

# Crisis Management in the Hospitality Industry Analyzed Through a Social Sustainability Focus on Male and Female Leadership Styles

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**Abstract:** Human capital management's managerial practices during a crisis ensure the achievement of main strategic objectives and result in long-term values, such as organizational learning, resilience, innovation, and business flexibility. Therefore, this study considers the social sustainability perspective in the hospitality industry as a critical aspect of crisis management. It specifically discusses differences and similarities between males' and females' leadership styles during the COVID-19 pandemic, adopting Goll and Zięba's (2025) Hospitality Human Capital Process Model in Crisis Management as the guiding framework. The value of the given qualitative view is a more in-depth understanding of how gender can determine a leader's focus in stressful events such as a crisis. The results indicated that female leaders adopt a more relationship-oriented leadership style during crises, utilizing emotional intelligence to determine effective ways to ensure the team's and the business's safety. In contrast, male leaders take a more strategic approach, focusing on organizational adaptation, finances, and morale. Additionally, the findings revealed that female leaders prioritize social capital, evident in their emotional support for employees and a strong emphasis on health, safety, and overall well-being through team and company bonding. Male leaders placed greater focus on structural capital. Despite their differing priorities, male and female leaders shared the goal of enduring extreme situations. Ultimately, the practical conclusion is that gender-diverse boards will likely be more efficient in ensuring long-term survival in the hospitality industry. Unlike previous studies focused on HR professionals in large hospitality enterprises, this research targeted small restaurant owners and managers in a distinct hospitality sector to offer a typically neglected perspective. It provides food for thought not only for academics but also for small business owners/managers.

**Keywords:** Hospitality Industry, Crisis Management, Qualitative Study, Leadership Style, Gender Studies, Extreme Context

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## 1. Introduction

Managing the business in times of crisis or disruptive changes is an inevitable challenge for business owners and managers, especially concerning the hospitality industry (Leta and Chan, 2021). Since this industry is highly human-dependent (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022), it is reasonable and justified to investigate crisis management issues through the lenses of Human Capital (HC) management practices (Alnassafi, 2022). Those practices are important due to the industry's challenges and the United Nations' (Ahmad et al., 2024) expectations regarding Sustainable Development Goals, especially concerning social aspects like decent work and employees' well-being. By cultivating qualities such as responsiveness, competency, flexibility, and adaptability, organizations can reach a level of sustainability that mitigates their negative impacts and proactively generates positive contributions to society and the environment (Dyllick and Muff, 2016). At the heart of sustainability lies the responsibility to manage resources, including human resources, wisely for the long term while fostering a commitment to solidarity in development—not at the expense of others. Company culture reflected in organizational behaviors affects employees and significantly impacts sustainability (Kucharska and Karwowska, 2025). Leaders create a company culture through their behavior examples. Therefore, this study focuses on leadership.

As the primary decision-makers responsible for implementing sustainable practices, managers play a pivotal role in initiating and ensuring social sustainability within their organizations through their leadership and actions directed toward the workforce (Heath and Norman, 2004; Wellton and Lainpelto, 2021). Recent studies on Human Capital management during a crisis in hospitality show that many managerial actions of managers/owners are very much focused on assuring employees with stable income, mental health, and overall well-being (Goll and Zieba, 2025), which is in line with sustainability principles. According to empirical research on employees' needs and expectations from leaders in the hospitality industry during the crisis, hospitality business leaders should show emotional intelligence, be empathetic, care about the mental health of the staff, and at the same time, think reasonably and react very fast to disrupting changes and unexpected challenges (Erburu et al., 2024; Kachniewska and Para, 2023). However, little is known about specific leadership styles or approaches adopted by hospitality business management, especially concerning male and female leadership

(Manoharan and Singal, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to address this gap and determine what leadership styles females and males in hospitality businesses represent regarding the social sustainability aspects of HC management in hospitality during a crisis.

## **2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

### **2.1 Human Capital in Crisis Management in the Hospitality industry**

Human Capital (HC) encompasses the skills, abilities, and experiences of individuals within a business (Nafukho et al., 2004). As one of the most human-centric industries, the hospitality sector—comprising primarily restaurant and hotel businesses—relies heavily on HC to achieve high performance (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022; Kianto et al., 2010; Taegoo et al., 2012). The distinctive nature of HC in hospitality sets it apart from other industries, leading to the concept of hospitality-specific Human Capital (Young et al., 2005). The critical importance of HC in the hospitality industry is reflected in its role in driving innovation, securing competitive advantages, and enhancing financial outcomes, all of which are enabled by the workforce (Jogarathnam, 2018; Kang et al., 2007; Molina-Morales and Martínez-Fernández, 2010).

