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Why Leadership Style Alone Isn't Enough: Organizational Commitment as the Missing Link Between Women's Leadership and Performance

Luh Sugiani¹, Tettie Setiyarti²

¹STIMI Handayani Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia, tettie.setiyarti84@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: tettie.setiyarti84@gmail.com¹

Abstract: This study examines how women's leadership style shapes employee performance at Madifushi Private Island Resort in the Maldives, and whether organizational commitment carries that effect. The resort has faced a persistent 34 percent employee turnover rate at the same time that the share of women in leadership positions rose from 28 percent in 2022 to 50 percent in 2026, and almost no prior research has examined women's leadership in a setting as geographically isolated as a private island resort. Data were collected from all 100 eligible employees using total sampling and analyzed with Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) in SmartPLS 4.0. Women's leadership style had no significant direct effect on employee performance ($t = 1.533$; $p = 0.063$) but had a strong, significant, positive effect on organizational commitment ($t = 15.532$; $p = 0.000$). Organizational commitment, in turn, significantly improved performance ($t = 3.303$; $p = 0.000$) and fully mediated the relationship between leadership style and performance ($t = 3.251$; $p = 0.001$; VAF = 53.3%). These findings show that women's leadership in this hospitality setting influences performance mainly by building employees' emotional attachment and loyalty rather than acting on performance directly, offering new evidence from an understudied resort-island context and a standpoint-informed research design that examines women's leadership practice on its own terms.

Keywords: women's leadership style, organizational commitment, employee performance, SEM-PLS, resort island

INTRODUCTION

Luxury hospitality in the Maldives has grown fast over the past decade: the number of resorts rose from 105 in 2015 to 186 in 2026 (Maldives Ministry of Tourism, 2026), and that growth has made competition for good employees fiercer than ever. Madifushi Private Island Resort, which opened in 2016, has felt this pressure directly. In 2025 its turnover rate hit 34 percent (HR Department, Madifushi Resort, 2025), noticeably above the industry average of 30 percent (Maldives Association of Tourism Industry, 2025). That gap translates into roughly USD 850,000 a year in recruitment and training costs (Financial Report, Madifushi Resort, 2025), and it chips away at the consistency of service quality that hospitality brands depend on to stay competitive. At the same time, something else has been changing at Madifushi: the

share of women in leadership roles has risen from 28 percent in 2022 to 50 percent in 2026 (HR Department, Madifushi Resort, 2026), part of a deliberate push to strengthen gender diversity at the managerial level. This raises the research question of whether this shift has actually affected employee performance, and if so, through what psychological mechanism that effect travels.

This shift looks even more striking against the wider industry. Nationally, women make up only 11 percent of the total resort workforce in the Maldives, and just 8 percent of Maldivian nationals working in resorts, compared with roughly 39 percent of foreign resort employees (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The gap widens further up the hierarchy: local women's presence in resort leadership and executive roles has been estimated at around 3 percent (Maldives Financial Review, 2021). Comprehensive, leadership-specific statistics for the industry are not published, so this study compares against overall workforce composition rather than a leadership-only benchmark. Even with that caveat, Madifushi's 50 percent female leadership share is a substantial outlier rather than a small deviation from the norm, which matters for how far these findings can be generalized and is also part of what made this resort a practically feasible site for the standpoint-informed design described below. There is also something distinctive about the resort-island setting itself: employees do not just work here, they live here for the length of their contract, so leaders and employees interact almost continuously, far more intensely than in a conventional office-based organization.

Leadership scholars have long recognized that leaders shape employee attitudes and behavior (Yukl, 2013; Northouse, 2022). Leadership is understood here as the process of influencing others so that they understand, accept, and carry out tasks effectively, while helping individuals and groups work together toward shared goals (Yukl, 2013). Leadership theory has moved through several phases, from trait theory to behavioral theory (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2022), and on to contingency and situational approaches that argue leadership effectiveness depends on context, including the leader's gender. When it comes to women's leadership specifically, Eagly and Carli (2007) and Rosener (1990) both point to a tendency toward a more transformational and participative style, marked by two-way communication, empathy, a collaborative approach, and an ability to build trust (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Chin, 2011; Trinidad & Normore, 2005). The evidence on women's leadership effectiveness is not perfectly consistent, however: Paustian-Underdahl and colleagues' (2024) meta-analysis of studies spanning 1970 to 2020 found that women leaders are rated as more effective in both agentic and communal styles compared with men, while other research shows women's leadership running into structural barriers in industries still shaped by gender stereotypes (Eagly et al., 1995; Koenig et al., 2011).

