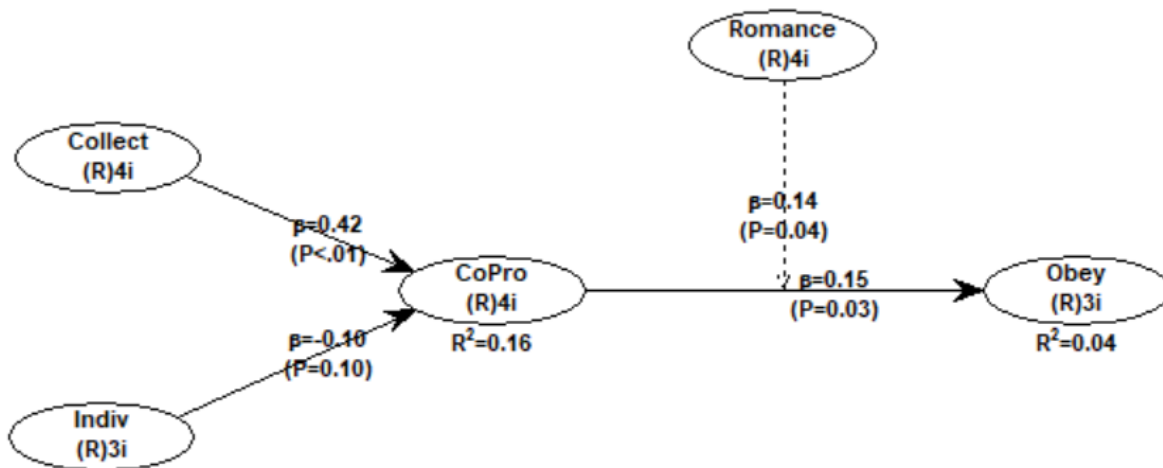


Figure 2. The Test Result

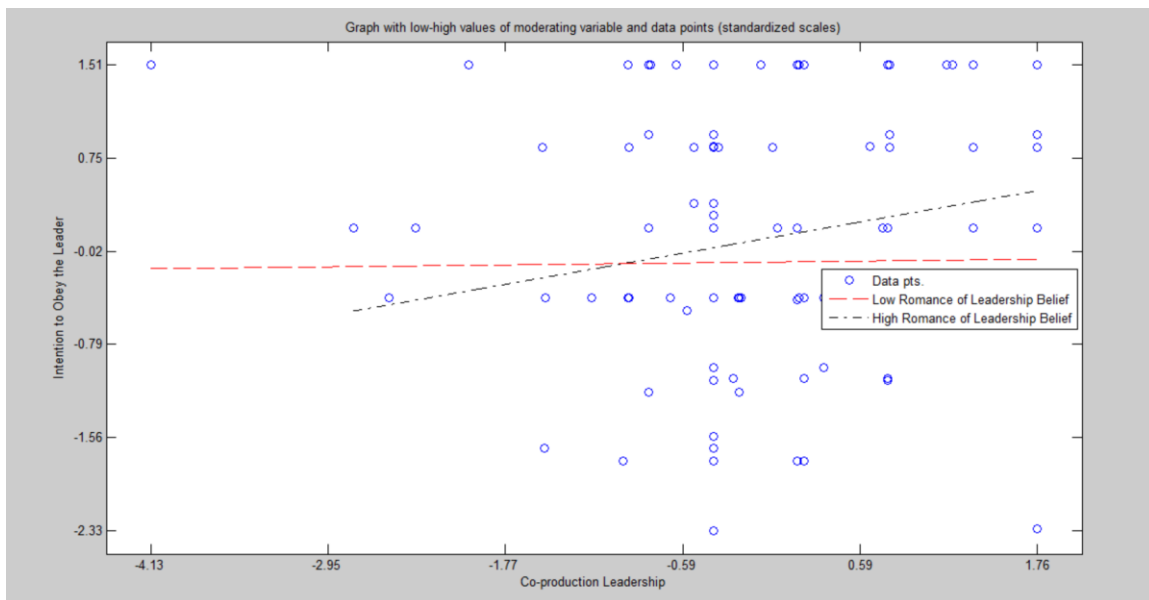


Figure 3. Interaction plot of co-production belief and romance of leadership on intention to obey the leader

**Discussion**

The present study attempts to study the followers' beliefs regarding their roles in the process of leadership, namely, co-production leadership. Individual's characteristics like individualism-collectivism are examined, whether or not they affect the belief in co-production leadership. The

present study examines whether the belief in co-production he/she possesses interacted with the belief in romance of leadership, a follower will tend to obey all orders of his/her leader.

