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Mother Leads with Her Heart: A Case Study of Women Worker Leaders in the Men-Dominated Forestry Sector

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Abstract: The masculine image and the notions of manual work and physical strength have resulted in more men workers in forestry. This gender imbalance has influenced the sector's leadership environment, a critical element in the workplace setting for meeting organizational goals. This study aims to investigate women's leadership dynamics in *Perhutani*, the only state-owned enterprise responsible for managing forest resources in Indonesia. Utilizing in-depth interviews with 11 women leaders from middle to top management levels, we found that there is a perceived physical limitation barrier to being a woman leader in *Perhutani*. To climb the career ladder, a support system from family, colleagues, and supervisors is important. However, family can be two sides of a coin, as it is also acknowledged as an internal constraint to being a woman leader. Our respondents acknowledge leadership labyrinth theory in being able to reach top leadership positions and tokenism theory, pointing out that the benefits of women leadership for *Perhutani* include the realization of gender equality, referring to the key performance index from the Government of Indonesia. For our respondents, being in a men-dominated sector is considered one of the attractive aspects of being a woman leader. They felt constantly challenged, but in a positive way. With these circumstances, our respondents showcase leadership styles in line with the theories of heart leadership and mother leadership. Heart-led leaders draw on the qualities of empathy, love, and vulnerability, while mother leadership means not only leading with the heart of a mother, but also with the mission, vision, and actions of a mother.

Keywords: women leaders; women managers; gender-based leadership; heart leadership; mother leadership; forestry enterprise



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1. Introduction

With respect to gender diversity, forestry is generally regarded as a men-dominated sector. This viewpoint is corroborated by global forestry workforce statistics [1,2]. As a workplace, forestry has traditionally been associated with a macho masculinity culture [3]. The masculine image and the notions of manual forestry work and physical strength have contributed to the widespread perception that men are the knowledgeable voice on forests, thereby discouraging other genders, such as women, from identifying with the sector [4]. Despite efforts to promote gender diversity and equality in the sector, forestry is still widely perceived as a place where sexist attitudes and behaviors prevail [5].

The phenomenon of gender inequality has affected the forestry sector's leadership environment, a critical element in the workplace setting for meeting organizational goals [6]. As one of many highly researched topics, notable advances have been made in the scholarship of leadership in general [7]. However, leadership development is a nascent field in scientific study, especially its intersectionality with gender, or women in leadership [8]. Historically, gender-based leadership research has associated management and leadership with agentic characteristics such as assertiveness and competitiveness that are viewed as

masculine stereotypes [9]. In general, management and leadership are associated with masculinity or the “think manager, think male” paradigm [10].

The effects of gender diversity and equality on group and company performance are inconsistently determined by meta-analyses [11–13]. On the one hand, diversity enhances the ability to make decisions, but on the other, it can increase intragroup conflict [14]. Inconsistent findings in the literature may lead to the conclusion that the relationship between increased gender diversity and organizational performance is context-dependent [15]. There is also the possibility that a work group lacks the ability to utilize the potential of diversity by failing to recognize different perspectives [16] or by relying on common knowledge and omitting specifics [17]. In order to arrive at a more inventive solution to a problem, the composition of a group should elicit the diverse knowledge and skills of its members and then extricate them [18].

Although there is considerable research about women in forestry, to the best of our knowledge, there are few comprehensive gender and leadership studies on forestry in less developed countries. Studies specifically researching gender and leadership in the forestry sector are mostly conducted in North America and Nordic countries [15,19–22]. This paper focuses on the gender-based leadership dynamics at *Perhutani*, the only state-owned forest enterprise in Indonesia. Considered an emerging dynamic middle-income economy country, Indonesia has one of the largest forest covers in the world and a significant proportion of the world’s remaining virgin forest stands. We specifically aim to investigate women’s leadership dynamics in *Perhutani* through the perspective lens of current women leaders in *Perhutani* (middle to top management levels).

In this paper, we use “man/men” and “woman/women” instead of “male” and “female” (except in direct quotes from respondents) in order to support gender-inclusive language with the purpose of not discriminating against a particular sex, social gender, or gender identity and not perpetuating gender stereotypes. The paper is structured in different sections. First, we outline our research context, theoretical background, and methods. We then present the results and discuss our findings. The Discussions and Conclusions section provides recommendations in terms of research gaps and possible future research directions.