Before turning to the gender-based leadership literature in more depth, it is worth flagging a methodological premise that shapes this whole study. Mainstream leadership theory was largely built from research on male-dominated managerial samples, and masculine, transactional, hierarchical behavior was implicitly treated as the neutral standard against which other styles then get described as a “difference” (Fondas, 1997; Calás & Smircich, 1991). Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations pushes this point further: organizational practices, hierarchies, and even the criteria used to judge what counts as “effective leadership” are not gender-neutral, but are historically built around masculine norms. Read this way, a research design that simply compares women leaders against a male baseline risks reproducing the very standard it is trying to examine, treating masculine-normed leadership as the reference point rather than as one gendered practice among others (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000). This study therefore treats the absence of a male comparison group not as a limitation to be fixed but as a standpoint choice: the aim is to understand how leadership functions on terms internal to women leaders' own practice in this setting, rather than to measure their distance from a

masculine-coded norm. This choice shapes how the findings should be read — they do not claim to show that women lead more, or less, effectively than men would in the same roles, which would require a comparative design not used here. Instead, the study examines how a particular set of leadership behaviors, enacted by women in this specific context, relates to employee commitment and performance.

This stance sits in some tension with the specific literature drawn on next, since Rosener (1990) and Eagly and colleagues largely worked within a tradition that treats women's leadership as measurably different from men's, which is itself part of what Due Billing and Alvesson (2000) warn against essentializing. Following Chin (2011) resolves that tension: the communicative, empathetic, participative, and supportive dimensions identified in that literature are treated here as a description of an observed leadership repertoire, one that prior studies have empirically associated with women leaders, rather than as evidence of an essential or biologically rooted gender difference. These dimensions were kept as the operational basis for measurement because they are well-validated instruments in the hospitality and organizational literature, not because they are assumed to be uniquely or naturally feminine.

Gender-based leadership research took off from the 1980s onward, alongside the growing representation of women in managerial positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Rosener (1990) introduced the concept of “interactive leadership,” describing how women leaders tend to open space for dialogue and encourage subordinates to contribute to decisions, in contrast to the “command and control” pattern more often associated with male leadership. Eagly and Johnson's (1990) meta-analysis of 162 studies backed this up, finding a statistical tendency for women toward a democratic-participative style. Eagly and Carli (2007) add that this style also reflects an adaptation to the pressures and social expectations women face as leaders, not simply a byproduct of gender socialization. More recently, Paustian-Underdahl and colleagues' (2024) meta-analysis, covering fifty years of research, confirms that women leaders are consistently rated as more effective in relationship-oriented behaviors and team engagement.

Drawing this together, women's leadership style is operationalized here through four interconnected dimensions (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Chin, 2011; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Trinidad & Normore, 2005). The first, communicative, means two-way communication, information transparency, and dialogue that involves multiple parties (Rosener, 1990; Eagly & Carli, 2007); within LMX Theory this is the foundation for building in-group relationships marked by trust and mutual support (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The second, empathetic, is the ability to understand employees' individual circumstances and respond to them appropriately (Chin, 2011; Bass & Avolio, 1994); through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) this is a relational investment that encourages employees to reciprocate with positive work attitudes (Liu et al., 2020). The third, participative, means involving employees in decision-making and genuinely valuing their ideas and initiatives (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Trinidad & Normore, 2005), consistent with the principle of individualized consideration in transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The fourth, supportive, covers support for professional development, provision of resources, and emotional support (Chin, 2011); in an isolated resort-island context this partly substitutes for the social network employees lose during their contract period (Kong et al., 2018).

