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What makes servant leadership effective for female employees? Servant leadership application during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of servant leadership and its profound impact on sustaining employee motivation amidst the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It sets out to meticulously examine and discern the pivotal factors that underpin the remarkable efficacy of servant leadership practices, particularly centered around female employees in an Indonesian setting, with a deliberate emphasis on women leaders. The research aims to understand the effectiveness of servant leadership among female employees in Indonesia, with a specific focus on women in leadership roles. The study includes a comprehensive sample of 310 respondents and utilizes confirmatory factor analysis within the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares framework to determine the key factors influencing servant leadership effectiveness. The findings of the study suggest that one of the most influential factors in driving the effectiveness of servant leadership is helping subordinates grow and succeed. On the other hand, emotional healing has the least influential impact on enhancing servant leadership practices compared to other dimensions. The study's findings provide valuable insights for organizations, especially in navigating the difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding the importance of fostering employees' personal growth and success, as well as acknowledging the limited impact of emotional healing, can inform leadership approaches to sustain workforce motivation during times of uncertainty. These results highlight the significance of cultivating employees' development within a framework of servant leadership, ultimately leading to a more resilient and motivated workforce, with particular relevance for female employees.

Keywords: Confirmatory factor analysis, Covid-19, Female employees, Organization behavior, Servant leadership, Women leaders.

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1. Introduction

The number of female employees is growing every year in Indonesia. Based on Indonesia Statistical Bureaudata, the female employee increased by 36.20% in 2021, whereas in 2020 the female employee was around 34.65% [1]. This labor growth is also an indication of the role of women in the corporate and industrial sectors. The organization sees this phenomenon as an opportunity to encourage women to become leaders. Women began to gain a place in higher leadership positions within the organization.

The Indonesian Statistical Bureau noted that 2.82 million people aged 15 years and older have managerial positions. The data showed that 33.08% of the 2.82 million workers are women with managerial positions; the number increased by 2.71% compared to the previous year, which was 30.37%. This growth shows something promising in the development of women's leadership. The company began to give more confidence to women in leadership positions. One of the state-owned companies in Indonesia engaged in Ultra Micro Finance started to implement this. The potential for women's leadership is considered a breakthrough, where one state-owned subsidiary company focuses on women's career and development from the bottom to managerial positions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies suffered significant setbacks. This requires action that can minimize the impact of the company's performance so that it does not get worse. Leadership plays an important role in managing such situations; good leadership can direct performance to be better. One leadership model that can be applied is servant leadership. Servant leadership focuses on subordinates, whereas the concept of servant leadership prioritizes service over issuing orders [2]. Leaders focus on serving what subordinates need [3]. Several studies have shown that servant leadership has a positive and significant role in improving performance [4-7]. Preliminary observations demonstrate the application of servant leadership within the company. The most important sign that indicates such behavior is the leader's ability to serve better and put the interests of his subordinates first. This situation illustrates that prioritizing service makes subordinates more motivated to follow the leadership [8]. Servant leadership helps subordinates continue to provide the best performance in the company, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, where many employees find it difficult to maintain their performance. This research was conducted to identify organizational factors that facilitate servant leadership development, and utilized a specific sample of female employees and female executives. The research is expected to add additional value to the fields of leadership, notably servant leadership and women leaders.

2. Theoretical Background and Research Aim

The concept of *servant leadership* (SL) first became a topic of discussion among academics after Robert K. Greenleaf put forward his thoughts in one of the seminars entitled The Servant as Leader. The practice of SL is not something found recently; this form of leadership style was carried out long before Greenleaf put forward the concept by the best religious leaders in the world and the world's best leaders [9]. Greenleaf's work has provided significant developments in the theoretical and practical scope of the SL leadership model. His 40 years of experience working at AT&T companies is an important addition to this concept. He was interested in learning further about the issues of authority and power, as well as how individuals in the organization were able to support each other.

Servant leadership is a team leadership model that identifies, assists, and develops others as its primary focus [10]. Good servant leadership is applied through how a team functions, building trust and collective success that forms a mentality of togetherness where team members can align in seeing the goals, processes, and collaborations in groups [3]. Servant leadership is a phenomenon that involves all members of a group in a thorough interaction with the leader and team members, where each member is treated equally by the leader [11]. The positive effect of servant leadership on performance is created through mechanisms of social exchange and learning, where it grows in concern and proactive awareness among organizations and stakeholders [2, 12].

