

## Embracing Leadership Behavior for Innovation Performance in Hotel Industry During Covid – 19

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### Abstract

The covid-19 pandemic has struck many industries, especially tourism and hotel businesses. Various creative and innovative actions should be taken to keep the sustainability of the business. Several antecedents are needed to foster innovation. This study aims to examine the influence of leadership behavior on innovation performances at five-star hotels, which are suffering their business due to the lockdown policy of the Government. The research shows that there are five distinct leadership behavior needed, namely Innovative Thinking, Staff Development, Market Sensitivity/Proactive, High Determination/Never Give Up and Courage/Calculated Risk Taking. The first two behaviors belong to the essential trait of Transformational and Servant leadership as value-based leadership. The last three behaviors are grouped into Leaders' entrepreneurial behavior. In addition, the leadership behavior was deemed insufficient in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Leaders must also have a mindset that is sensitive to the current pandemic condition (Pandemic Mindset) and Risk Tolerance to create innovation that has excellent performances. This research was conducted at two five-star hotels in Surabaya, Indonesia, affected by the road closures policy. The research uses a qualitative approach to high-rank decision makers as the resource persons, such as directors, General Manager, or owners. The data collection method was purposive sampling with in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The data confirmation is carried out to measure the accuracy of the data by interviewing employees, visitors, and documentation. In addition, this research also conducted a case study analysis of the data model.

### Keywords

leadership behavior; covid-19 pandemic; innovation performances; hotel; risk tolerance; pandemic mindset



## I. Introduction

Every organization has specific goals to achieve. The success or failure of an organization in achieving its goals is related to the leadership behavior or actions of a leader. While this has been done before by many leaders when leading their organizations during normal conditions, things are different during a pandemic. Organization must have a goal to be achieved by the organizational members (Niati et al., 2021). The success of leadership is partly determined by the ability of leaders to develop their organizational culture. (Arif, 2019).

More than 186,000,000 Covid-19 cases worldwide, with more than 2,500,000 coming from Indonesia since the first case was announced (covid19.who.int, 2021). From a global economic perspective, the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the supply chain, shook positions, hampered economic activity, and caused economic uncertainty for

companies nationally and internationally. Many losses have been experienced as a result of this pandemic, both materially and non-materially. The losses experienced non-materially are more social, such as the emergence of public panic, which results in the emergence of the phenomenon of panic buying. Material losses are caused by the lockdown policy, Large-Scale Social Restrictions, and Implementation of Restrictions on Community Activities which require people to stay at home, work from home and do online learning. These activities hamper the country's economic activities and harm the level of social welfare.

This pandemic is not only affecting rich/poor income countries or high/low-interest rates, but it affects the whole world as it experiences disruptions to supply and demand. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) stated that the hotel sector is one of the sectors that have been most affected by Covid-19. The main problem in the hospitality industry due to this pandemic is the decline in demand, which is a direct consequence of government restrictions and the public fear of the Covid-19 virus (Larsson and Gustavsson, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic conditions have made the hospitality industry face a unique situation, so relying on past knowledge and experience may not be enough. This has forced tourism industry players from the hospitality sector to (especially leaders) adapt to unprecedented changes in the business environment in order to maintain competitiveness during and after the pandemic. Leadership behavior used by leaders will determine whether an organization's goals can be achieved or not. Leadership behavior will function as an interpretation of intelligence, both regular and emotionally, attitudes, interests, knowledge, and experience, as well as being a hallmark of the personality of a leader himself. From this, a leader can also influence innovative behavior that leads to innovative performances, even though they do not do this consciously (De Jong and Den Hartog, 2007).

The role of a leader during a pandemic has become more challenging in bringing up innovation performances (Geerts et al., 2021). Leaders must balance competing priorities, keep their subordinates engaged and motivated, and must be able to avoid burnout in a post-emergency environment that remains unstable, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (or more commonly known in management theory as VUCA). In this condition, unprecedented opportunities arise at all levels, where leaders must "act quickly" by improvising, innovating, collaborating, and taking lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic for the future.

Leaders must be able to survive, struggle hard and face uncertainty and are forced to be able to "rack their brains" in creating or innovating without taking advantage of past experiences. Leaders must reassess some standard operating practices (SOPs) and quickly devise new and innovative strategies. Thus, hotels must also implement innovations without a clear understanding of the effectiveness of innovations (Sharma et al., 2021). This is what will determine whether hotels can survive, especially hotels that are open during the pandemic.

