WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES TO ADVANCE THE PHARMACEUTICAL BUSINESS IN INDONESIA : AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Efforts to advance public welfare through industrial development require penta-helix collaboration to achieve goals more effectively and efficiently, especially in the pharmaceutical sector, where raw materials are still dependent on other countries. This poses a shared challenge requiring all elements of the nation, especially the government, to play a significant role in collaborating on all national resources towards independence, sovereignty, and national progress for the welfare of the people. The pharmaceutical sector in Indonesia is experiencing rapid progress, but on the other hand, it requires a focus on gender-based human resource development, particularly women's leadership. In fact, the role of women in the pharmaceutical industry is significant, but opportunities for leadership remain very limited. In general, the number of women holding managerial positions in Indonesia in 2010 was around 12%, increasing to around 20% by 2025. Challenges and obstacles are highly dynamic, influenced by many factors, including traditional customs and the still-low level of education for women. The women's emancipation championed is still enjoyed by elite women, so their roles and contributions are still insignificant. Gender issues in the pharmaceutical industry, particularly female leadership, remain a significant issue. Strategies are needed to address this by improving the quality and quantity of female human resources, enabling them to achieve top career positions. Therefore, this research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive design with an ethnographic approach. The author served as one of the primary informants. Therefore, triangulation of data collection methods was necessary, including interviews, documentation, and the vision and mission of female leadership during the researcher's tenure as CEO of a pharmaceutical company in Indonesia. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative methods to describe the phenomenon using an ethnographic approach, reflecting the researcher's actions during her tenure as CEO. The results revealed that the strategies used by female leadership to advance the pharmaceutical business in Indonesia are as follows: a) Self-confidence, equipped with adequate education and experience; b) Readiness to compete objectively with other leaders and aspiring leaders, both male and female; c) Working hard, intelligently, and prioritizing the company's interests; d) Building a solid team; e) Developing a pentahelix-based network; f) Understanding business changes in the pharmaceutical industry; g) Seeking support from top leaders; h) Developing talented human resources. i) Understanding and applying management and leadership skills from global business leaders; and j) adapting to change, especially in the VUCA era of digital advancement.

BACKGROUND

Efforts to educate and advance public welfare through industrial development require penta-helix collaboration to achieve goals more effectively and efficiently, especially in the pharmaceutical sector, where raw materials are still dependent on other countries. This is a shared challenge requiring all elements of the nation, especially the government, to play a significant role in collaborating on all national resources towards independence, sovereignty, and national progress for the welfare of the people. The pharmaceutical sector in Indonesia is experiencing rapid progress, but on the other hand, it requires a focus on gender-based human resource development, particularly women's leadership.

Increasing the role of women in the business world, including the pharmaceutical sector, remains a relevant topic in the context of economic development in Indonesia. Although women's involvement in this sector has increased, the challenges and obstacles they face remain significant. In the pharmaceutical industry, where innovation and regulatory compliance are crucial, female leadership can provide new perspectives that can advance business growth. Overall, although there has been a significant increase in the number of women holding managerial positions in Indonesia between 2010 and 20% by 2025, challenges and obstacles still need to be overcome to achieve greater gender equality in leadership. Continuous efforts are needed from all stakeholders to ensure that women have equal access and opportunities in the business world, including in the pharmaceutical sector.

Women's leadership strategies in the pharmaceutical business in Indonesia are interesting to explore using an ethnographic approach, as it allows researchers to understand the social, cultural, and structural dynamics that influence how women lead and manage businesses. Ethnography, as a qualitative research approach, allows researchers to delve into local contexts, explore interactions between individuals, and analyze how cultural norms and values influence leadership practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

In Indonesia, while the presence of women in leadership positions in the pharmaceutical sector is increasing, it remains far from proportional. Research shows that women often face various challenges, including gender stereotypes, lack of access to professional networks, and limitations in strategic decision-making (ILO, 2020). On the other hand, women leaders possess unique capabilities in team empowerment, collaboration, and innovation, which can enhance a company's competitiveness in the market.

Therefore, this study aims to identify and describe women's leadership strategies in advancing the pharmaceutical industry in Indonesia using an auto-ethnographic approach.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Women's leadership refers to the role and influence of women in positions of authority and decision-making across various sectors, including politics, business, and community organizations. This emphasizes the importance of gender diversity in leadership, promoting equal opportunities and

representation for women across all sectors. Characteristics of women's leadership include a greater emphasis on emotional factors, a valuing of teamwork and collective commitment, a greater development of empathy, a greater ability to connect emotionally with their teams, fostering a positive and productive work environment and encouraging participation, and sharing information and power with those they lead. These conditions require encouragement from various parties to significantly increase women's access to top management.