Traditional leadership often focuses on achieving organizational goals using power as a coercive factor [13]. Meanwhile, servant leadership prioritizes developing, maintaining, and resolving problems that occur among its followers. So that through their followers, they positively impact the organization, its external environment, and even the broader society in general. Leadership that is in line with the perceptions expected by followers will encourage leaders to be more effective. It can also increase the legitimacy that a leader needs from his followers. A recent review noted the abundance of literature linking servant leadership to positive outcomes compared to other forms of moral leadership. For example, ethical leadership and authentic leadership, respectively, prioritize adherence to cultural norms and moral freedom rather than stakeholder attention [14]. Existing research has demonstrated that servant leadership has uniqueness and potential that distinguishes it from other types of moral leadership.

Organizations can achieve success by fostering servant leadership behavior [15], and servant-leader terms indicate "gender perspective characteristics" Reynolds [16].Liden, et al. [17] previously proposed gender as one of the moderator variables in leadership research. The concept of gender is frequently discussed in previous research findings; however, the relationship between gender and servant leadership has been given little thought. The theory of gender role congruity demonstrates that women's roles in leadership can only produce a lower output than male leadership [18]; this situation is associated with traditional forms of leadership that are commonly linked with masculinity [19]; therefore, it can be perceived as incongruence and likely to dissonance on the condition that a female leader isin charge [20, 21]. In contrast, a recent study by Lemoine, et al. [14] revealed that servant leadership is the ideal form of leadership for women. This leadership style can mitigate and even reverse the negative effects of masculine leadership stereotypes. The findings also suggest that modern organizations should consider providing servant leadership training to new managers and even employees. While there is no assurance that this method is appropriate for all leadership models under female managers, the approach that has been taken in the past to find a leadership approach that is more suitable for women [20] may

consider servant leadership as a new, more appropriate, and effective approach in leadership development programs for women. Based on the above explanation, this research aims to find the factors that shape servant leadership in female employee managers. This research also aims to strengthen previous research on gender relations with servant leadership.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Sample

The data was obtained through a survey sent using Google Form. The questionnaire was adopted from [10] and adjusted to the research requirement. The research period took place between the years 2021 and 2022. The results of the questionnaire responses were tested if there were any bias or invalid items, and they did not demonstrate unusual results. Questionnaire items are explored with confirmatory factor analysis to observe which factors demonstrate the dominant value of servant leadership.

3.2. Measurement of Variable

The servant leadership variable utilizes Likert scale to attain the data with a response format from number 1, representing strongly disagree, to number 5, representing completely agree. The questionnaire consists of nine dimensions and 28 items to define and measure the servant leadership variable.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Servant Leadership Variable Measurement Test

The following results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)testing on servant leadership variables conducted with the second order method. Figure 1the illustration of confirmatory test of servant leadership variable.