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Leadership Behavior**

Leadership behavior is an aspect of leadership that affects team members/units or organizational units under their leadership. In the era of the pandemic, leaders must adapt quickly. This follows the statement from Kahneman (2011), which states that "thinking fast" is efficient and adaptive in many circumstances. Nevertheless, it will create a fixed

pattern that leaves leaders without the range to handle shifting and dynamic situations or more significant responsibilities.

The current situation is very different and is characterized by the existence of a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) character that demands the appropriate adaptation of leader behavior. Therefore, leadership strategy coach Dede Henley believes that the transformation must be done immediately. Leaders need to see this pandemic as a rare opportunity to redefine what kind of business approach is appropriate at a more strategic and sustainable level (gulf business, 2021). Leaders must take a people-centered approach to transform happen, be it in organizational or cultural leadership systems.

Several studies have shown that transformational leadership and servant leadership have behavioral dimensions that are more adaptive to members of the group or organization. The first is the concept of transformational leadership, where transformational comes from the word "to transform," which means changing something into another form. Transformational leadership itself, according to Yukl (2013), is a leadership style that refers to the moral values of followers to increase awareness, especially regarding ethics, and to mobilize their energy and resources to reform an organization.

There are four characteristics of transformational leadership, according to Yukl (2013), namely Idealized influence, Individualized consideration, Inspirational motivation, and Intellectual stimulation. Meanwhile, according to Jahidi and Hafid (2017), the effects felt by employees when transformational leadership is implemented include loyalty, admiration, respect, trust, and being motivated to do more than initially expected.

Secondly, the concept of servant leadership, which was first put forward by Greenleaf in 1977, is a leadership style about helping others to achieve common goals. This can be achieved by facilitating individual development, empowerment, and collective work that is consistent with the long-term health and well-being of followers (Yukl, 2013). Furthermore, according to Jahidi and Hafid (2017), this type of leadership can influence and move employees to maintain relationships and have good morals, have high human values, empathy, listen to criticism and suggestions from others, have a spirit of service and have responsibility and commitment. A servant leader, according to Fery (2013), must have several aspects in himself, namely a spiritual, professional, intellectual, high, and stable emotional soul.

## **2.2 Leadership Imperatives**

The significance of leadership behavior can be seen from the implementation of behavior in several leadership imperatives. The following studies show the urgency of some of these leadership imperatives.

Imperative, according to Rundell (2002), in a noun that means "extremely important and urgent," while as an adjective, it means "vital importance, crucial, giving an authoritative command, authoritative, peremptory (definitely)." Moreover, according to Kruse (2013), leadership is a process of social influence that maximizes the efforts of others to achieve a goal. A leader must set a clear vision for the organization to motivate and guide the work process and build morale for all members he leads. From these two definitions, it can be interpreted that the leadership imperative must be done by a leader in achieving a goal. In addition, there are several studies that discuss leadership imperatives, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic (Geerts et al., 2021; IBM, 2020; United Minds, 2020; Deloitte, 2020).

### **2.3 Innovation Performances**

According to Ossai (2021), at its core organizational sustainability fully depends on the organization's ability to learn how to explore new opportunities while taking advantage of existing realities. This statement is very relevant in the conditions facing hotels today. In order to cope with this unprecedented condition (Covid – 19), the hotel must devise a number of “immediate ways” to safeguard the health and safety of all parties involved. The hospitality and tourism industry are forced to innovate and adapt to the unprecedented changes in the business environment. This is done to maintain competitiveness during and after the pandemic, even though the hotel does not yet have experience in dealing with the pandemic (Gössling et al., 2020). Based on the research of Sharma et al. (2021), there were three types of innovations carried out by the hospitality industry during the pandemic, namely marketing innovations, product/process innovations, and organizational innovations.

## **III. Research Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with the research subject being the high decision-makers (Director/General Manager/Owner), with the object of this study at 2 five-star hotel that has just opened in Surabaya, Indonesia and which are suffered their business due to the lockdown policy of the Government due to Covid-19 pandemic. The data collection method used purposive sampling with in-depth interviews, observation and documentation. The triangulation of data is carried out to measure the accuracy of the data by confirming to employees, visitors and cross-checking products as a result of innovation. In addition, this study also conducted a case study analysis of the data model.

## **IV. Result and Discussion**

### **4.1 Opportunity during the pandemic**

Although there are many challenges that must be faced during a pandemic, especially human resources (lack of manning), researchers see an opportunity from this challenge, namely the number of competent or trained HR candidates so that companies can save costs such as training costs for new employees, salaries, etc.

