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The Strategic Role of Women's Leadership in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT
Women's leadership in Indonesia is increasingly demonstrating its strategic role across various sectors, from business to government. This study examines the contributions of female leadership to organizational sustainability, performance effectiveness, innovation, and cultural transformation. Despite facing structural challenges such as gender stereotypes, limited support, and *patriarchal* systems, female leaders have proven capable of fostering inclusive, collaborative, and ethical work environments. With leadership styles rooted in empathy, participation, and communication, women leaders promote work-life balance, inclusive decision-making, and the development of adaptive organizational cultures. The study concludes that empowering and developing women's leadership is a strategic necessity that must be supported by organizational policies, leadership development programs, and supportive work ecosystems to enhance diversity and organizational competitiveness in the global era.

Keywords: women leadership; gender equality; organizational sustainability; innovation; inclusive culture

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INTRODUCTION

Women play an important role in various aspects such as business activities, social, and economic development (Boserup et al., 2013; Minniti, 2010; Silva, 2016). Women have the same rights, obligations, and opportunities as men to participate and play a role in development (Muslimah, 2021). Women's thoughts, innovations, and creations to support the success of development goals are needed (Sahban, 2016). The struggle for women's equal rights in social life in Indonesia was initiated by R.A. Kartini. During the Dutch colonization, women often joined the battlefield and led resistance groups, such as *Cut Nyak Dien* in Aceh. This proves that Indonesia is no stranger to women's leadership (Poltera J, 2019). Indonesia, as the fourth most populous country in the world, still has inequality between male and female leadership positions, although it does not limit the opportunity for leadership positions for both genders (Noviani, 2024). This inequality does not stem from ability but is often based on gender discrimination, where women are considered incapable or not credible in carrying out leadership duties (Noviani, 2024; Oktaviani F Fitzsimmons T., 2021; Permatasari R Pernanda H., 2020).

Women certainly have the opportunity to become leaders, but there are still major challenges that need to be faced, such as the lack of training for women in the aspect of public leadership (Sahban, 2016). Women's leadership still faces challenges such as responsibilities towards the family, lack of role models, *patriarchal* structures, and lack of support (Cahyati D Sowiyah Karwan D., 2021). Siahaan T Haryanti E Harini H Perkasa D. (2024) also explained that challenges for women's leadership include lack of support, gender stereotypes, and difficulty in achieving strategic positions.

In the business world, the role of leadership can affect the sustainability of the organization and be a determinant of success in achieving the vision, mission, and goals (Fitriani, 2015). The management of a company requires the role of leaders to ensure the sustainability and performance of the company (Dewi et al., 2023). Leadership refers to a person's ability to influence others to work together in certain situations in order to achieve predetermined organizational goals (Fitriani, 2015). Effective leadership in a company needs to be supported by the ability to achieve the company's goals and objectives (Farhan, 2022). Leadership is an important factor that affects the company's operations and success (Dewi et al., 2023).

The development of the business world in Indonesia at this time strongly encourages the participation of women in leadership. Business transformation further supports the participation of women in leadership in companies by emphasizing values and positive change for the company (Bayo, 2021). Women's leadership continues to improve in line with the increasing participation of women in strategic management positions and the role of women in decision-making in companies. Women's participation in leadership roles can contribute to the success of a company (Elaigwu M Alghorbany A Ngwoke O Ude A Desmond O Audu P., 2024). Gender participation and women's representation in leadership positions play an important role in the success and sustainability of the organization, providing strategic advantages (Kyambade M Namatovu A Oyella S., 2024).