Organizational commitment is understood here as a psychological state reflecting the quality of an employee's relationship with their organization, one that shapes their decision to stay or to leave (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Steers (1977) adds that commitment shows up as a belief in the organization's values, a willingness to give one's best effort, and a genuine desire to remain part of the organization. Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model breaks organizational commitment into affective commitment (emotional attachment and psychological identification with the organization, which Meyer and colleagues' (2002) meta-

analysis found has the strongest correlation with performance of the three, with a communicative, empathetic, supportive leadership style as one of its strongest antecedents), continuance commitment (attachment from a calculative, rational weighing of the costs of leaving, which in an isolated resort-island context would be expected to be stronger simply because job alternatives are limited, though prior research finds it has a relatively weak, and potentially even negative, relationship with performance; Meyer et al., 2002), and normative commitment (a sense of moral obligation to stay, as a form of reciprocation for what the organization has invested in the employee, Meyer & Allen, 1991, something the reciprocity principle in Social Exchange Theory helps explain; Blau, 1964). Because these three components have such different roots and consequences, an expectation is stated up front about which one should carry most of the mediating effect. Meyer and colleagues' (2002) meta-analysis shows affective commitment has the strongest correlation with performance among the three, precisely because it reflects genuine emotional identification rather than calculative attachment or felt obligation. Since a communicative, empathetic, participative, supportive leadership style works mainly by building trust and a sense of belonging — relational rather than transactional mechanisms — it should be expected to cultivate affective commitment specifically, with that component carrying most of the downstream effect on performance, while continuance commitment plays a comparatively minor role. On an isolated resort island where alternative employment is scarce, continuance commitment could easily be elevated by circumstance rather than by leadership quality, and prior evidence suggests it correlates weakly, or even negatively, with performance (Meyer et al., 2002). This distinction matters for interpretation later: if the data show affective commitment dominating the descriptive profile while continuance commitment lags behind, that would support the mechanism theorized here rather than an alternative “entrapment” story, in which employees simply stay and perform because they lack other options.

Employee performance is defined as the tangible outcomes of work behavior that reflect an individual's contribution to the organization's strategic goals (Armstrong & Baron, 1998). In hospitality, performance is never just technical or quantitative; it also includes the quality of interaction between employees and guests, which shapes satisfaction, loyalty, and the resort's reputation (Deery & Jago, 2015). On a resort island, where the line between professional and personal life is thin, work performance needs to be understood within the distinctive social relationships and life experiences that come with living where one works (Kong et al., 2018). Following Wibowo (2010), employee performance is operationalized through three dimensions: quantity (the volume of work completed to standard), quality (consistency of service and guest satisfaction), and efficiency (how well time, effort, and cost resources are managed).

Several theoretical strands underpin the hypothesized model. Social Exchange Theory (SET), formulated by Blau (1964) building on Homans (1958), views social interaction within organizations as an exchange process bound by the norm of reciprocity: receiving something of value creates a pull to give something back. Unlike economic exchange, which is bound by contract, social exchange runs on trust and long-term interaction, which is exactly why it is so relevant to leadership dynamics in the intense, personal world of a resort island; a communicative, empathetic, participative, supportive style of women's leadership is understood here as a form of social investment, one that employees respond to with emotional commitment and performance that goes beyond what any contract requires (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX), developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), emphasizes that the quality of the leader-employee relationship is dyadic and unique to each pair, ranging across a spectrum from transactional out-group relationships to in-group relationships built on trust and support that go beyond formal demands; an empathetic,

participative, communicative style, more often associated with women's leadership, tends to expand that in-group circle (Chin, 2011), which is the mechanism linking women's leadership style to greater organizational commitment, which then drives improved employee performance.