Basically, it is undeniable that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on almost all industrial sectors, including hospitality. The government has also made various efforts and policies to resolve the Covid-19 problem and stabilize and restore the economy, but all these measures have limits. When that limit has been reached, there's no choice but to ensure that economic activity continue. As a result, it seems that a lot of people are competing to find work or "job fighting" and do not think about salary or income (the important thing is work).

### **4.2 Innovation made during Covid – 19 pandemics**

Innovative strategies such as product/process innovation, organizational level, and marketing implemented by hotels are considered to reduce the risk of hotel guests and employees being exposed to Covid-19, as well as produce good hotel market value so that it dramatically influences hotel conditions during this pandemic. The three kinds of innovations become a reference for researchers with results that can be said to be appropriate when researchers conduct interviews with informants, including:

#### **1) Product/process innovation**

- a) FnB via drive-thru, delivery and online application
- b) Added one extra security in the closing area of the access road to the hotel

- c) Creating retail (supermarket) in the hotel
- 2) Marketing innovation
  - a) Marketing by utilizing the established process standards
  - b) Create various kinds of attractive and unique promos or packages
- 3) Innovation in organizational innovation
  - a) Re-selection and reduce employees before the hotel open
  - b) Pay cuts, reduced working hours

### **4.3 Leadership Behavior**

#### **a. Innovative Thinking**

Innovative thinking is needed by a leader to maintain his business. This innovation appears when we are outside our comfort zone, as happened during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this condition, leaders are not only required always to have innovative thinking, but they also have to encourage their subordinates to think of solutions to the problems they face. Leaders must also openly accept input and innovative solutions from their subordinates, regardless of their position, as long as the idea or innovation makes sense with the prevailing assumptions.

Innovative thinking does not stop just with having various kinds of ideas or innovations received from shared or independent thinking. However, they must also be implemented in the hotel. Innovative thinking behavior is also a characteristic of transformational leadership found in the research of Sendjaya et al. (2008) and by Sendjaya and Cooper (2011), which states a leader must encourage his team members to think of solutions to problems by questioning the assumptions that apply.

#### **b. Staff Development**

The pandemic has forced all companies to carry out various efficiency and cost savings, including human resources. Here, the leader can improve the skills of his employees to do not only one job but also several other jobs (multitasking). Staff development is one of the behaviors leaders need to do to direct their team members in dealing with the Covid-19 condition. In addition, leaders must also have behavior that increases the capacity of their team members to take moral action as a form of their responsibility in serving hotel visitors. While it might seem less profitable for employees initially, it will have a positive impact as employees become more trained and competent. Leaders must also make it clear to their members that they must help and work together. When the situation returns to normal, the hotel does not need to spend any more training costs, and the leader already has competent and professional team members. These two leader characters (staff development and providing capacity for their subordinates) are also found in transformational and servant leadership theories (Carless, Wearing and Mann, 2000; Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora, 2008; Sendjaya and Cooper, 2011).

#### **c. Market Sensitivity and Proactive**

Leaders are always required to be sensitive to the existing market. In the current pandemic period, when they open, hotels no longer think about how to compete to get a market share but to survive (smaller profit is okay as long as it can still cover operational costs). In fact, during the pandemic, many companies closed and went bankrupt. Here, the leader must be very sensitive to the existing market so that their hotel remains open and running. In addition, leaders are also required to be proactive. The purpose of being proactive here is to do various ways to survive, such as by looking for several significant clients (usually the government because, in general, SOEs are a business sector that is still

running during a pandemic), taking several segments, and being innovative in attracting them. In addition, the leader must be wise to see the existing gaps. When the gap is found, the leader must immediately fill it and move in that direction. The attitudes shown (having market sensitivity and being proactive) were also found in the research of Antonio et al. (2011), which states that an entrepreneur or leader must have the ability to see the existing market.

#### **d. Persistence - High Determination and Never Give Up**

Leaders must have strong determination, have a mind like a steel trap to ever give up, and stay persistent even when facing a pandemic in order to achieve their goals (survival). They must not only show this attitude to everyone, but they must also encourage their subordinates to have the same attitude. On average, how newly opened hotels save HR costs are by recruiting interns, calling, etc. It is undeniable that multitasking makes employees feel that what they are doing is not comparable to what they are getting (resulting in employee behavior that is not in line with company goals). Despite that being the truth, in the current condition, everyone must understand that survival is a top priority. Here, the leader must also encourage his employees to have a solid mental attitude, never to give up, and be persistent.