The result of the study showed that the values of individualism have no influence on the belief in co-production leadership. This finding is different from our proposed hypothesis stating that individualism positively affects belief in co-production leadership. However, our finding is in line with Carson et al. (2014) noted that individualism has no relationship with proactive personality of followers.

Regarding collectivism, The result of the study showed that collectivism positively and significantly affects the co-production leadership. However, this result does not support the proposed hypothesis that the values of collectivism negatively affect the belief in co-production leadership. In this context of our study, high collectivism culture enhances co-production Leadership belief. Although we predict that followers with a high value of collectivism tend to be more passive and think less critically, on the other hand our finding does not support this notion. Based on our findings, strong ties and loyalty within a group, and the principle that community interest is above personal interest, lead to the orientation of followers as an active partner of the leader that contributes to the achievement of the organizational objectives. Indeed, in a collectivist culture, a collective purpose is considered more important than the accomplishment of individuals.

Concerning the effect of belief in co-production on subordinates' behavior, the result of the study is in line with the theory of reasoned action, which states that belief is the basis of an attitude and intention to behave (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Concerning followers with belief in co-production, the result of this study does not support the hypothesis stated above. This result also contrasts with the study conducted by Carsten and Uhl Bien (2012). They state that, by having a strong belief in co-production, they suppose not just to obey the leader's order but also to disobey the leader's order that deviates and is unethical. Yet, the study's result shows a positive relationship between belief in co-production and obedience. The different contexts of the study may cause this difference. According to the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991), an individual's belief and attitude interact with the context to affect behavior. In the context of the study, the cadres who were the study's respondents admire their leader, so, although they feel they are partners of their leader, they still voluntarily obey the instruction. However, it does not prevent them from expressing ideas and opinions in the form of constructive resistance to organizational virtue. Surprisingly, the finding shows that the romance of leadership moderates the positive influence of co-production leadership on the intention to obey the leader. When the followers' belief in the romance of leadership is firm, the effect of co-production leadership on the intention to obey the leader is getting stronger. In turn, when the followers' belief in the romance of leadership is low, the influence of co-production leadership on the intention to obey the leader weakens. The finding is relatively new in co-production leadership literature since no previous research examines this kind of relationship.

## Conclusions

The result of the study showed that the values of collectivism positively associated with the co-production leadership belief. However, the study also found that the values of individualism had no significant effect on the co-production leadership belief. Surprisingly, the result also showed that the co-production leadership belief positively affected the leader's intention to obey. The result indicated that the romance of leadership moderates the relationship between the co-production leadership and the intention to obey the leader. When the followers' belief in the romance of leadership are high, the influence of co-production leadership on the intention to obey the leader is getting stronger and vice versa.

## Recommendations

The result of the study responds to the previous studies' call on examining and understanding the concept of co-production leadership, that is rarely studied. Examining the concept of followership in the political parties is a novel thing. The result of this study supports the existing theory stating



that in order to change someone's behavior, change their belief first (Conner & Armitage, 1998). Belief in co-production leadership, in this case, is proven to be one of the predictors of the behavioral intention of followers. This can be a consideration for the leaders or organization to consider the belief of their subordinates when expecting a certain behavior from them.

The present study possesses some research limitations that can be used as an opportunity for improvement in the next researcher. Firstly, this study selected political party as the object of the study, so thoroughness in generalizing the result of the study to other objects is needed. Secondly, the study's cross-sectional design limits the researcher's in-depth analysis of workplace violence phenomena since the data being studied is only based on one period of time. Lastly, the collected data were limited to the respondents' responses to statements in the questionnaire. More information could be obtained by conducting an in-depth interview with the respondents.

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