SET and LMX explain why a relational leadership style should build commitment, but neither explains why leadership style might fail to affect performance directly, a pattern that also needs to be accounted for rather than explained away after the fact. Kerr and Jermier's (1978) substitutes-for-leadership framework fills that gap: in settings with strong formalization, standardized task procedures, and professional norms, those structural features can substitute for a leader's direct behavioral influence on task outcomes, effectively soaking up the variance that leadership style would otherwise explain. A five-star resort is a strong candidate for exactly these conditions, since service quality, guest-interaction protocols, and operational standards tend to be brand-defined and heavily formalized, which limits how much any individual leader's style can directly shape day-to-day performance. Under this framework, leadership style would be expected to influence performance mainly through the psychological, attitudinal route (organizational commitment) rather than through a direct behavioral route, since institutional standardization has already claimed much of that direct route. This gives an a priori theoretical basis for expecting the direct path, from women's leadership style to employee performance, to be weak or non-significant, rather than treating a null direct effect as a surprising or merely leftover finding. Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory helps explain why the indirect, commitment-based pathway should be especially strong in this specific setting. Resort-island employment combines high job demands, extended live-in contracts, blurred work-life boundaries, and geographic isolation from outside social support (Kong et al., 2018), with a comparatively narrow set of external resources available to cushion those demands. In JD-R terms, a communicative, empathetic, participative, supportive leader acts as a job resource, supplying the psychological support and sense of connection that, in a conventional urban or office-based job, would partly come from external social networks and daily contact with family and friends outside work. Because employees here have fewer alternative resources to draw on, leader-supplied relational resources should convert into organizational commitment more strongly than in less isolated settings, with that commitment then sustaining performance by buffering the demands of the role. This lines up with broader evidence that transformational, relationally oriented leadership shapes work-related outcomes mainly by mediating employees' psychological and boundary-management experience rather than through a direct path, including evidence that leaders' behavior affects employees' work-life boundary experience through such mediated mechanisms rather than directly (Hammond et al., 2015). Together, substitutes-for-leadership theory and JD-R theory jointly predict the pattern tested here: a weak direct effect of leadership style on performance, and a comparatively strong indirect effect that runs through organizational commitment.

Most prior research focuses on the direct effect of leadership on performance without exploring what might sit between the two (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Vecchio, 2002), and studies that do treat organizational commitment as a mediator have generally used general leadership models rather than gender-based ones (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Nguyen et al., 2017; Hernandez et al., 2011; Yang & Islam, 2019), with results varying between full mediation in manufacturing settings and partial mediation in service settings. Most of this research has also taken place in urban or office-based organizations (Smith & Johnson, 2020; Wang et al., 2019; Brown & Anderson, 2019), leaving the remote resort-island environment, with its geographic isolation and limited social support (Deery & Jago, 2015; Kong et al., 2018), almost entirely untouched. Liu, Shen, and Gao (2020) examine women's leadership and organizational

commitment in Chinese hospitality, but their outcome variable is career advancement rather than employee performance. Paustian-Underdahl and colleagues (2024) and Boubakri and colleagues (2025) add further empirical evidence on the effectiveness and impact of women's leadership representation, but at the level of leadership evaluation and corporate environmental performance, not individual employee performance mediated by organizational commitment. Putting this together, three main empirical gaps emerge: first, no study has yet translated women's leadership style into empirically measurable communicative, empathetic, participative, and supportive dimensions within the hospitality industry; second, organizational commitment's role as a mediator between gender-based leadership and employee performance has rarely been tested explicitly; and third, the remote, residential resort-island context, with its unusually intense leader-employee interaction, has not been widely used as a setting for gender-based leadership research. Beyond these empirical gaps, this study also makes a methodological and epistemological contribution: much of the prior literature on women's leadership implicitly or explicitly relies on a male comparison baseline to make claims about effectiveness or difference (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly et al., 1995), a design choice that risks measuring women leaders against a masculine-coded norm rather than examining their practice on its own terms (Acker, 1990; Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000). By deliberately studying women leaders' practice without a male comparison group, this study offers a design consistent with a standpoint-informed approach to gender and leadership research (Fondas, 1997; Calás & Smircich, 1991), one that this resort's unusually high concentration of women in leadership made practically feasible in the first place. On the methods side, conventional regression approaches (Baron & Kenny, 1986) were set aside since they struggle to test mediation simultaneously while accounting for measurement error; SEM-PLS is better suited to complex models with limited sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019, 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2021), so that is the approach used throughout.