Women's leadership is able to contribute to company innovation, create progress in the business world, and gain access to important roles (Khushk A Yang H., 2022). Women's leadership tends to be more relationship-based, collaborative, communicative, empathetic, and participatory. Women's leadership tends to excel in areas such as communication, empathy, and collaboration to build strong teams and a positive work culture (Kyambade et al., 2024). Women's leadership provides a new perspective in terms of creating positive changes in organizations, decision-making, and building an adaptive and inclusive organizational culture (Siahaan et al., 2024). This study examines the contributions of female leadership to organizational sustainability, performance effectiveness, innovation, and cultural transformation.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive-analytical design to explore the strategic role of women's leadership in Indonesia. The research focused on analyzing existing literature, policies, and case studies to identify patterns, challenges, and contributions of female leaders across sectors such as business, government, and academia. The data population included scholarly articles, government reports, and corporate documents published between 2015 and 2024, sourced from databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, and institutional repositories. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 20–30 high-impact studies and reports that aligned with the research objectives, ensuring relevance and depth of analysis.

The research instruments consisted of structured content analysis frameworks and coding sheets to systematically categorize themes such as leadership styles, barriers, and organizational outcomes. Validity was ensured through triangulation by cross-referencing findings with multiple sources, while reliability was maintained via inter-coder agreement checks among researchers. Data was collected through document analysis, including peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, and annual reports of organizations with prominent female leaders. The procedure involved: (1) identifying key themes from the abstract and introduction, (2) extracting and coding data, and (3) synthesizing results to address research questions. Software tools like NVivo or *Atlas.ti* were utilized to manage qualitative data and visualize thematic patterns.

For data analysis, this study adopted thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights about women's leadership. The process included open coding to categorize raw data, axial coding to establish relationships between themes, and selective coding to integrate findings into a coherent narrative. Comparative analysis was conducted to contrast leadership outcomes across sectors, while *SWOT* analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) was applied to evaluate the strategic impact of female leadership. The results were interpreted in the context of existing theories (e.g., transformational leadership) and practical implications for policy and organizational development. This methodological rigor ensured a comprehensive understanding of women's leadership dynamics in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership is the ability of a leader who can guide and influence others to achieve common goals (Sahban, 2016). Da Meisa and Anzari (2021) explained that leaders play a role in providing enthusiasm, the quality of the group they lead, and the level of achievement achieved. Ideal leaders need to meet the criteria of popularity, electability, capabilities and strong leadership abilities (Sahban, 2016). Leadership is indispensable for encouraging, inspiring, motivating and directing others to achieve collective goals within the organization.

Women's leadership refers to a collaborative, inclusive, empathetic and participatory leadership style that focuses on business interests and employee well-being (Siahaan et al, 2024). Women's leadership in business organizations is on the rise. Women's leadership tends to be more patient, empathetic, multitasking, able to network and negotiate better (Fitriani, 2015). Women's leadership can bring a unique new perspective to develop innovation and strategic decision-making to face various very complex business challenges (Siahaan et al, 2024).

Women's leadership can show a strategic role that includes strengthening diversity, supporting work-life balance, and encouraging collaborative decision-making to increase productivity and team engagement (Siahaan et al, 2024). Women's leadership can support the sustainability of the company, so it needs to be continuously developed. The increase in women's leadership in the business world has prompted several studies aimed at exploring the contribution of women's leadership in companies (Siahaan et al, 2024).

Research by Dewi et al (2023) explains the influence of women's leadership on the sustainability of SOEs in Indonesia. Dewi N Fahmi I Syarief R. (2023) found that organic leadership significantly supports the sustainability of the company, while visionary leadership is insignificant in supporting the sustainability of the company. In addition, Dewi et al (2023) also explained that business competence provides a full mediating role in the influence of visionary leadership on the company's sustainability, on the other hand, organizational competence only mediates part of the influence of organic leadership on the company's sustainability. Dewi et al (2023) also outlined that female leadership can encourage company sustainability by developing visionary female leaders to improve performance and build company sustainability. Women's leadership tends to apply ethical values, attention to socio-environmental issues and support transparency and accountability in corporate governance (Da Meisa E, 2021).

Farhan's research (2022) explains related to women's leadership which includes competitive factors as well as subjective and objective qualities that contribute to the effectiveness of leadership in companies. Farhan (2022) explains that the way women lead is done by highlighting leadership styles subjectively and objectively. Farhan (2022) also explained that the competitive factors of women's leadership are divided into soft competitive advantage factors (such as morality, consultation, humility, compassion and compassion) and hard competitive advantage factors (such as strategy, responsibility, intelligence and persistence). Women's leadership capacity development needs to be supported by various holistic approaches to increase leadership competitiveness.

