

Research Article

**NAVIGATING CRISIS WITH EMPATHY AND INNOVATION:
WOMEN'S TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN
IMPROVING THE WELFARE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the transformational leadership style adopted by women leaders in Village-Owned Enterprises (BUM Desa) in transferring positive values, building trust, and innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The type of research used is descriptive qualitative research with a case study approach. The methods of data collection used in this study are observation, interviews, documentation, and data triangulation. The findings of this study indicate that: 1) The transformational leadership style in the existence of BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul has a strong influence in instilling positive values, being able to inspire subordinates, and being the key to innovative problem-solving. 2) Women have been effective in increasing the productivity of business units and showing the persistence of spirit in the joint movement in facing the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. However, problems are still related to the need for more skill development and the lack of employee independence at work. Women's transformational leadership style has presented a new concept of solid gender characteristics as an asset for a leader in making inclusive and change-oriented decisions. The women's leadership paradigm has underpinned that women can become ideal leaders to be relied upon in building gender equality. This is to achieve the vision and mission goals of Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprise in improving the welfare of the local community.

Keywords: *transformational leadership; women; village-owned enterprise*

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership in an organization plays a strategic role in influencing decision-making processes and shaping policy direction. Traditional leadership theories often associate leadership with men, while women, despite possessing strong leadership abilities, frequently face obstacles in achieving significant results within organizations (Eagly, 2007; Hoare & Gell, 2009). Many women are assigned administrative rather than strategic roles, limiting their contributions to impactful decision-making (Kushandajani & Alfirdaus, 2019). Empirically, this limitation is particularly evident in developing countries, such as Ethiopia and rural areas of Indonesia, where women's roles in decision-making remain restricted due to entrenched patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes (Hora, 2014). Such gender discrimination is rooted in societal constructs that shape women's identities and access to public spheres, reinforcing social norms and power dynamics that hinder their ability to create equitable and empowering living conditions (Alfiyah & Tini, 2021; Hannah, 2020; Vissandjee et al., 2005).

This study offers novelty by focusing on women's transformational leadership, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted the unique qualities brought by female leaders, including empathy, resilience, and innovative problem-solving (Dodwell, 2020; Helmich & Post, 2021). Srikandi Tangguh illustrates the strength of women's leadership in maintaining the existence of BUM Desa and reorganizing the business units that have slumped due to COVID-19. The direction of BUM Desa women's leadership to achieve goals, these findings also have the same pattern supported by the research "A new era: women and leadership," where they also found statistics that only 18% of women in the United States got a place in administrative positions in 1972. However, the percentage increased to 46% in 2002. Emphasizing these characteristics sheds light on a humanistic and collaborative approach, distinguishing it from previous studies that primarily spotlight transactional leadership styles associated with men (Porterfield & Kleiner, 2005). Moreover, this study explores how women in leadership contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), precisely Goal 5 on "Gender Equality," by reducing inequality and poverty through transformational leadership values (Subrahmanyam, 2023; Zuhdi, 2018). Thus, this research provides new insights into the contributions of women's leadership in overcoming global challenges and strengthening the role of women as change agents in organizations.

The implications of this research are vital for organizations in both public and private sectors, especially in rural areas where patriarchal social structures are deeply rooted. This study underscores the importance of increasing female participation in strategic roles to reap the benefits of transformational leadership, which promotes collaboration, innovation, and inclusive decision-making (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Harini, 2021; Saputra & Azmi, 2021). Findings from this study can support governmental efforts to design policies that promote women's empowerment in

leadership, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on gender equality. Policies encouraging women's involvement in leadership are expected to foster an inclusive work environment conducive to developing competent human resources (Hassan & Silong, 2008; Vasavada, 2012).

Beyond policy implications, this research emphasizes the need for education and training that empower women to develop transformational leadership skills. Training focused on empathy, communication, and collaboration will enable women to lead with a humanistic approach, addressing the challenges faced in strategic roles (Kurniawan, 2021; Stempel et al., 2015). Preparing women for leadership positions equips organizations to adapt more effectively to change and manage crises, as evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, where female leaders demonstrated resilience and innovation in navigating complex crises (Chen, 2006; Dewantara, 2019; Helmich & Post, 2021).