2. Research Context

The forest land use zone in Indonesia is officially classified into two distinct categories: state forest and non-state forest areas [23]. The state forest is categorized into three distinct forest types: production forests, protection forests, and conservation forests. Within the production forest regions, there are two main types of companies: management of timber plantations and natural forest management concessions [23]. An example of the first type of company is *Perhutani*, the only state-owned forest enterprise in Indonesia.

2.1. Job and Function of *Perhutani*

According to the Government Regulation Number 72 Year 2010, *Perhutani* is mandated to carry out a business providing goods and/or services pertaining to forest management and quality forest products to the public at reasonable prices, while adhering to the principles of sustainable forest management and good corporate governance [24]. Its primary business activities are: (1) forest management and composition of forest management plans, (2) forest utilization including area utilization, environmental services, timber and non-timber forest product utilization, and timber and non-timber forest product collection, (3) rehabilitation and reclamation, (4) forest protection and nature conservation, (5) processing of forest products into raw materials or finished materials, (6) education and training in forestry, (7) agroforestry development, (8) community forests and/or community plantation forest building and development, and (9) trade in forest products and products of own production as well as those of other parties.

Most of the *Perhutani* forest land is on Java Island, the economic and political center of Indonesia [24]. Structurally, the *Perhutani* forests are partitioned into multiple forest

management units, commonly known as *Kesatuan Pemangkuan Hutan/KPH* (in English: Forest Management Unit) at the local level. The individual holding the position of Chief in the KPH is responsible for fulfilling two distinct roles, as reflected in their official title as both “Administrator” for administrative duties and *Kepala* (in English: Chief) of the KPH (KKPH) for management operations.

In the past, *Perhutani* implemented a policy of exclusion towards rural communities (who are usually living around their forest areas), which is reminiscent of the colonial model [25]. It was argued necessary in order to exercise a greater level of control over the forestland activities of rural individuals. The forest was under the surveillance of an armed police force, which worked in conjunction with the managerial and technical departments [25].

During the late 1990s, in the midst of economic and political instability in Indonesia, *Perhutani* contemplated altering its strategy in regard to the surrounding community [26]. In 2001, *Perhutani* initiated a collaborative management strategy to jointly determine and execute forestry activities with the community around its forest areas.

2.2. Gender Composition in the *Perhutani* Workforce

For years, its workers’ gender composition has been relatively static with 93% men employees, compared with only 7% women employees (Table 1). The worker numbers naturally influence the gender in leadership, with more men as leaders.

Table 1. The gender composition of *Perhutani* employees (analyzed from internal *Perhutani* data).

Year	Men (Persons, %)	Women (Persons, %)	Total (Persons, %)
2018	17,550 (93%)	1413 (7%)	18,963 (100%)
2019	17,102 (93%)	1315 (7%)	18,417 (100%)
2020	16,629 (93%)	1305 (7%)	17,934 (100%)
2021	15,525 (93%)	1211 (7%)	16,736 (100%)
2022 (until October)	14,634 (93%)	1169 (7%)	15,803 (100%)

The concern around having more women in leadership roles started with a top-down approach. Since 2000, the Indonesian government has employed gender-mainstreaming strategies at the national level in order to more equitably distribute development benefits and empower women to partake in the development process. The National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) for 2015–2019 includes initiatives to promote gender equality [27].

In 2021, The Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in Indonesia had the #GirlsTakeOver campaign, a part of #RaisetheBar campaigns to promote gender equality and women’s leadership in the workplace [28]. This campaign is in line with its commitment to increase the representation of women leaders, especially in top-level management (i.e., Board of Directors). The increasing target number is 15% in 2021 and 25% in 2023 [28]. This is part of the transformation of SOE human resources for improving leadership equality. It is believed that by improving gender equality in the workplace, Indonesia has the potential to have an increase of USD 135 billion in the 2025 Gross Domestic Product [28].