Leaders must remind employees or team members about their responsibilities or goals for the company and remind them again that they are one of the lucky ones because they can still work while many out there are surviving and struggling to live, still looking for work. With the attitude of high determination and never giving up (persistence), all members in the organization will become accustomed to and trained from the various challenges and risks they face. Leaders in hotels that just opened during a pandemic are also used to taking action in making decisions quickly compared to hotels that were already standing or crowded with visitors before the pandemic. In addition, hotels are also better prepared to face various challenges when a pandemic or similar situation occurs in the future. The attitude of persistence of a leader, according to Antonio et al. (2011), is part of the category of entrepreneurial characteristics possessed by a leader or entrepreneur.

#### **e. Courage - Calculated Risk Taking**

The pandemic period can be said to be an uncertain condition or often referred to as VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous). Leaders are required to make changes or innovations quickly in a relatively short time. In making these decisions, leaders must consider all the risks involved. Courage or calculated risk-taking is a characteristic a leader must have in this condition. They must have the courage to decide whether the hotel will be opened or not with all the risks and considerations when it opens, as well as having the preparations and plans necessary for that. The leader must also consider the risks that would exist if they did not open since the funds of the owner, leader, or investor were limited. However, they also have dependents such as maintenance costs, interest expenses on capital loans to banks, etc. If they decide to open, they must also prepare other things (that naturally incur additional costs), especially regarding their obligations to meet health protocol standards from the government. The attitude or characteristics of being brave in taking risks (calculated risk-taking) was also found in Antonio et al. (2011), namely the ability of a leader or entrepreneur to take measurable risks.

#### **f. Sense of Pandemic (Pandemic Mindset)**

With a sense of pandemic or pandemic mindset, the leader's mindset will reflect the quality of the leader's beliefs and attitudes along with their emotional ties, such as how the leader thinks, feels, and the actions that will be taken later result of this mindset. Eileen Brown, in her article entitled *Shifting the Mindset During Covid-19*, written in 2020, explains that there is no more important time than now for leaders to execute the risks, even though the facts are often difficult to accept during the Covid pandemic.

First of all, leaders must be aware that they are facing a pandemic - according to Brown (2020), being aware will help leaders hone judgment in making better decisions about the leader's behavior and actions. Awareness will also help the leader understand the reasons behind the decision and increase the motivation of subordinates to comply.

Next, the leader should stop for a moment to reflect and consider the various challenges and risks that will be taken and faced. In other words, they have to simplify their thinking and go back to the basics to focus on prioritizing some of the risks and challenges that exist. Later, the leader must act with a combination of facts and concern (compromise) for the mental and emotional impact on others wisely.

#### **g. Risk Tolerance**

In the current pandemic situation, the leadership of the leaders is "tested" by having to make quick changes or innovations in a relatively short time so that there are lots of innovative ideas that flow freely. This free-flowing innovation usually involves many risks. In general, leaders have an "unbelievable talent" or are unique in considering all the possible outcomes where risk is well calculated and often pays off. However, remember that the leader must also find a way to face these risks and manage them well rather than just competing (in other words, "quickly make changes and innovations because they are in a hurry and have not considered the risks carefully"). This is what is known as risk tolerance. In this case, if the leader knows their risk tolerance well, then whatever risk is taken will be able to achieve excellent innovation performances. Rauch and Phrase (2007) state that the emergence of risk tolerance is characterized by the attitude of a leader who has innovativeness (innovative thinking) is proactive, can handle stress well, responds quickly to various problems or risks that will be faced, has a willingness, readiness, and ability to thrive under pressure. This is also under the results of leadership behavior found in this study.

In conducting this research, researchers have stayed at both hotels and found several risk tolerances faced and need to be reconsidered by the leaders, namely as follows:

- The first hotel, which is located in Surabaya, is a full-service five-star hotel with various facilities offered such as staycation, luxury, business, proposal, wedding, party, MICE, meeting, seminar, etc. From the profile of customers who visit, stay, or choose this hotel, it is evident that these customers belong to the "different class and not random" segment because they are looking for "facilities or comforts" found in five-star hotels rather than other star hotels.

When the leader decides to make innovations such as delivery or drive-thru, this is where risk tolerance occurs. Indeed, the delivery or drive-thru innovation made by this hotel is a way to survive. However, they must also remember that their "image" is also at stake. From the visitor's point of view, there will be a perception and impression that the hotel is "desperate."

- The second hotel, located in Surabaya, is a five-star hotel and has turned the hotel into a business hotel. Since the various facilities offered, such as swimming pools, gyms, meeting rooms, weddings, parties, and seminars, are not unique, what sets this hotel

apart from others is the presence of the supermarket below.