This research explores and analyses the role of women's leadership in driving positive organizational change through transformational leadership. Additionally, this study seeks to understand the unique leadership characteristics that bring added value, especially during crises, focusing on empathy, inclusivity, and resilience distinctive to women's leadership (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Harrison, 2018; Situmorang, 2011). Through this study, deeper insights are expected into how transformational leadership by women can serve as an inspiring model for navigating challenges and creating environments that support organizational growth and resilience.

Research on transformational leadership, specifically in the context of female leadership in Pakistan, highlights how women leaders foster connectedness, innovation, and trust within organizations, as demonstrated in the survey-based study by Bilal et al., (2021). Using cross-sectional data from 366 employees across various organizations led by women, this study suggests that transformational leadership positively mediates interactions between managers and staff. Transformational leadership emphasizes trust-building and empowerment, critical to enhancing employee engagement and organizational commitment.

A qualitative technique might be used to undertake additional study. This will clarify how successful women's leadership is and how women's leadership operates in accomplishing corporate goals. Zenger & Folkman (2019) 360-degree assessment demonstrated that women in leadership roles are regarded as equally effective to men. However, everything remained the same. The analysis knife in this study uses indicators of transformational leadership theory, namely 1) Idealistic Influence provides a strong influence in becoming a role model for employees; 2) Inspirational Motivation in encouraging and inspiring subordinates to re-energize due to the COVID-19 pandemic; 3) Intellectual Stimulation, a female leader's approach to increasing innovation and creativity in various situations, and 3) Individual Consideration, focusing on the level of needs of each subordinate in dealing with the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Practical leadership theory underscores how transformational leadership can drive organizational performance by building trust and a cohesive workplace culture (Yukl, 2013). Key performance indicators of effective leadership include productivity, group cooperation, and work spirit—all vital to organizational resilience and success. Productivity is enhanced through the effective use of organizational resources, while group cooperation promotes trust and ensures that tasks are completed collaboratively and effectively. Lastly, work spirit, which is particularly relevant to organizations

recovering from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflects the morale and engagement of employees in striving toward common objectives (Badu & Djafi, 2017). These elements support the transformative potential of women's leadership and underscore the relevance of transformational leadership theory in understanding and advancing the role of female leaders in diverse organizational contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design aimed at uncovering in-depth insights into women's leadership in community-owned enterprises during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research, as noted by (Creswell, 2016), seeks to address social issues through exploring the meanings derived from participant interactions and behaviors. Data for this study were collected through purposive sampling, selecting key informants relevant to the study focus, including the village head, the director of BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul, core management members, business unit managers, and associated community members. These informants were chosen based on their direct experience with the organizational dynamics and leadership practices within BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul. The sampling method ensured that data were gathered from individuals who could provide detailed and specific insights into the influence of female leadership in community development during the pandemic.

Data collection involved multiple methods: observation, interviews, documentation, and triangulation. Observation entailed direct field observations to monitor the behaviors and activities of leaders and employees at the research location, focusing on aspects such as task delegation, workplace interactions, and adaptation to pandemic-related challenges. Semi-structured interviews allowed researchers to engage in face-to-face conversations with participants, asking targeted questions about transformational leadership practices while adhering to COVID-19 health protocols. Documentation, including records, photographs, and relevant organizational documents, supported the validation of observational and interview data, strengthening the reliability of the findings. Triangulation, as recommended by (Kadji, 2016), integrated these diverse data sources to enhance credibility and minimize biases, allowing for a more holistic understanding of women's leadership dynamics.

Data analysis followed the (Matthew B. Miles, 2014), approach, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During data reduction, non-essential information was filtered to focus on relevant patterns and themes, facilitating clearer interpretation. Data were then organized and displayed systematically, providing an overview of the emergent themes on women's transformational leadership. Conclusions were drawn based on iterative analysis and verification, with each step reviewed to ensure consistency and reliability. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting their privacy throughout the research process. However, challenges arose due to the pandemic, limiting access to some participants and requiring adaptability in data collection methods. These limitations underscore the importance of flexibility in qualitative research, particularly under pandemic constraints, and are acknowledged as potential factors affecting the study's generalizability.