On 8 October 2021, The Indonesian Minister of SOEs sent a formal letter to all SOEs’ top management regarding the aspirations of shareholders/capital owners for the preparation of each company’s 2022 work plan and budget [29]. The letter specifically mentioned that the ratio of women in the nominated leadership talent should be adjusted to the characteristics of the business cluster (i.e., forestry) and should be at least higher than the number of the previous year. As a member of the SOEs in Indonesia, *Perhutani* supports the women leadership initiatives, although the company currently does not have any women on its Board of Directors.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1. Perceived Fit Theory

The masculine image and the notions of manual forestry work and physical strength possibly perpetuate the suggestion of less perceived fit for women in the forestry sector [30]. Perceived fit is conceptualized as a direct evaluation of compatibility, assessing whether an individual matches well within an organization [31]. The rationale behind this concept is that people's perceptions of reality will determine their cognitive evaluations and responses to particular situations.

According to the perceived fit theory, individuals are permitted to apply their own weighting scheme to various environmental dimensions [32]. Due to this comprehensive evaluation of compatibility and its tendency to be consistent, perceived compatibility allows for a high degree of cognitive manipulation. Therefore, the perception of organizational characteristics has stronger effects than the actual characteristics, particularly for characteristics that are difficult to verify, such as values or goals [31]. The perceived fit theory may explain that due to a persistent masculine image [30], women are less likely to choose a career in the forestry sector [33].

3.2. Barriers to Women in Leadership: Glass Ceiling, Leadership Labyrinth, Tokenism

Research in the field of gender studies has identified numerous obstacles that can impede the advancement of women in leadership roles (e.g., [34]). Several theories, frequently with intersecting components, have been posited to account for the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions across various sectors and the tendency for women's career advancement to plateau in leadership trajectories. In the following, we outline three barriers that are likely to manifest themselves in forest enterprise settings [19,20].

The most famous barrier introduced in the gender-based leadership literature is probably the glass ceiling metaphor. The glass ceiling refers to the invisible obstacle that impedes women's progress in attaining top managerial roles within organizations [35]. The metaphor implies that the organizational context and the beliefs and attitudes of organization members regarding women's leadership abilities contribute to women's career advancement challenges.

Because of current societal dynamics, the glass ceiling metaphor is considered irrelevant. Therefore, the leadership labyrinth concept has been developed to recognize the gender-specific difficulties and barriers that women face in leadership roles [36]. Women professionals may encounter more indirect routes than their men counterparts, involving anticipated and unforeseen obstacles, in their journey towards achieving high-level managerial positions.

Another barrier to women in leadership is tokenism. Women leaders are often seen as a symbol or token since they represent a minority gender in an otherwise proportionally unbalanced workgroup [37]. These token women are excluded in the group [37] as a result of men's work culture and leader stereotypes [38]. Men, as a majority group, categorize, stereotype, and dismiss these women [39]. To eliminate tokenism practices, women leaders should have more influence and impact, and this can be done if these leaders reach a particular threshold or critical mass.

3.3. Heart and Mother Leadership

Heart leadership is related to gender stereotypes of emotion, which affects the leadership style [22,40]. Leadership involves the establishment of interpersonal connections, including the connection between individuals and their professional responsibilities [41]. In essence, individuals engage in work with the intention of fulfilling a specific objective, and it is imperative that this objective is met in order to foster a sense of encouragement. The etymology of the term "encouragement" can be traced back to its Latin root "cor", which denotes the anatomical organ of the heart [41]. To encourage literally means to give others heart.

Heart-led leaders draw on the qualities of empathy, love, and vulnerability to effect true transformational change [40]. The transformational aspect of leadership is enhanced when the leader employs inspiration that emanates from the heart [42]. Leadership with the heart is also related to inspirational leadership, eliciting an emotional response from individuals that impacts their personal beliefs.

Mother leadership denotes an individual who has attained self-awareness as a leader and possesses a forward-looking outlook that facilitates the promotion of sustainability and values [43]. As a managerial approach characterized by maternalism, there is a strong emphasis on the significance of the mother symbol in organizational operations and work principles. The leadership style is a holistic model of leadership based on a metaphor of a mother [44]. It is not only leading with the heart of a mother, but also leading with the mission, vision, and actions of a mother.

4. Methods

This study utilizes in-depth expert interviews to investigate the women leadership phenomenon in *Perhutani*. Individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol to give the flexibility to follow up on interesting points in order to explore the key issues without prejudice [45]. This is important especially when discussing sensitive topics (e.g., gender-related experience) since individual interviews are believed to provide a more supportive environment for women respondents [46].