Research conducted by McKinsey & Company, Women in the Workplace 2021, found that women's leadership in the business and public sectors can create healthier organizations. The research also shows that women's leadership is capable of producing comprehensive and inclusive decisions because it considers various aspects. Women's sensitivity is considered capable of formulating organizational or company strategies that align with consumer needs and drive improved company performance.

Women's leadership is associated with feminine character and traits. Etymologically, the word "feminine" comes from the Latin word "femina," which translates into English as feminine, meaning "female" or "feminine." The combination of leadership and feminist traits or characteristics gives rise to a concept called "feminist leadership." "Feminist" refers to attitudes, while "leadership" refers to actions. Therefore, feminist leadership can be defined as actions taken by leaders based on feminist traits.

Smith explains five "feminist" attributes: 1) Caring, defined as a commitment to acting on behalf of others. Caring is inherent in relational leadership, demonstrating concern and compassion for all team members, colleagues, and subordinates. 2) Vision, defined as the ability to articulate and formulate original ideas through a process facilitated by motivation. Visionary leaders create a work environment characterized by mutual trust, collaboration, and participation among team members, colleagues, and subordinates. 3) Collaboration, defined as the ability to work in groups, support team members, and create an energetic environment. Collaboration involves inclusivity, idea sharing, connectedness, and cooperation. 4) Courage, defined as the ability to move forward and seek new ideas in the practical world. This also includes a willingness to take risks for the advancement of the team and the individual. 5) Intuition, defined as the ability to give equal weight to experience and abstraction, the mind and the heart. Intuition acts as an initiator of the capacity of the mind and the heart, which is inseparable from a relational leadership approach (Smit, 2013).

The success of women as leaders is influenced by several factors. Nurmi mentioned Kanter's view, that there are four dominant factors that influence women's leadership, namely: Mother, Seductress, Pet and Iron Maiden (Nurmi, 2020). On the other hand, there is a Glass Ceiling phenomenon that affects women workers in their careers in companies. Factors such as company culture, factors from the

woman herself, lack of support from company leaders, the government, and family. The glass ceiling refers to the invisible barriers that women face in achieving leadership positions, even if they are qualified or have the required experience. Many influencing factors include: a) Cultural Barriers and Stereotypes where there is often an assumption that leadership is associated with masculine traits, such as assertiveness and ambition. This can make women considered less suitable for top positions, even though many have relevant skills and experience; b) Lack of Networking and Mentorship. Professional networks are often dominated by men, so women may have difficulty reaching mentors or sponsors who can help them rise to leadership positions.; c) Obstacles in Promotion and Career Development due to limited access; and unsupportive company policies.

Overcoming these challenges requires a collaborative effort from various parties to create a fairer and more equitable work environment. Women need to develop the right mindset, improve their skills, build networks, and utilize social media. Companies need to adapt their human resources functions to utilize women's abilities and competencies at the executive level. Governments and organizations also need to support gender equality through relevant policies and programs.

Furthermore, women who aspire to a career in top management must understand the principles and functions of management, which are a series of activities that include planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling, which align with the management functions proposed by George Terry. In their book, Contemporary Human Resource Management: Transformation of the Indonesian Workforce Towards the Industrial Revolution 4.0 from a National Resilience Perspective, Hadiningrat et al. (2025a) explain that POAC management functions are a series of interconnected cycles that function as a system to achieve goals effectively and efficiently.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The success of women as leaders is influenced by several factors. Nurmi mentioned Kanter's view, that there are four dominant factors that influence women's leadership, namely: Mother, Seductress, Pet and Iron Maiden (Nurmi, 2020). On the other hand, there is a Glass Ceiling phenomenon that affects women workers in their careers in companies. Factors such as company culture, factors from the woman herself, lack of support from company leaders, the government, and family. The glass ceiling refers to the invisible barriers that women face in achieving leadership positions, even if they are qualified or have the required experience. Many influencing factors include: a) Cultural Barriers and Stereotypes where there is often an assumption that leadership is associated with masculine traits, such as assertiveness and ambition. This can make women considered less suitable for top positions, even though many have relevant skills and experience; b) Lack of Networking and Mentorship. Professional