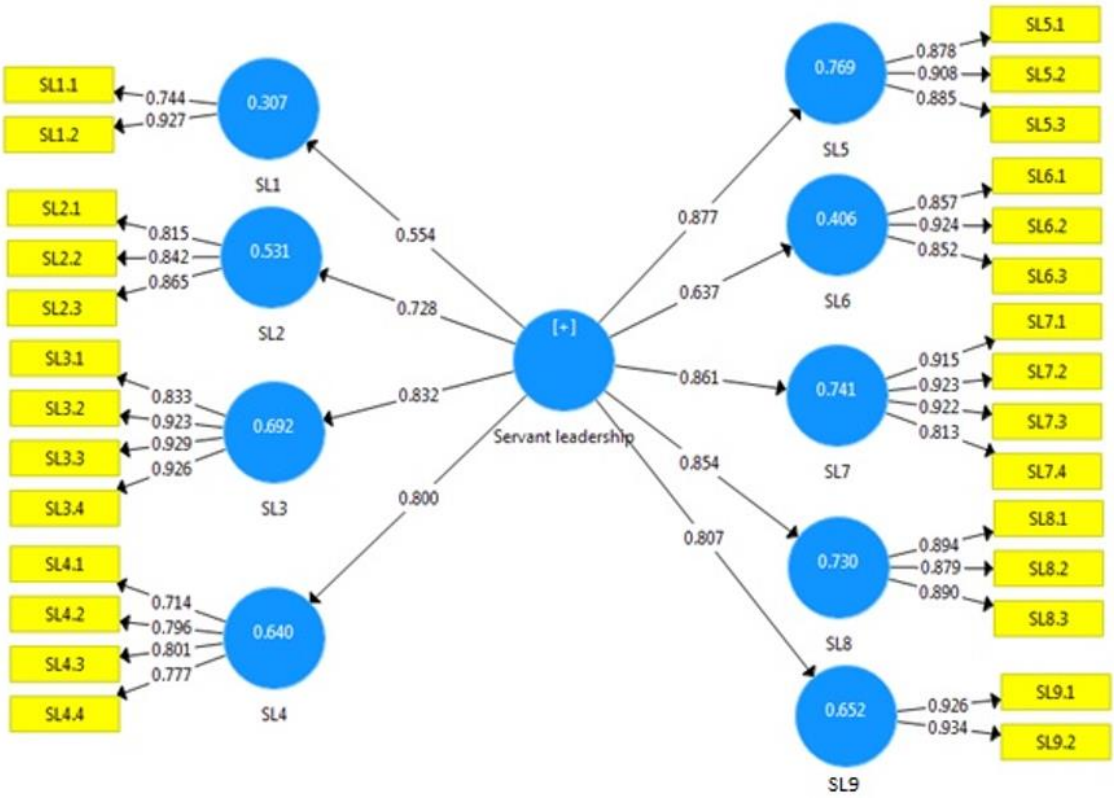

Figure 1.
Confirmatory test of servant leadership variable.

From the CFA test results above, it can be seen that all indicators have a loading factor above 0.5 so, it can be concluded that all valid indicators are a measuring tool for each of the latent variables.

4.2. Convergent Validity Test

The recapitulation of convergent validity test results based on loading factor values and Average Variance Explained (AVE) values for servant leadership variables is as follows:

Table 1.
Convergent validity test of servant leadership.

Construct	Indicator	Loading factor	T values	AVE	Result
First order					
Emotional healing (SL1)	SL1.1	0.744	15,727	0.706	Valid
	SL1.2	0.927	69,092		Valid
Creating value for the community (SL2)	SL2.1	0.815	30,819	0.707	Valid
	SL2.2	0.842	39,156		Valid
	SL2.3	0.865	43,743		Valid
Conceptual skills (SL3)	SL3.1	0.833	33,547	0.816	Valid
	SL3.2	0.923	71,433		Valid
	SL3.3	0.929	75,032		Valid
	SL3.4	0.926	85,636		Valid
Empowering (SL4)	SL4.1	0.714	27,146	0.597	Valid
	SL4.2	0.796	26,927		Valid
	SL4.3	0.801	26,927		Valid
	SL4.4	0.777	23,882		Valid
Helping subordinates grow and succeed (SL5)	SL5.1	0.878	44,476	0.793	Valid
	SL5.2	0.908	61,902		Valid
	SL5.3	0,885	39,302		Valid
Putting subordinates first (SL6)	SL6.1	0.857	39,165	0.771	Valid
	SL6.2	0.924	97,156		Valid
	SL6.3	0.852	30,875		Valid
Behaving ethically (SL7)	SL7.1	0.915	61,401	0.800	Valid
	SL7.2	0.923	77,564		Valid
	SL7.3	0.922	77,049		Valid
	SL7.4	0.813	24,744		Valid
Relationships (SL8)	SL8.1	0.894	59,446	0.788	Valid
	SL8.2	0.879	37,513		Valid
	SL8.3	0.890	51,314		Valid
Servanthood (SL9)	SL9.1	0.926	86,384	0.865	Valid
	SL9.2	0.934	100,716		Valid
Second order					
Servant leadership (X1)	SL1	0.554	14,108	0.607	Valid
	SL2	0.728	20,598		Valid
	SL3	0.832	34,174		Valid
	SL4	0.800	33,027		Valid
	SL5	0.877	56,382		Valid
	SL6	0.637	14,783		Valid
	SL7	0.861	45,721		Valid
	SL8	0.854	45,846		Valid
	SL9	0.807	29,887		Valid