The interview protocol was designed and modified from the existing literature [19,20]. The questions were carefully translated to Indonesian language by a team of gender and forestry experts, led by the first author. Interviews were conducted from May to December 2022, mostly in person. The questions were divided into four themes: (1) gender and the forestry industry, (2) career path of the women leaders, (3) impacts and benefits of women leadership, and (4) the future of the forestry sector.

We first proposed the research to the top leadership of *Perhutani* and informed them about the research purpose, scope, and information collected. Ethical considerations were sought through the *Perhutani* research body. After the top leadership permitted us to conduct research, we carried out an open call to all eligible women leaders. The targeted respondents are women leaders in middle- to top-level management in *Perhutani*. Once these leaders agreed to be interviewed, we scheduled a visit to their office.

In total, we interviewed 11 women leaders. Our respondents have diverse responsibilities with varied risks, from administration at the office (usually interpreted as having the lowest risks) to management within the forest working areas (commonly associated with the highest risks, especially related to their safety). An example of an administrative-based work title of our respondents is a Chief of Finance. Her main responsibility is to manage finance including calculating salary, benefits, and payroll. Most of her activities will be categorized as “at a desk” and conducted in office settings. This is quite in contrast with being a Chief of KPH with a forest area as her responsibility. Her tasks will include management operations such as forest patrols (most of the time in the nighttime to catch illegal loggers).

The interviews were mostly done in person when the second author visited the leaders' offices. The visit took from three to six hours, consisting of casual conversations to build trust and the interview itself. The interview part (ranging from one to two hours) was recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed.

All interviews were thematized in three steps [47]. First, both authors discussed and confirmed the steps of the analysis approach before undertaking the second stage independently. In the second step, each author read and reread the verbatim transcripts. Then, each author identified themes and sub-themes from significant phrases and sentences using a codebook developed from prior research and our interview protocol. Adaptations were then made to certain codes based on concepts that arose from additional analysis. To ensure the reliability of their research, the authors kept a personal reflexive journal and critically reflected on their preconceptions regarding the topic. Since numerous coders may reach different conclusions, the authors then compared and discussed

their emergent themes and sub-themes in a third step. Interview protocols (in Indonesian/original and English/translation) and the final themes and codes can be found in the Supplementary Materials.

5. Results

The results are organized according to the primary themes of our interview protocol: (1) gender and the forestry industry, (2) career path of the women leaders, (3) impacts and benefits of women leadership, and (4) the future of the forestry sector (see Supplementary Materials for more details). It should be noted that all quotations in the Results section come directly from the interviews, with respondents' random numbers (#1–11) provided after the quote.

5.1. Gender and the Forestry Industry

Since the forestry sector in Indonesia is perceived as a men-oriented and men-dominated industry, reflected in the employee proportion in *Perhutani* (Table 1), women leaders are still a "minority" (#6, 8). Based on one respondent's opinion, gender-based perceptions of women as more emotional and irrational than men sometimes lead to discrimination in the workplace. This reasoning, however, was disputed by other respondents. They consider that job segregation is not due to discrimination but more because of women's limitations (i.e., physical appearance) and risk management (i.e., safety issues) for women's own sake.

Compared with the past, our respondents stated an increase in the quantity of both women workers and leaders in the forestry sector, including in *Perhutani*. Women leaders are also found to hold more diverse leadership roles, not only in the office but also in the field (KPH/forest management unit), a role that is historically due to its high safety risk always held by men leaders. Nevertheless, one respondent was quite skeptic and associated the trend with the need to meet the key performance index for the enterprise performance required by the Government of Indonesia, possibly indicating women as a token.

Although women are considered as capable, knowledgeable, competent, and competitive as men in forestry, there is still a physical limitation barrier. Employment in the forestry sector often meant working in remote rural forested areas with wild animals, difficult workplace conditions (i.e., without proper toilet facilities), and a harsh environment that needed physical strength. Five respondents argued that there should be job segregation such as not having women leaders with forest working area responsibility. This position is considered to have a high safety risk. The leaders in these areas should have a strong physical presence and be able to ride an off-road trail motorcycle.

"... such as (forest) patrols... must need extra energy if you have to go to an area with difficult terrain. Not to mention finishing patrols until nighttime. At least that's it. Especially if you go to the field, you know what the location of the forest is, up and down, it seems close but actually it is far away." (#2)

"It is very risky to place women in an insecure area where there are frequent conflicts with communities, which sometimes using violence." (#3)

However, three other respondents saw the physical differences as not a burden for women leaders. They mentioned that working as a team and job delegation to men employees can answer this concern. In fact, women's strengths such as being more adaptive, communicative, and organized than their men colleagues are perceived to bring another positive dynamic into the forestry workplace. Respondents emphasized different types of leadership associated with women vs men. Women use their "heart" in leadership, referring to motherly acts, which makes them outstanding leaders.