However, if you look at the manning, rooms, service, and confirmation from visitor employees, this hotel seems to be "a little forced" to become a 5-star hotel so that it becomes "over expectation" when staying at the hotel. This risk tolerance is what researchers suggest reconsidering (why not make it into a 4-star hotel but the concept that is carried out and delivered to visitors).

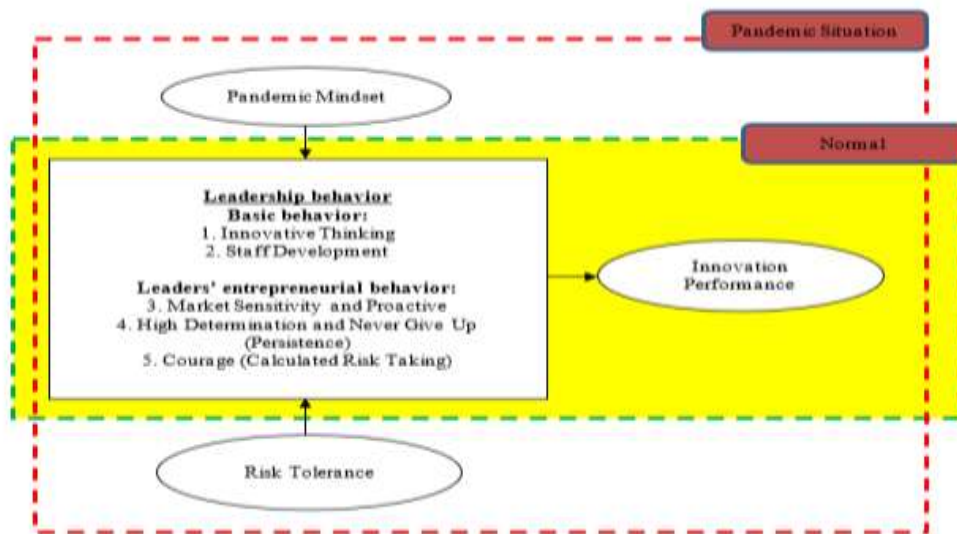
Therefore, leaders need to know their respective risk tolerance because they do not want the risk taken to exceed the limits of the organization's goals, hindering the organization from achieving its goals. In this case, if the leader knows their risk tolerance well, whatever risk is taken will be able to produce excellent innovation performances as well.

#### 4.4 Managerial Implication

In this research, the researchers founded and created a model for leaders' behavior in the hotel industry during Covid - the 19 pandemics, as seen in Figure 1. This model can be used in the future if it occurs again.

- In typical/ordinary situations, leaders can drive their organization to achieve its goals related to their leadership behavior. With these, they can achieve excellent innovation performances. However, things are different during a pandemic situation.
- To achieve excellent innovation performance during a pandemic situation is very different and is characterized by the existence of a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous). A pandemic situation demands the appropriate adaptation of leader behavior (adapt quickly). In other words, leaders must be able to survive, struggle hard and face uncertainty and are forced to be able to "rack their brains" (think fast) in creating or innovating without taking advantage of past experiences to handle shifting and dynamic situations or more significant responsibilities. The leadership behavior was deemed insufficient in dealing with this pandemic. Leaders must also have a mindset sensitive to the current pandemic condition (Pandemic Mindset) and Risk Tolerance.
- The pandemic mindset □ of being aware of the pandemic situation will affect leaders' hone judgment in making better decisions about the leader's behavior and actions. Leaders must simplify their thinking and focus on prioritizing some of the risks and challenges that exist. Later, they must act with a combination of facts and concern (compromise) for the mental and emotional impact on others wisely.
- Risk Tolerance □ It is essential for leaders to know their respective risk tolerance because they do not want the risk taken to exceed the limits of the organization's goals, so it hinders the organization from achieving its goals. Simply put, "don't take that risk if you do not have time to recover."





*Figure 1. The output of this study*

## V. Conclusion

There are five leadership behaviors that the leader has in the object under study, namely: Innovative Thinking, Staff Development, Market Sensitivity and Proactive, Persistence (high determination and never giving up), and finally, Courage - Calculated Risk Taking. From these results, two of them are the essential traits of Transformational and Servant leadership, namely Innovative Thinking and Staff Development, and three of them are leaders' entrepreneurial behavior, namely Market Sensitivity and Proactive, High Determination, and Never Give Up (Persistence), Courage - Calculated Risk Taking. The leadership behavior in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic period is one where the leader must also have a mindset sensitive to the current pandemic condition (Pandemic Mindset) and Risk Tolerance to achieve excellent innovation performances.

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