Given these gaps, this study examines the effect of women's leadership style on employee performance, with organizational commitment as an intervening variable, at Madifushi Private Island Resort Maldives, using SEM-PLS. Specifically, it sets out to answer four research questions: 1) does women's leadership style affect employee performance; 2) does it affect organizational commitment; 3) does organizational commitment affect employee performance; and 4) does organizational commitment mediate the relationship between women's leadership style and employee performance? Theoretically, this study aims to help open the “black box” in the leadership-performance relationship (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2024; Eagly et al., 1995; Koenig et al., 2011) and to extend Social Exchange Theory and Leader-Member Exchange Theory into the territory of gender-based leadership. Practically, the findings are intended to help Madifushi's management design more targeted leadership development strategies for women and bring turnover costs down, with relevance for other international hospitality companies facing similar challenges.

A mediation model is proposed in which women's leadership style (X) affects employee performance (Y) both directly (H1, path c') and indirectly through organizational commitment (Z) as an intervening variable ($H4 = H2 \times H3$, path $a \times b$). H1: Women's leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at Madifushi Private Island Resort Maldives. H2: Women's leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employees' organizational commitment at Madifushi Private Island Resort Maldives. H3: Organizational commitment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at Madifushi Private Island Resort Maldives. H4: Organizational commitment mediates the effect of women's leadership style on employee performance at Madifushi Private Island Resort Maldives. To determine the type of mediation, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) value is

combined with a test of the simultaneous significance of the direct and indirect effects, following Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010) and Cepeda Carrión, Nitzl, and Roldán (2017).

METHODS

Research Design

This study takes a quantitative approach, with the object of study being the effect of women's leadership style on employee performance through organizational commitment as an intervening variable, at Madifushi Private Island Resort Maldives. The research subjects are employees who work directly under a woman leader's supervision, have a minimum tenure of three months, and do not hold a director or General Manager position.

Population and Sample

The research population was estimated at 100 to 130 people out of roughly 200 total Madifushi Resort employees, given that about half of the leadership positions are held by women. The total sampling (census) technique was used, yielding 100 respondents who met the inclusion criteria. This sample size aligns with Hair and colleagues' (2019) recommendation that SEM-PLS performs well with a minimum of 100 observations for relatively simple mediation models. Most respondents were male (68 percent), aged 31 to 35 (31 percent), and had 1 to 2 years of tenure (35 percent).

Operational Definition of Variables

Three main variables were measured using a reflective measurement model (Hair et al., 2019) on a 1 to 5 Likert scale: Women's Leadership Style (X) through 16 indicators across four dimensions (communicative, empathetic, participative, supportive); Organizational Commitment (Z) through 12 indicators across three dimensions (affective, continuance, normative commitment); and Employee Performance (Y) through 9 indicators across three dimensions (quantity, quality, efficiency).

Data Collection Technique

Primary data were collected through a structured bilingual (Indonesian-English) questionnaire, distributed in cooperation with Madifushi Resort's HR Department, supplemented with limited semi-structured interviews with 3 to 5 key informants (the HR Manager, department heads, and operational employees) to help interpret the statistical results in context. Secondary data were drawn from HR Department reports, internal financial reports, the Maldives Ministry of Tourism, and the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) in SmartPLS 4.0, chosen because it suits complex mediation models, does not require data normality, and can estimate path coefficients while accounting for measurement error (Hair et al., 2019, 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2021). The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated, covering indicator reliability (loading factor ≥ 0.70), internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability ≥ 0.70), convergent validity (AVE ≥ 0.50), and discriminant validity (the Fornell-Larcker criterion, Fornell & Larcker, 1981, and HTMT < 0.85 , Henseler et al., 2015). Second, the structural model (inner model) was evaluated, covering VIF (below 3.3 as ideal, below 5 as a conservative threshold), R^2 , f^2 , Q^2 (through blindfolding, with an omission distance of 7), and the significance of path coefficients through bootstrapping with 5,000 sub-samples ($t > 1.96$; $p < 0.05$). For the mediation test (H4), bootstrapping of the indirect effect ($a \times b$) was combined

with a calculation of VAF (Indirect Effect divided by Total Effect, times 100 percent), while also considering the simultaneous significance of the direct and indirect effects, following Zhao and colleagues (2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Evaluation