"As far as we can see, men leaders mainly use their brain (head) in their work. Their heart is lacking. But if the leaders are women, ... we touch our work not only with logic, but we bring it to a different atmosphere. So, employees

are invited to think together so nothing is impossible. In fact, I bring a different influence with a different way of leadership than men. If we can do it in a mother's way, sometimes being gentle as a mother, we as a leader can be distinguished. For men, probably use less feelings." (#1)

5.2. Career Path of the Women Leaders

Being women leaders, our respondents mentioned some supporting factors that helped them to reach their current positions. Internally, the women leaders indicated ability, attitude, competency, discipline, integrity, knowledge (with strong educational background), and perseverance as the main factors, in addition to mastering skills such as communication, management, and networking. These factors will result in good performance assessment and track record, opening the way for a promotion.

However, a few of our respondents stressed external factors such as work experience, years of service, and an opportunity to climb the career ladder. The opportunity is related to having their bosses' trust, which can be achieved if these women show good work performance. Living in a religious culture, our respondents also stressed the act of praying to God as a main factor in being successful. They believed that God has his own way and plans for every human, including their work careers.

"Opportunity, trust, ability. Opportunity is, in my opinion, the main (factor). Because, if you don't have a chance, then what can you do? The leaders put trust in us. This has to do with ability as well, the capabilities (that these women) possessed." (#5)

"The leader's sharpness (observations) to see (their subordinate's) achievement is also important because to occupy a certain (leadership) position, it must still either be approved or be proposed by their (upper) leaders." (#7)

Support systems were also mentioned as an important factor in climbing the career ladder. Support can be received from family, colleagues, and supervisors. Nevertheless, family can be two sides of a coin, as it is also acknowledged as an internal constraint to being a woman leader. Six respondents specifically mentioned their difficulties in maintaining work-life balance due to the necessities of late working and overnight staying. This is specifically important when their children are still young.

"... for women who has a family, this can be a support as well as an obstacle. Personally, when I was young(er), I (chose to) focus on the family, making it as my priority." (#8)

Regarding external constraints of being a woman leader, our respondents repeated the factors of societal perception and job location. The societal perception sometimes doubts the ability of women working in challenging fields, going up and down the mountain, which mostly has steep and hilly terrains. One respondent also mentions an infamous public opinion, that "women are not appropriate to lead men and more senior subordinates" (#7). The culture, added by another respondent, considers "men (to be) more capable of being leaders than women" (#10). Meanwhile for job location, three respondents stressed the importance of distance between their job/office location and home base. This distance is beneficial for maintaining their work-life balance, even becoming a major factor in their decision to accept a career promotion.

"That's why most women choose to be close to their home base so that they can work and take care of their children." (#6)

5.3. Impacts and Benefits of Women Leadership

When asked about the impacts of women leadership in *Perhutani*, our respondents mentioned that their feminine traits make a difference. The physical environment (i.e., offices) becomes cleaner, more beautiful, and organized. Meanwhile non-physically, women leaders are considered to be able to create a different atmosphere in their work

environment. Organization skills are also mentioned as having an impact on finances. Women are perceived to be more meticulous, orderly, and intense in managing the finances.

“We, as women, use our hearts more (than men). More tolerance, also different (type of) performance (than men). It doesn’t work with ‘bang bang’ (imitating a gunshot sound) . . . arrogance can be more suppressed.” (#1)

“Women are more organized, more open, and transparent, (and have) good communication (skill). Usually, if I make mistakes, I will say sorry. If men, they usually have pride. Men usually play logic. For women, there is empathy. There’s a side for it.” (#9)

Socially, women leaders are perceived as having more empathy, caring nature, and sensitivity toward their colleagues. They will use a personal approach, which makes them easy to talk to, and be more of a team player.