Table 1 presents the results of the measurement model test for servant leadership variables using the second-order method. In the first-order model, all indicators in the Emotional Healing (SL1) dimension have a loading factor greater than 0.50 percent, validating them as measuring instruments. The SL1.2 indicator, with the highest loading factor, is the strongest in reflecting the Emotional Healing (SL1) dimension. The AVE value for this dimension is 0.706, indicating that it can be explain 70.6% of the variance of the indicators, confirming its good convergent validity.

The Creating Value for the Community (SL2) dimension shows that all indicators have a loading factor exceeding 0.50, validating them as measuring instruments. The SL2.3 indicator, with the highest loading factor, is the strongest in reflecting this dimension. The AVE value for this dimension is 0.707, indicating that it can explain 70.7% of the variance of the indicators, confirming its good convergent validity.

In the Conceptual Skills (SL3) dimension, all indicators have a loading factor exceeding 0.50, validating them as measuring instruments. The SL3.3 indicator, with the highest loading factor, is the strongest in reflecting this dimension. The AVE value for this dimension is 0.816, indicating that it can explain 81.6% of the variance of the indicators, confirming its good convergent validity.

In the Empowering dimension (SL4), all indicators have a loading factor exceeding 0.50, validating them as measuring instruments. The SL4.3 indicator, with the highest loading factor, is the strongest in reflecting this dimension. The AVE value for this dimension is 0.597, indicating that it can explain 59.7% of the variance of the indicators, confirming its strong convergent validity.

In the Helping Subordinates Grow and Succeed (SL5) dimension, all indicators have a loading factor exceeding 0.50, validating them as measuring instruments. The SL5.2 indicator, with the highest loading factor, is the strongest in reflecting this dimension. The AVE value for this dimension is 0.793, indicating that 79.3% of the variance of the indicators can be explained by this dimension, thus confirming its good convergent validity.

In the Putting Subordinates First (SL6) dimension, all indicators have a loading factor exceeding 0.50, validating them as measuring instruments. The SL6.2 indicator, with the highest loading factor, is the strongest in reflecting this dimension. The AVE value for this dimension is 0.771, indicating that 77.1% of the variance of the indicators can be explained by this dimension, thus confirming its good convergent validity.

In the Behaving Ethically (SL7) dimension, all indicators have a loading factor exceeding 0.50, validating them as measuring instruments. The SL7.2 indicator, with the highest loading factor, is the strongest in reflecting this dimension. The AVE value for this dimension is 0.800, indicating that 80.0% of the variance of the indicators can be explained by this dimension, thus confirming its good convergent validity.

Similarly, in the Relationships (SL8) dimension, all indicators have a loading factor exceeding 0.50, validating them as measuring instruments. The SL8.1 indicator, with the highest loading factor, is the strongest in reflecting this dimension. The AVE value for this dimension is 0.788, indicating that 78.8% of the variance of the indicators can be explained by this dimension, thus confirming its good convergent validity.

The Servanthood dimension (SL9) exhibits a loading factor greater than 0.50 for all indicators, validating their use as measurement tools. The SL9.2 indicator, with the highest loading factor, is the most potent reflection of the Servanthood dimension. The dimension's AVE value of 0.865, exceeding 0.5, indicates that the Servanthood dimension explains over 86.5% of the indicator variance, affirming its robust convergent validity.

Meanwhile, in the second-order model, all dimensions of the servant leadership variable have a loading factor above 0.50, confirming their validity as measuring instruments. The helping subordinates grow and succeed (SL5) dimension, with the highest loading factor, is the most significant reflection of the servant leadership variable. Conversely, the Emotional Healing (SL1) dimension has the lowest loading factor, making it the weakest reflection of the servant leadership variable. The AVE value for the servant leadership variable is 0.607, which is greater than 0.5. This suggests that the servant leadership variable can explain over 60.7% of the dimension variance, demonstrating its strong convergent validity.

Table 2.
Fornell-Larcker criterion test of servant leadership.