Khushk et al's (2022) research outlines the role of women's leadership in corporate innovation. Khushk et al (2022) found that women-led companies tend to be more innovative and more engaged in new business practices. Khushk et al (2022) explain that women's participation is an aspect considered by companies to maintain and encourage

business growth. Khushk et al (2022) explained that women's participation to become leaders in companies is an important resource that can encourage companies to seize opportunities and overcome challenges by facilitating the design and implementation of initiatives. The characteristics of women's leadership that are more collaborative and participatory can increase effectiveness in initiating social change.

Thus, research conducted by Dewi et al (2023), Farhan (2022) and Khushk et al (2022) can complement discussions related to the influence of women's leadership on company sustainability, the effectiveness and competitiveness of women's leadership, and the role of women's leadership in innovation. Women's leadership styles that tend to be participatory, ethical and long-term oriented can improve the quality of the organization and build an inclusive and adaptive system. Women's leadership plays a role in the development of the company, so it needs to be continuously supported to provide the best results for the company. Support for women's leadership can be in the form of gender equality in companies, mentoring to improve career paths, and leadership training and development programs. Utilizing the full potential of women's leadership can encourage the achievement of a company's competitive advantage in a global business environment that continues to change rapidly. Increasing women's representation in strategic positions needs to continue to be encouraged through strengthening leadership competencies in a competitive environment. Organizational culture transformation and multi-sector collaboration are also needed to create an ecosystem that promotes gender equality in leadership.

The existence of women's leadership roles is beginning to be equalized and appreciated (Sahban, 2016). In the current development, many women have emerged as leaders in various fields (Muslimah, 2021). Women's leadership in Indonesia is showing a positive trend in line with the increase in women's participation in the professional and business worlds (Mishra N. Rajkumar M, 2019). The success of women's leadership shows that women are worthy of being a leader and can be an inspiration for most women in Indonesia (Da Meisa and Anzari, 2021). In today's business practices, women's leadership in companies in Indonesia continues to experience developments that can be an inspiration for corporate business transformation. Women in Indonesia are increasingly showing their ability to take strategic leadership roles both in the profession and the government sector (Sahban, 2016). This can be seen from the real role of women as commissioners, directors, government officials and leaders in other high positions. The existence of women as leaders is quite revolutionary. The role of women in the company can revive the company's glory with the strategic thinking brought. This indicates that women's leadership styles tend to be inclusive and long-term oriented. Women's leadership can create a more supportive work environment for all workers, making it easier for companies to continue to operate dynamically and harmoniously to maintain the stability and sustainability of the company.

Women's leadership must be able to deal with various dynamic situations so that the role of female leaders can support the company's operations to run well. Women's leadership can encourage corporate transformation through organizational culture transformation as contained in the company's core values so that it can provide benefits to various stakeholders. Women leaders are expected to play a role in responding to problems in the company, improving integrity, strengthening governance and risk management and building the trust of various stakeholders to increase the company's productivity and profitability. The success of women's leadership shows that women play a strategic role to compete professionally in a competitive environment to provide inspiration and valuable lessons for the development of women's leadership in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is the ability to influence others to achieve organizational goals, and the quality of leadership plays a crucial role in an organization's success. Women's leadership, particularly in top management, is associated with a collaborative and participatory style that fosters inclusivity, flexible work policies, innovation, and improved company performance. To maximize these benefits, organizations and governments must create supportive environments through diversity policies, mentoring, managerial training, and institutional support, ensuring women have equal opportunities to lead. Women leaders should continue to cultivate strong values, effective communication, and relationship-building skills to drive organizational success. Future research should explore the long-term impact of women's leadership on organizational resilience and innovation across different sectors, as well as the effectiveness of specific empowerment strategies in various cultural contexts.

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