“Here, we treat them (her subordinates) like family, so they don’t hesitate to tell me about (their) family problems. They are happy to tell me, and it’s not uncommon for me to help with their (family) problems.” (#7)

As women leaders, almost all respondents believed that they could influence the strategic planning/decision-making process in *Perhutani*, mostly through logic-based professional discussion. One respondent talked about her efforts in innovative forest management in her working area, and how she did studies to influence the decision-making process at an upper level. However, one leader mentioned that this will depend on their leadership position, such as having a forest working area or not.

When we asked about the benefits of having women leaders in *Perhutani*, our respondents repeated their feminine traits as their advantages. One respondent mentioned creativity, which is usually associated with having more women workers. Creativity can be utilized for “sales and marketing” (#7). Another respondent stated that women are usually stricter with regulations and following norms than their men counterparts. These traits are considered beneficial in avoiding corruption.

“... women are difficult, more difficult to negotiate (talking in a tendency of doing corruption). They are usually stricter with company rules, (so) the potential for violating the rules is smaller. Women tend to be more conscientious and focus on the norms.” (#8)

Nevertheless, one respondent mentioned that gender may not matter in leadership when it comes to the impacts and benefits. Both women and men, when they are in leadership, will think and act the same, holistically for the enterprise. However, another respondent acknowledged that women who reach top positions have had to go through a lot of barriers, more than their men counterparts. This is possibly referring to the leadership labyrinth. Interestingly, two respondents pointed out that the benefits of women leadership include the realization of gender equality, referring to the key performance index from the government.

5.4. The Future of the Forestry Sector

For our respondents, being women leaders in the forestry sector is attractive because working in forestry means working closely with nature, not only spending time inside office buildings. This is also considered their “forester instinct” (#7), developed from their education and training in forestry school.

As a sector, forestry is also considered to have a broad coverage with great challenges. The changing working environment, from offices to forests, as well as the varied activities, from keeping the finances balanced to forest security, are dynamic and not monotonous. The challenge is also connected to the gender-based circumstance. Being in a men-dominated sector is, in contrast, considered one of the attractive aspects of being a woman leader. They felt constantly challenged, but in a positive way. This is why, for one respondent, it is important to place women leaders in the right specific positions.

“Because forestry sector is challenging for women. Usually, it’s men. That’s what I find attractive. (Also) it is full of nature challenges. It’s also interesting, sometimes in the office, sometimes in the field, (so that I can do) healing.” (#11)

When our respondents were asked to give advice for young women entering the forestry sector/industry, there was a variety of answers covering both internal and external factors. Internal factors that were mentioned are associated with good leadership traits such as being sincere, inclusive, assertive, competitive, confident, persistent, tough, and passionate as well as being professional but still staying true to themselves. The toughness not only refers to mental condition, but also physical abilities. Externally, education and networking are also important factors. To have a promising career in *Perhutani*, women leaders “must have a (good) network of internal (companies) and external (stakeholders)” (#8). Due to their multiple roles in society, one respondent emphasized the need to choose the right spouse.

“If you want to work in the forestry sector, you have to be strong, physically strong, and choose an understanding partner. It’s very risky if our partner doesn’t understand. Because almost all of our work is related to men. So, choose the right partner.” (#5)

6. Discussions and Conclusions

Gender role norms in society are intertwined with women’s leadership behavior expectations [36]. As a consequence of patriarchal norms, leadership is still embedded with masculinity [48], resulting in a negative perception of women in leadership roles [49]. Women leaders are associated with being “emotional”, “bossy”, and “too nice” [50]. Men are viewed as rational and objective; consequently, they lead with their heads [40]. On the other hand, it is believed that women are more emotional and therefore lead with their hearts [50].

It can be acknowledged that in today’s modern workplace, the work environment tends to be collaborative and cooperative, which creates an advantage for women pursuing leadership opportunities [36]. However, this remains a question in a men-dominated sector such as forestry. For example, women leaders in Nordic countries considered “being one of the boys” to be a norm to adapt to in order to succeed in the forestry sector [19]. Culture-specific issues, such as sauna and hunting traditions, promote exclusion and can be a challenge for women in their career development. These activities potentially exclude women from participating in discussions leading to crucial business decisions or sharing important information [19].

Societal perception and cultural issues were also found in our case study. Similar to circumstances around the world, the forestry sector in Indonesia has long been perceived as a men-oriented and men-dominated industry. This perception is linked with the employee proportion in *Perhutani* (Table 1). Established to manage forests in Java and Madura, many *Perhutani* workers and leaders are Javanese, native to the central and eastern parts of the Indonesian island of Java.