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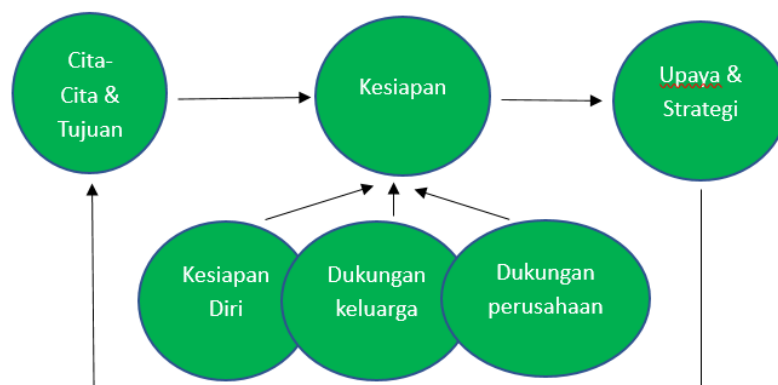
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender issues in the pharmaceutical industry remain a challenge, as access to career levels from managerial positions to top management requires extra effort. In the company where the researcher achieved leadership, it was a long struggle, as she was the first woman to hold a branch manager position. At the time, company regulations required branch managers and managers to be men. However, other required qualifications were attainable by anyone, not just men.

This struggle to climb the career ladder is what the researcher has compiled into a scientific paper, hoping to inspire women to achieve their best and reach top management. This research is not intended to boast, but rather as a source of academic literacy and education, where good ideas can be published for greater benefit.

In this case, strategy, as a tactic or method employed by someone to achieve success and a proud career, varies from one person to another. Many influencing factors, including not only internal factors, are also crucial, including family factors such as parents, husband, and children. Furthermore, superiors, colleagues, and subordinates significantly influence a person's success, including researchers in achieving their careers as CEOs. A multidimensional career path is not easy to share with the public, but researchers attempt to share their own experiences.

From this, there are at least three main factors that influence a person's performance: personal factors, family factors, and work environment factors. If these three factors support each other, it is hoped that achieving goals will be easier. Based on the researcher's experience, each individual must have ideals and goals that guide us towards achieving them. Based on the researcher's experience, it can be explained that the leadership strategies for women in advancing the pharmaceutical business in Indonesia are as follows: a) Self-confidence, equipped with adequate quality education and experience; b) Ready to compete objectively with other leaders and aspiring leaders, both male and female; c) Working hard, intelligently, and prioritizing the company's interests; d) Building a solid teamwork; e) Developing a pentahelix-based network; f) Understanding business changes in the pharmaceutical industry; g) Seeking support from top leaders; h) Developing talented human resources; and i) Understanding and applying management and leadership skills from world business leaders; and j) adapting to change, especially in the era of digital progress that is all about VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity).

In simple terms, it can be depicted in a chart as follows:

Source: Researcher Compilation, 2025

Figure: Flowchart of Readiness, Efforts, and Strategies for Achieving Goals

Women's leadership strategies in the era of globalization must adapt to rapid changes and existing challenges. With an inclusive, innovative, and values-based approach, women can make significant contributions to addressing global dynamics, while simultaneously driving progress in the workplace and society as a whole.

Qualitative data analysis revealed that women's leadership strategies for advancing the pharmaceutical business in Indonesia are as follows: a) Self-confidence, equipped with adequate education and experience; b) Readiness to compete objectively with other leaders and aspiring leaders, both male and female; c) Working hard, intelligently, and prioritizing the company's interests; d) Building a solid team; e) Developing a pentahelix-based network; f) Understanding business changes in the pharmaceutical industry; g) Seeking support from top leaders; h) Developing talented human resources; and i) Understanding and applying management and leadership skills from global business leaders; and j) Adapting to change, especially in the era of digital advancement characterized by VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity).

CONCLUSION

From the data analysis above, it can be concluded that: the strategy of women's leadership in advancing the Pharmaceutical business in Indonesia is carried out as follows: a) Self-confidence equipped with adequate quality education and experience; b) Ready to compete objectively with other leaders and prospective leaders, both men and women; c) working hard, smart and prioritizing the interests of the company; d) Building a solid teamwork; e) Developing a pentha helix-based network; f) Understanding business changes in the Pharmaceutical industry; g) seeking support from top leaders; h) developing talented human resources; and i) Understanding and applying management and leadership knowledge from world business figures; and j) adapting to change, especially in the era of digital progress that is all VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity).

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