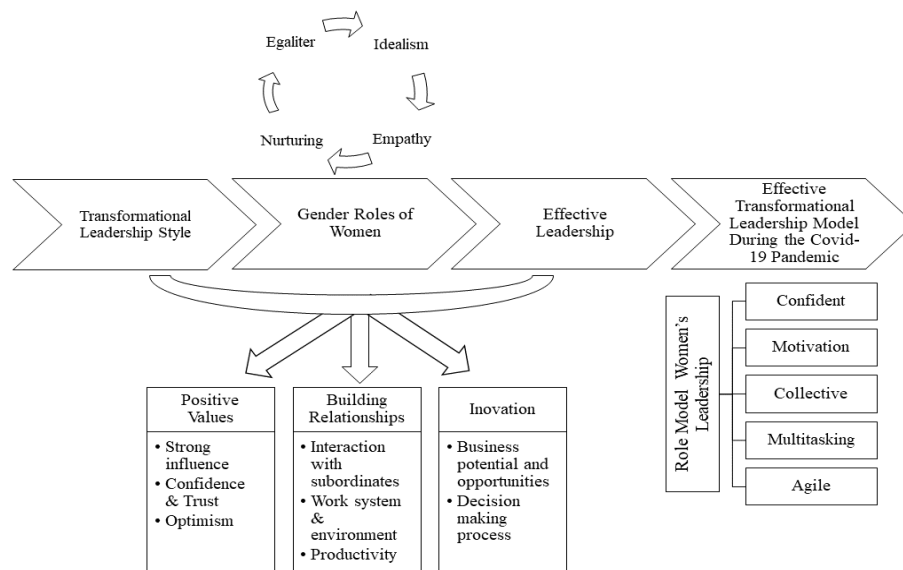
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformational Leadership in the Existence of Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprises (BUM Desa)

Innovative strategic steps to alleviate poverty and inequality result from developing village welfare pioneer institutions of the BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul in Jatirejo Village, Kapanewon Lendah, is one of the active BUM Desa in Kulon Progo Regency. According to lendah.kulonprogokab.go.id (accessed November 6, 2021), the majority of Jatirejo villagers who work as farmers have encouraged the establishment of BUM Desa business units through the "BUMI MELANI" program (*BUM Desa bersemi membela petani*), which began in 2017. Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprises (BUM Desa) programs aim to improve the welfare of the community, especially farmers developing business units have developed 3 types of business units, namely First, Financial Services. Second, Trade and Agricultural Production. Third, Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprises (BUM Desa) develops new business unit innovations, namely Bukit Cubung Tourism and Resto as well as other activities such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities and assistance to MSMEs.

Efforts to increase the role of women in village development, especially in the Jatirejo sub-district, are reflected in the dominance of women's management in Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprises (BUM Desa), reaching 50% and occupying important roles in the BUM Desa organizational structure. Women have occupied strategic positions such as BUM Desa Director, Secretary, Treasurer, and Finance Section as well as cooks filled by women in the Bukit Cubung Tourism and Resto Business Unit. Women's participation can support the creation of gender equality. Women are more empowered and have economic independence from their income as employees and administrators of BUM Desa.

Figure 1
Role Model Women's Leadership



Source: Processing Results, 2024

Idealized Influence

Women's leadership in BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul has been a driving force for change and improvement of the community's economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The leadership qualities exhibited by women in BUM Desa highlight

exemplary attitudes of care, empathy, and active participation. Through a joint solid commitment, they successfully established the Bukit Cubung Tourism and Resto Business Unit amid the pandemic, showcasing how leadership can bring in new income and support the community's economic growth. This leadership approach has enhanced BUM Desa's performance, fostering trust among employees, the village government, and external partners, which has been pivotal to the business unit's success.