Servant leadership (SL)	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4	SL5	SL6	SL7	SL8	SL9
SL1	0.840								
SL2	0.506	0.841							
SL3	0.403	0.627	0.903						
SL4	0.423	0.609	0.630	0.773					
SL5	0.389	0.569	0.744	0.670	0.890				
SL6	0.396	0.478	0.311	0.595	0.479	0.878			
SL7	0.351	0.464	0.712	0.573	0.772	0.401	0.894		
SL8	0.447	0.464	0.603	0.557	0.718	0.523	0.795	0.888	
SL9	0.441	0.552	0.538	0.573	0.621	0.546	0.666	0.814	0.930

4.3. Discriminant Validity Test

Discriminant validity testing can be performed using the following Fornell-Larcker Criterion criteria.

Based on the Table 2, it can be seen that the AVE root value for the Emotional Healing (SL1) dimension is 0.840 higher than the highest correlation value between the Emotional Healing (SL1) construct and the creating value for the community (SL2) of 0.506. Similarly to other constructs that have a higher AVE root value than the highest correlation between these constructs and other constructs, it can be concluded that each construct has good discriminant validity.

4.4. Reliability Test

Evaluation of the reliability value of constructs is measured by composite reliability, which is said to be reliable if it has a composite reliability greater than 0.70.

Table 3.
Composite reliability test of servant leadership.

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
SL1	0.610	0.826
SL2	0.792	0.879
SL3	0.924	0.947
SL4	0.779	0.855
SL5	0.869	0.920
SL6	0.851	0.910
SL7	0.916	0.941
SL8	0.866	0.918
SL9	0.843	0.927

Based on the results in Table 3, it can be seen that each construct has a composite reliability (CR) value greater than 0.7, as well as an acquisition of Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.6. This shows that each indicator has consistency in measuring its construct.

5. Discussion

The population's characteristics that will be estimated and tested in the CFA are known as model parameters. Arrows pointing from the latent variables to the observed variables are used in CFA models to show relationships between the two variables. Regression coefficients used to forecast indicators from the latent factor are known as factor loadings [22]. In general, loadings below 0.30 are not typically interpreted, and the higher the factor loading, the better. The rule stated that the loading numbers greater than 0.71 are excellent, 0.63 very good, 0.55 good, 0.45 fair, and 0.32 poor [23].

The first order in the emotional healing dimension demonstrates that there is one loading factor value in the proposed questionnaire item, namely "Leaders can feel when subordinates are experiencing problems." This shows that the strong loading factor value of 0.927 is in the excellent category. Several studies imply that effective leadership, particularly when it comes to controlling emotions at work and forging strong bonds with subordinates, depends on a leader's capacity to comprehend and feel their staff members' problems [24-26].

The dimension of creating value for the community has a dominant loading factor, namely, “The leader encourages their subordinates to work voluntarily within the community around them.” The value of the loading factor is 0.865 which is in the excellent category. According to several studies, a leader's encouragement of community involvement among his or her subordinates can benefit both the department and the organization at large. Leaders can improve performance and results for the organization by encouraging a sense of purpose and meaning in their subordinates, which will make them feel more engaged and committed to their work [27-29].

The dimension of conceptual skills has a dominant loading factor, namely “The leaders have a good understanding of the organization's goals”. The value of loading factor is 0.929, which is in excellent category. According to some studies, a leader’s understanding of corporate objectives has a significant impact on corporate performance. Leaders can assist in aligning personal and organizational goals, which improves performance and results for the organization, by establishing clear and meaningful goals and effectively communicating them to their subordinates [30].

The dimensions of empowerment have a dominant loading factor, namely, “Leaders give subordinates the freedom to handle their work in the best way according to the subordinates.” The value of loading factor is 0.801, which is in the excellent category. According to some studies, a leader's support for employee autonomy may improve employee engagement, mental empowerment, and creativity, improving organizational performance and results. Leaders may encourage a sense of ownership and motivation among their staff by allowing subordinates to manage their work however best suits their skills and preferences [31].