In Javanese society, which adheres to a patriarchal culture, the highest achievement for a woman is to become a wife and mother who serves her family [51]. The family here not only includes her husband and child(ren), but also extended members such as parents, siblings, parents-in-law, siblings-in-law, nieces, and nephews. The Javanese word for woman, “wanita” (which is also absorbed as a national Indonesian language word for woman), means “wani ing tata”, which translates as “dare to be controlled” [51]. This is a virtuous concept that describes Javanese women who should be submissive and under the control of their husband and older family members (i.e., parents and parents-in-law).

Because their culture places a higher value on women’s domestic and nurturing roles, Javanese women sometimes feel discouraged from pursuing leadership positions. The lack of support from spouses and other family members may hinder women’s ability to assume leadership positions. It is socially stigmatized for women to pursue better careers than their spouses, although they are capable of doing it, as it is viewed as causing disability

within the family [52]. The family is ideally portrayed with the husband as the breadwinner and the wife as a competent housewife. A famous term referring to Javanese women's important duties is "macak, manak, masak", which translates as "to apply makeup (to be beautiful), to bear child(ren), and to cook" [51]. To sum up, being raised in a patriarchal culture with a theological narrative encourages most of our respondents to showcase a style in line with heart and mother leadership theories.

7. Study Limitations and Future Pathways

We recognize a few potential limitations of this study. For example, our respondents may have different concerns and job trajectories. Another limitation is related to varied respondent experiences and knowledge, from having decades of work experience to just working recently. This different exposure creates different perspectives and may impact their responses. Lastly, we are aware of the locus of our study as the only state-owned forest enterprise in Indonesia. As we believe that this enterprise is one of the most historically important forestry workplaces in Indonesia [23], our findings may not be able to be generalized across the sector (i.e., private forest companies).

Future research can be directed based on our respondents' opinions about the importance of good networking for their careers. Theoretically, networking is perceived as being able to address gender inequality. As a critical factor for career progression and success, networking has many advantages for individuals [53]. Individuals who excel at networking generally excel within their organizations.

However, in the forestry sector, which is historically dominated by men, the concept of organizational networks is too often associated with an old boys' club or old boy network [54]. This concept, most of the time, excludes women as the other gender and limits their potential [55]. Therefore, there is a need to form a woman-inspired network with the aim of increasing a sense of belonging and engagement [56].

Nevertheless, the question will be whether this top-down network initiative can effectively help to address gender inequality in the men-dominated forestry sector, specifically in a strong patriarchal culture. Thus, the authors suggest that, in addition to networking, there could be a formal mentoring program between senior women leaders and their juniors. Moreover, mentorship can also be cross-gendered [57]. In men-dominated professional settings, women can, at times, reap benefits from men mentors because men have long been advantaged in the forest sector, including in *Perhutani*. Therefore, in this circumstance, men may provide resources required for success for their mentees [57].

At a practical level, there seems to be potential for eliminating discrimination and stereotypes. To achieve this goal, it is recommended that gender diversity and awareness programs at the company level be further developed. This strategy can be applied not only in *Perhutani* but also in the overall forest industry, and even in other sectors in Indonesia. Enhancing the general awareness on the subject matter can be achieved by educating employees on the challenges faced by underrepresented employee groups and the root causes of these issues (e.g., [5]). Establishing specific and well-defined diversity objectives across various tiers of the organization, as opposed to solely for leadership teams and general purposes, may enable the sector to pinpoint areas of concern and concentrate on resolving the most pressing issues (e.g., [58]).

After determining the women leadership dynamic in *Perhutani*, future research can be conducted to investigate the recently established women's network in *Perhutani*, as a result of the top-down approach from the Government of Indonesia. Interviews and observations can be carried out with key stakeholders to ascertain the network's impacts on women workers. Men worker perspectives as colleagues can be studied to enrich the understanding of the organizational benefits.

Future research can also be directed at exploring mentor relationships based on mentor-mentee gender (same gender vs cross-gender). Methodologically, the monitoring of the evaluation can be done longitudinally such as at the start of the mentorship process, one year after, two years after, etc. The over-year observations are important to document the

mentorship journey and its impacts and benefits, not only in the workplace setting, but also in terms of the actors' personal development.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/merits3030025/s1>, Table S1: Interview protocols and themes.

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