"I conducted a business study to launch a new unit, Trading and Agricultural Production, right when I was appointed Director. However, the village government logically pointed out, 'If we allocate a large amount of funds and it doesn't succeed, it's better to use the funds to build roads that directly benefit the community,'" said SW, Director of BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul. In her proposal, SW initially proposed a capital of Rp 200,000,000 but only received Rp 38,000,000. "But it also made sense when Mr. Lurah said, 'If we allocate a large amount and it doesn't work, it's better to build a road that the community can enjoy.' So, our focus is building trust and establishing our presence in the community and with the village government through BUM Desa's performance achievements." Women's strong leadership traits influence decision-making processes with determination and high ambition to achieve set goals. Their idealistic approach enables them to manage conflict, build relationships, and motivate employees, making them respected role models who help BUM Desa achieve its objectives even in challenging times.

Inspirational Motivation

The leadership of Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprise (BUM Desa) is committed to encouraging employees to remain solid and enthusiastic amid the COVID-19 pandemic—efforts to foster motivation for employees by supporting each other. The core management of BUM Desa has shown loyalty in designing business development, establishing relationships with external parties, and supervising employees so that they can work well. BUMDes Desa Jati Unggul has been trusted by the Jatirejo Village Government to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks, face shields, thermogenic, hand sanitizers “wasuh”, disinfectants, and others used to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Encouragement efforts have been given by BUM Desa women leaders directly through face-to-face meetings and indirectly through telephone calls. Motivation is done through various steps in her social responsibility to keep running the business for the income of BUM Desa employees.

"We often use the slogan "We Want, We Can" to motivate employees. This motivates us to work hard. When our friend shows signs of discouragement. We also try to stay open during the pandemic. We try to pick up the ball; how can we get a salary if we are closed?" (NH, Employees of Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprise (BUM Desa)

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the female management remains optimistic, loyal, and committed. This is evident when each business unit directly impacts increasing community income. Despite the many problems that arose due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Bukit Cubung New Tourism and Resto Business Unit could absorb local labor. Women leaders have provided moral support to each other to foster confidence that BUM Desa can still generate employee income. Women as iconic of the progress of Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprise (BUM Desa) excel, have been invited to various activities organized by the government and community to provide material on the theme of the role of contributing to building villages as a motivator for learning successful BUM Desa. Various activities were organized, including a webinar entitled "Village Food Security Strategy in the New Normal Era" in collaboration with Bumdes.id. BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul has

also facilitated other BUM Desa to conduct a mock study to BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul by sharing stories and keys to success in managing BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul.

Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leadership leads to the intellectual stimulation process of BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul employees to increase innovation and creativity in dealing with problems. Women leaders need this to solve problems with new approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women leaders contribute significantly to discussing BUM Desa issues individually and through forum agendas. There are many opportunities to empower local MSMEs by facilitating a place to sell. "We help with packaging, product quality control, distribution permits. What we facilitate is not yet optimal, but we want to create a creative economy for the community." (SW, Director of BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul) BUM Desa has designed the development of Apik Rejo marketing as an online market for Jatirejo villagers and facilitated the assistance of 25 MSMEs in realizing the creative economy.

The women leaders of BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul strategize in approaching mediators by introducing BUM Desa through networking, negotiation, and good communication. The primary step in making various innovations began to be promoted through technological advances, products, ideas, and working methods. BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul continues to open itself to receive significant inputs and establish relationships with various external parties. Women's leadership approach to problem-solving stimulates subordinates to increase innovation and creativity in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Routine briefing agendas are carried out through public forums and face-to-face to find solutions to problems. However, in communicating problems within BUM Desa, there is a lack of employee independence in solving problems.

Individualized Consideration

Individual considerations focus on the behavior of BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul women's leadership style in becoming mentors or trainers for their employees. The focus on empowerment is a challenge for BUM Desa women leaders in providing training and knowledge transfer to employees. The reason is that many local villagers still need more human resources (HR). Therefore, providing learning or training is very important in improving employee competence in carrying out tasks. At that time, women chose to commit to leaving their comfort zone. Some are for thinkers; some can only carry out tasks.