Testing showed that three indicators on the Women's Leadership Style construct ($X1 = 0.694$; $X2 = 0.659$; $X6 = 0.586$), one indicator on Organizational Commitment ($Z1 = 0.694$; $Z6 = 0.642$), and two indicators on Employee Performance ($Y1 = 0.597$; $Y9 = 0.654$) fell below the 0.70 outer-loading threshold. Even so, the AVE values for all three constructs sat above 0.50 ($X = 0.661$; $Z = 0.639$; $Y = 0.693$), and Composite Reliability was above 0.70 for each ($X = 0.961$; $Z = 0.955$; $Y = 0.952$), so all three constructs were judged valid and reliable overall. Interestingly, the indicators with low loadings, $X1$ and $X2$, actually had the highest descriptive mean scores (4.5 and 4.3), which reads as low variation in how respondents answered on aspects they already treat as a general standard of women's leadership, rather than as a sign of construct weakness. Discriminant validity held up under both the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and HTMT (below 0.85; Henseler et al., 2015), and every construct proved reliable by Cronbach's Alpha (above 0.60) and Composite Reliability (above 0.70).

Descriptive Profile of Research Variables

The Women's Leadership Style variable came out with a mean of 4.3, a “very high” category, with communication openness scoring highest (4.43) and empathy and individual concern scoring lowest (4.25), particularly on sensitivity to work pressure and involving employees in decisions. Organizational Commitment averaged 4.0, a “high” category, and was dominated by pride in being part of the organization, which is affective commitment, while continuance commitment consistently scored lowest. Employee Performance averaged 4.5, “very high,” with five-star service standards and work-time management scoring highest.

Structural Model Evaluation

R^2 values show that Women's Leadership Style explains 45.1 percent of Organizational Commitment, while Women's Leadership Style and Organizational Commitment together explain 28.7 percent of Employee Performance. The f^2 values tell a clear story too: the effect of Women's Leadership Style on Employee Performance is small (0.036), its effect on Organizational Commitment is large (0.820), and Organizational Commitment's effect on Employee Performance is small-to-medium (0.104). Q^2 values of 0.432 for Organizational Commitment and 0.173 for Employee Performance suggest the model has adequate predictive relevance. Inner VIF values among the exogenous variables were within acceptable limits, so multicollinearity is not threatening the stability of the structural path estimates.

Table 1. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	Women's Leadership Style → Employee Performance (direct)	1.533	0.063	Rejected
H2	Women's Leadership Style → Organizational Commitment	15.532	0.000	Accepted
H3	Organizational Commitment → Employee Performance	3.303	0.000	Accepted
H4	Women's Leadership Style → Organizational Commitment → Employee Performance (indirect)	3.251	0.001	Accepted

Source: Primary data processed (2026)

When the Variance Accounted For (VAF) was calculated: Direct Effect = 0.216; Indirect Effect = $0.671 \times 0.366 = 0.246$; Total Effect = 0.462, giving a VAF of 53.3 percent. That figure conventionally falls within the partial mediation range (20 to 80 percent), but the bootstrapping results show the direct effect is not significant while the indirect effect is. Following Zhao and colleagues (2010) and Hair and colleagues (2019), this significance pattern is treated as the primary basis for deciding the type of mediation, leading to the conclusion that organizational commitment acts as a full mediator, what is sometimes called indirect-only mediation.