The dimension of helping subordinates grow and succeed has a dominant loading factor, namely, “The leaders ensure that subordinates always achieve their work targets.” The value of the loading factor is 0.908, which is in the excellent category. Some studies claim that a leader's encouragement of goal achievement may improve organizational performance, job satisfaction, and results. Leaders can assist in harmonizing individual and organizational goals, resulting in better performance and outcomes for the organization, by establishing clear and valuable goals and effectively communicating them to their subordinates. They may also offer support and resources to assist employees in achieving their goals [32, 33].

The dimension of putting subordinates first has a dominant loading factor, namely, “The leaders focus on the interests of subordinates above themselves.” The value of loading factor is 0.924, which is in excellent category. According to some studies, a leader's attention to subordinates' needs may improve employee voice, corporate citizenship behavior, and employee well-being, which will improve organizational results. Leaders can promote a culture of trust, respect, and collaboration by prioritizing the needs of subordinates over their own. This will improve employee relationships and corporate performance [34-36].

The dimension of behaving ethically has a dominant loading factor, namely, “Leaders always try to be honest.” The value of loading factor is 0.923, which is in excellent category. According to the studies, a leader's honesty can improve organizational outcomes as well as vigilant personality, social leadership, work engagement, extra-role behaviors, and employee voice. Leaders can increase employee trust and credibility by being honest and transparent, which will improve performance and relationships [14, 37].

The dimension of relationships has a dominant loading factor, namely, “The leaders care about the welfare of their subordinates.” The value of loading factor is 0.894, which is in excellent category. According to the studies, a leader's concern for their subordinates' well-being may improve employee wellbeing, leadership trust, attachment, job satisfaction, and organizational results. Leaders may contribute to creating a positive work environment by showing concern for the welfare of their subordinates. This will strengthen employee relationships and enhance organizational performance [38-40].

The dimension of servanthood has a dominant loading factor, namely, “The leaders try to make the work of their subordinates easier.” The value of loading factor is 0.934, which is in excellent category. According to some studies, a leader's efforts to simplify their subordinates' duties may benefit employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, shared identity, work engagement, and organizational results. Leaders may improve organizational performance by offering resources, feedback, and support. This will help to foster a positive work environment and boost the productivity of their staff [8, 16].

The second-order stage demonstrates the loading factor value for each dimension related to the servant leadership variable. The existing loading factor values show variation. The emotional healing dimension owns the lowest loading factor value, which is 0.554. Nevertheless, the emotional healing dimension is still in the good category. Meanwhile, the highest value is owned by the dimension of helping subordinates grow and succeed, which is 0.877 and within excellent

category. Overall, high scores indicate that the practice of servant leadership values brought by leaders is in line with organizational expectations. Leaders who implement servant leadership in the organization support the achievement of the organizational goals [4, 5, 7]. According to field research, female leaders who are in charge of female employees are also capable of properly implementing the servant leadership pattern. The organizational environment dominated by women does not cause difficulties that hinder the achievement of organizational performance, even though some research says otherwise [41-43]. In this case, female leaders find it easier to approach subordinates who are also female. This is a distinct advantage for the organization, where all the leaders and members are women. This situation confirms that the research on women's leadership aligns with the servant leadership model [14].

6. Conclusion

Based on the previous explanation, the researcher draws the conclusion that a strong relationship between factors, dimensions, and variables works together to form a leadership pattern that can be applied in organizations. The pattern is servant leadership. Servant leadership provides an illustration that by positioning oneself as a servant, it does not reduce the respect of subordinates. Being a servant does not mean that a leader demeans himself. This research shows that subordinates prefer and are comfortable with this leadership style. This situation is in accordance with the perspective that if someone wants to be served, then he must be willing to serve others first. This perspective is then suitable as an effective form of leadership in the organization. This serving nature is also very close to the characteristics of women. This trait also makes it easier for female leaders to implement servant leadership. Therefore, what makes servant leadership effective for female employees is how the dimension that has a strong value, namely helping subordinates grow and succeed, is the primary factor that facilitates the acceptance of female subordinates to the servant leadership model. Researchers would like to provide suggestions for further research where other researchers can use comparative analysis to test the effectiveness of leadership between men and women, especially by using servant leadership variables. Comparing the acceptance of this leadership style by male and female subordinates who are under the direction of women is another method for conducting studies.

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