Considerations from women's leadership have yet to be able to provide optimal consideration to their subordinates. This can be seen in the need for more efforts to develop the skills and competencies of employees with low educational backgrounds. In responding to the needs of employees to increase marketing widely, they have yet to be able to utilize digital marketing optimally. In addition, the delegation of tasks needs to be better organized. Employee development still needs to be improved and restricted under the current HR framework. The quality of human resources is still being improved, as are the skills and expertise of employees. It is evident from the female management of Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprise (BUM Desa), which excels in offering access to develop employees through various mentoring or training opportunities, albeit insufficient. The activities assigned for management, SOP, and inventory still need to be better organized.

The role of women's leadership in the Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprise (BUM Desa)

The role of women's leadership in the Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprise (BUM Desa) demonstrates significant potential in shifting community economic paradigms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women in BUM Desa have navigated traditional social expectations while emerging as leaders who embody empathy, collaborative spirit, and resilience. Their roles challenge conventional views, showcasing women's capability to manage village enterprises effectively, contribute to local economic growth, and promote financial literacy in the community. Through their dual roles as leaders and community members, women have incorporated an empathetic leadership style that resonates well with the community's needs, proving transformative in maintaining economic stability during crises.

Women leaders at BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul have instilled a supportive work environment that employees often describe as a "second home." Women leaders' nurturing and participatory approach has enabled an inclusive work culture and strengthened internal cohesion among employees. The transformational leadership displayed here has facilitated a close-knit relationship within the BUM Desa team, encouraging productivity and mutual trust. SW, the Director of BUM Desa, emphasized this collaborative spirit, noting, "The focus is on building trust and presence within the community and the village government through BUM Desa's achievements." Based on solidarity and shared goals, this trust-centric approach fosters an organizational culture in which employees feel valued and committed to their work.

One critical challenge female leaders encounter in BUM Desa is the limited funding provided by the village government. While initially proposing a capital of Rp 200,000,000, SW received only Rp 38,000,000. She recounted the village head's reasoning: "If we give a large amount and it doesn't work, it is better to build a road that can directly benefit the community." Despite this setback, SW's determination to create economic opportunities led to the development of the Bukit Cubung Tourism and Resto Business Unit, which remarkably increased its revenue from Rp 108,767,600 in 2020 to Rp 1,238,037,104 in 2021. This substantial growth underscores the effectiveness of women's leadership in implementing strategies that generate tangible economic outcomes, encouraging continued governmental support.

The women-led management at BUM Desa has also fostered teamwork and a sense of shared responsibility among employees, reinforcing collective efforts to meet organizational objectives. However, maintaining strict adherence to job descriptions has been challenging, as some employees are frequently assigned additional tasks outside their primary roles. YR, the Treasurer of BUM Desa, remarked, "The activities I aim to accomplish align with my job desk, yet I often find myself handling other tasks, which sometimes leaves primary responsibilities incomplete." Women leaders continue to nurture team spirit despite these challenges, building an adaptive workforce capable of sustaining operations under difficult conditions.

During the pandemic, the spirit of togetherness in BUM Desa Binangun Jati Unggul became a critical factor in sustaining operations. The inability to operate dine-in services due to government restrictions led to innovative sales strategies, such as door-to-door sales. SW observed, "The enthusiasm to go door-to-door, even in challenging weather, shows our employees' dedication to achieving daily sales goals of IDR 1,000,000." This strategy allowed BUM Desa to remain operational amid restrictions, with female leaders pivotal in motivating employees to adapt and persevere. By fostering resilience and flexibility, female leadership at BUM Desa supported the enterprise's economic recovery and reinforced the community's commitment to collective growth and sustainability.