H1 — Women's Leadership Style and Employee Performance. A non-significant direct effect was found here ($t = 1.533$; $p = 0.063$; $f^2 = 0.036$), indicating that a positive perception of women's leadership (mean 4.3) does not, on its own, translate into a direct bump in performance (mean 4.5). Women's Leadership Style and Organizational Commitment together account for only 28.7 percent of the variance in Employee Performance (R^2), leaving roughly 71 percent attributable to factors such as individual competence, work experience, reward systems, workload, organizational culture, and operational standards, all outside this model. This is exactly the pattern that Substitutes-for-Leadership Theory and JD-R Theory led us to expect: a five-star resort's brand-defined service protocols leave comparatively little room for any individual leader's style to move performance directly. The descriptive data back this up: employee performance scored highest on precisely the standardized, protocol-governed aspects (five-star service standards, work-time management) that this framework predicts would respond least to discretionary leadership style. A parallel appears on the leadership side: the two indicators with the highest descriptive means but the lowest outer loadings (X_1 , X_2) both concern communication openness, which reads as an institutionalized service-culture expectation in this resort tier (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) rather than something that differentiates one leader from another.

H2 — Women's Leadership Style and Organizational Commitment. This effect came through strong and significant ($t = 15.532$; $p = 0.000$; $f^2 = 0.820$; $R^2 = 0.451$), consistent with the reciprocity principle in Social Exchange Theory and with how in-group relationships form under LMX Theory. Using Cohen's (1988) conventional f^2 benchmarks of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for small, medium, and large effects in behavioral research, an effect size of 0.820 is more than double the threshold for “large,” a magnitude rarely reported for a single leadership-style predictor of commitment. Reading this through the JD-R lens, this unusually large effect fits a setting where leader-supplied relational resources carry more weight than they would somewhere less isolated, precisely because employees here have fewer alternative sources of psychological support to draw on.

H3 — Organizational Commitment and Employee Performance. A positive and significant effect was found here too ($t = 3.303$; $p = 0.000$), fitting the interpretation that employees with high emotional attachment and loyalty tend to work more responsibly and keep service quality more consistent, in line with Meyer and colleagues' (2002) finding that affective commitment correlates most strongly with performance among the commitment components. The descriptive data showed affective commitment, pride in being part of the organization, dominating, while continuance commitment consistently scored lowest. This is exactly the profile theorized earlier as consistent with a genuine attachment mechanism rather than an “entrapment” account, in which employees would simply stay and perform because they lack other options on an isolated island. Had continuance commitment been elevated instead, that alternative explanation would be harder to rule out; instead, it is affective commitment doing the work, although ruling out entrapment entirely would require a comparative or longitudinal design, which was not used here.

H4 — The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment. The full mediation finding (VAF = 53.3 percent) indicates that more than half of the estimated effect of women's leadership style on employee performance travels through organizational commitment: it appears to build emotional attachment and loyalty first, and that attachment is what shows up as employees working more optimally. Because the design is cross-sectional, this sequence is consistent with a mediated process, but it is not direct evidence of temporal causal order. It is worth situating this finding against prior mediation research, most of which reports partial rather than full mediation. Nguyen and colleagues (2017) and Yang and Islam (2019), studying Vietnamese public-sector and restaurant settings, found partial mediation, with leadership retaining a direct effect on performance alongside its indirect effect through commitment. Those settings do not share Madifushi's particular combination of a highly standardized, brand-governed service environment (Kerr & Jermier, 1978) and a geographically isolated, live-in employment arrangement that concentrates employees' access to relational resources onto the leader specifically (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Under the JD-R framing, the comparative isolation of a resort-island context would be expected to route a larger share of leadership's total influence through the commitment channel than in less isolated, more resource-rich settings, a boundary condition this full-mediation finding fits, though confirming it would need a direct multi-site comparison. A related, more recent meta-analysis by Gupta and Agrawal (2025), synthesizing 27 studies on the job satisfaction-organizational commitment relationship, offers a narrower kind of triangulation here. Its predictor is job satisfaction rather than leadership style, so it does not directly benchmark the size of the path found in this study, but its finding that gender significantly moderates the strength of employees' commitment-related relationships reinforces the premise that commitment mechanisms are not gender-neutral and deserve examination specifically within gender-based leadership research.