The realization of BUM Desa's business revenue has increased, as seen from the new business units reaching a total revenue of more than 1 billion in 2021 despite the

COVID-19 pandemic. Women's leadership creates employee enthusiasm to perform all tasks productively at BUM Desa to keep it running and earn money for their families. Participation, environment, and solidarity built in the spirit of employees become a force to strengthen each other in facing the COVID-19 pandemic crisis that can realize inclusive and sustainable village development. This has encouraged the creation of 1) Positive values that provide a strong influence in making women leaders who are good role models for subordinates. Women bring confidence and determination and build trust among employees and village governments that BUM Desa can be a social safety net for communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. 2) Women can effectively play a role in bridging the interaction process of building the broadest possible relationship, and women instill a working system that builds a closeness between employees to create a comfortable, dynamic environment and employee productivity. 3) creating innovations or breakthroughs and maximizing the potential and business opportunities that can bring new income to the community. The following is an effective transformational leadership model during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

Table 1

Effective Transformational Leadership Model During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Source: Processing Results, 2024

No.	Model	Characteristics
1	Confident Leader	Qualified capabilities can be relied upon in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. The capacity of individual leaders to manage the organization has advantages in good financial literacy and good communication skills.
2	Motivation Leader	Female leaders encourage subordinates' motivation to thrive in a situation of limitations in the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Leaders have an unyielding spirit and a strong belief to be optimistic in achieving the goals expected by a leader.
3	Collective Leader	A model of community spirit that can be applied by women's leadership in mobilizing subordinates. Women leaders have the belief that collective strength will facilitate the achievement of a goal.
4	Multitasking Leader	A model that promotes effective women's leadership in innovative organizational reforms. The advantages of women have the ability as leaders and experts in all fields including management.
5	Agile leader	Female leaders adapt quickly and are agile when in new environments or problem-solving. In the COVID-19 pandemic situation, women are quick to respond to changes and innovations that must be agile in any situation.

This research confirms that women's transformational leadership in BUM Desa demonstrates a democratic approach to decision-making, marked by inspirational attitudes and close emotional connections with subordinates, which fosters motivation and serves as a model for future leadership. Women's increased participation has become essential social capital for sustainable development, as they contribute innovative and critical ideas that drive significant organizational changes. The dual roles often held by women have shaped empathetic, compassionate, and responsive leadership qualities, especially evident during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic,

reflecting a deep social and moral commitment to community welfare. Unlike previous studies, this research highlights a distinctive leadership model rooted in grassroots formation and collective effort, wherein women build a "trust-based" environment that helps employees endure and seize local opportunities. This model underscores women's effective negotiation and collaboration skills with stakeholders, establishing flexible and resourceful communication channels that leverage government support for rural empowerment and poverty alleviation programs.

CONCLUSIONS

A This research discusses the transformational leadership style adopted by the female board of Binangun Jati Unggul Village-Owned Enterprise (BUM Desa), which shows characteristics that are oriented towards positive values, building good relationships, and innovative changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although on the scale of a local organization, women are present in seeing their leadership perspective against the patriarchal culture that develops in rural areas so that gender equality and inclusiveness can be implemented. Women leaders are increasingly present and confident in being the key to solving problems employees face in responding to changing conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. A leader's effectiveness in the actions taken can bring positive results related to the performance of BUM Desa, which is based on profit and high employee enthusiasm in coming up with breakthrough ideas for surviving the COVID-19 pandemic. However, leaders need to accommodate every opinion and aspiration so that employee autonomy can be further developed. BUM Desa needs to open the investment tap for business capital by allowing community investors to join in developing and enjoying BUM Desa's business results. Women leaders need to consider the level of employee needs in capacity building to become professionals, such as training and mentoring employees in leadership training, management, archiving, and digital marketing training to reach a wider BUM Desa market share and assess employee performance indicators.

This leadership style research only focuses on transformational leadership adopted by women's leadership. Future research recommendations address other leadership styles that can be researched to develop a more comprehensive picture of women's leadership. The narrow focus of the study was only on the scale of local groups, and the results might be different if used on a larger scale. The researcher suggests further research to establish leadership styles in large-scale public sector organizations. This study did not look at the perspective of transformational leadership style in one organization with another organization and did not compare leadership styles between men and women. Based on this, future research can look at the perspective of transformational leadership styles from various organizations or compare leadership styles between men and women in a public organization.

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