Taken together, these results point to the novelty of this study: rather than treating women's leadership as directly determining performance, the findings show that its influence is channeled almost entirely through organizational commitment, a pattern consistent with substitutes-for-leadership and JD-R theorizing in a highly standardized, geographically isolated, live-in resort-island setting that has rarely been studied in gender-based leadership research. This resort-island boundary condition, together with the standpoint-informed design that examines women's leadership on its own terms rather than against a male baseline, is the study's principal contribution to the leadership-commitment-performance literature.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

1. Women's Leadership Style has no significant direct effect on Employee Performance ($t = 1.533$; $p = 0.063$), indicating that other factors, such as individual competence, reward systems, work experience, organizational culture, and the work environment, also shape performance.
2. Women's Leadership Style has a positive and significant effect on Organizational Commitment ($t = 15.532$; $p = 0.000$).
3. Organizational Commitment has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance ($t = 3.303$; $p = 0.000$).
4. Organizational Commitment fully mediates the statistical relationship between Women's Leadership Style and Employee Performance ($t = 3.251$; $p = 0.001$; VAF = 53.3%). This is consistent with women's leadership being associated with employee performance primarily by strengthening organizational commitment. Because the design is cross-sectional, this sequence reflects the pattern most consistent with the data, not confirmed temporal causation.

Limitations

This study has several limitations, each pointing toward a direction for future work. The design is cross-sectional, so the leadership-to-commitment-to-performance pattern found here reflects the sequence most consistent with the data, not confirmed temporal causal order; a longitudinal or multi-wave design would allow this sequence to be tested directly. The sample also comes from a single resort whose 50 percent female leadership share sits well above the Maldivian industry baseline, so these findings should be generalized cautiously to resorts with more typical gender compositions in leadership. Relatedly, because a male-leader comparison group was not included by design, these findings describe how this leadership repertoire relates to commitment and performance on its own terms, not how it compares to male leadership in the same roles; a comparative design would be needed to make that claim. Replication at sites closer to the industry norm would help establish whether the mediation pattern found here depends on this unusually high representation of women in leadership, or holds independently of it. Two further characteristics of the respondent sample were not tested as moderators, though both are plausible candidates for follow-up analysis. The subordinate sample is 68 percent male, broadly matching the male-dominated composition of the Maldivian resort workforce nationally (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2024); whether subordinate gender moderates how women's leadership style translates into commitment or performance was not tested, so it cannot be ruled out that male and female subordinates experience that leadership differently, and a multi-group PLS analysis by subordinate gender would be a direct next step. Similarly, 35 percent of respondents had 1 to 2 years of tenure. The unusually large leadership-to-commitment effect ($f^2 = 0.820$) was interpreted through a JD-R lens as a feature of the isolated resort-island context, but a workforce skewed toward shorter tenure is also one where relational bonds with a direct supervisor may still be forming; since tenure was not tested as a moderator, its potential contribution to the size of this effect cannot be separated from the isolation-based account offered here.

Recommendations

For Madifushi Private Island Resort's management, the recommendation is to maintain the women's leadership style that has clearly built organizational commitment, particularly through open communication and employee involvement, while also strengthening other performance-supporting factors such as reward systems, competency development, and objective performance evaluation, alongside commitment-strengthening programs like employee engagement initiatives and a positive organizational culture. Leaders should also pay more attention to individual empathy and to involving employees in decision-making, since these two aspects had relatively lower descriptive scores in the data. Future studies should broaden the scope of research objects, increase the sample size, use a longer observation period, and include other relevant variables, such as work motivation, job satisfaction, organizational culture, compensation, and employee engagement, to develop a more comprehensive research model. Different analytical methods, such as multi-group SEM-PLS by subordinate gender or tenure, System Dynamics, Artificial Intelligence, or a longitudinal approach, along with a mixed-methods design incorporating in-depth interviews and a larger sample spanning multiple resorts or companies, may provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms tested here.

Author Contributions

All authors made significant contributions to this study. These contributions included research conceptualization, development of the theoretical framework, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, manuscript preparation, scholarly revision, and final approval of the manuscript for publication. All authors confirm that they have read and approved the final version of the article.

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