A crisis is an unpredictable event that disrupts stakeholder expectations and impacts organizational performance (Coombs, 2021). Effective Crisis Management requires rapid adaptation of managerial activities, with Human Capital (HC) playing a crucial role (Alnassafi, 2022). Integrating HC into Crisis Management plans is essential, as employees are pivotal during all crisis phases (Vardarlier, 2016). Empirical studies confirm that proper human resource management practices positively influence business performance in crises (Mirzapour et al., 2019). Managers' understanding of employees' needs and abilities enhances organizational resilience (Lazarov, 2020). In tourism, developing HC's capacity for crisis response is critical for risk mitigation (Pforr and Hosie, 2007). According to Goll and Zięba (2025), Human Capital Management managerial practices during a crisis ensure the achievement of main strategic objectives and result in long-term values, such as organizational learning, resilience, innovation, and business. Therefore, this study considers the social sustainability perspective in the hospitality industry as a critical aspect of crisis management.

### **2.2 Social Sustainability in Hospitality**

Social sustainability in hospitality emphasizes the critical role of Human Capital (HC) and the well-being of employees, reflecting the industry's reliance on people-centered services (Melissen, 2013), which is in line with Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 8: well-being and decent work (Huck, 2014). Despite its importance, hospitality research often prioritizes environmental and economic aspects, overlooking employee welfare (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). Managing HC effectively involves fostering employee engagement, addressing well-being, and ensuring management's fair labor practices, which are essential for sustainable operations (Filimonau and De Coteau, 2019). However, a detailed view of human capital management practices regarding assuring well-being and decent work conditions for employees is still lacking (Wang and Cheung, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to provide deep insight into HC management practices during the pandemic crisis, when health, safety, and well-being issues were especially prioritized, to find out: 'if' and 'how' hospitality managers/owners seek social sustainability with regard to their workforce.

### **2.3 Gender and Leadership in Hospitality**

Considering feminine and masculine leadership styles, in the literature, we distinguish relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership, respectively. These two distinct styles are briefly analyzed in Fiedler's Contingency Theory (Bons and Fiedler, 1976; Kachniewska and Para, 2023; Peters et al., 1985). Task-oriented leaders prioritize achieving objectives and maintaining productivity, while relationship-oriented leaders emphasize interpersonal relationships and team cohesion, fostering a supportive and collaborative environment. According to recent studies regarding crisis management in the hospitality industry, employees expect from leaders androgynous leadership. They require both concentration on their well-being (Erburu et al., 2024) and, at the same time, fast reactions, firm decision-making, and straightforward communication (Kachniewska and Para, 2023). However, in hospitality management literature, even though gender is the most popular diversity dimension investigated, it is mostly concentrated on employee's perceptions and expectations. Studies focusing on male or female performance and roles as leaders of hospitality businesses are lacking (Manoharan and Singal, 2017; Mooney, 2020). Therefore, in this paper, the authors want to find out what males' and females' leadership styles during

the COVID-19 pandemic and identify possible differences and similarities between them, adopting Goll and Zięba's Hospitality Human Capital Process Model in Crisis Management (2025) as the guiding framework.

## 2.4 Hospitality Human Capital Process Model in Crisis Management

The Hospitality Human Capital Process Model in Crisis Management (Goll and Zieba, 2025) provides a strategic framework for effectively managing human capital during crises. The model centers on three core strategic objectives of hospitality managers/owners during a crisis: keeping employees, adapting to new conditions, and minimizing costs. These objectives serve as the guidance for management actions regarding employees. Key management practices include open communication, engaging employees in decision-making, diversifying roles, and prioritizing employee well-being and safety. The financial stability of employees is maintained by ensuring regular salaries. By involving staff in diverse activities and leveraging their creativity, businesses can unlock hidden potential and drive innovation. The model emphasizes the long-term value gained through managerial actions and HC, including increased flexibility, enhanced organizational learning, and resilience. The model describes the general process of crisis management regarding HC and the guiding principles for this process, but it does not provide information on leaders' characteristics or approaches. Depending on the leadership style of managers/owners, the priority of specific strategic objectives or managerial activities may differ (Bons and Fiedler, 1976; Peters et al., 1985). This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the model works in the case of male and female hospitality leadership styles.

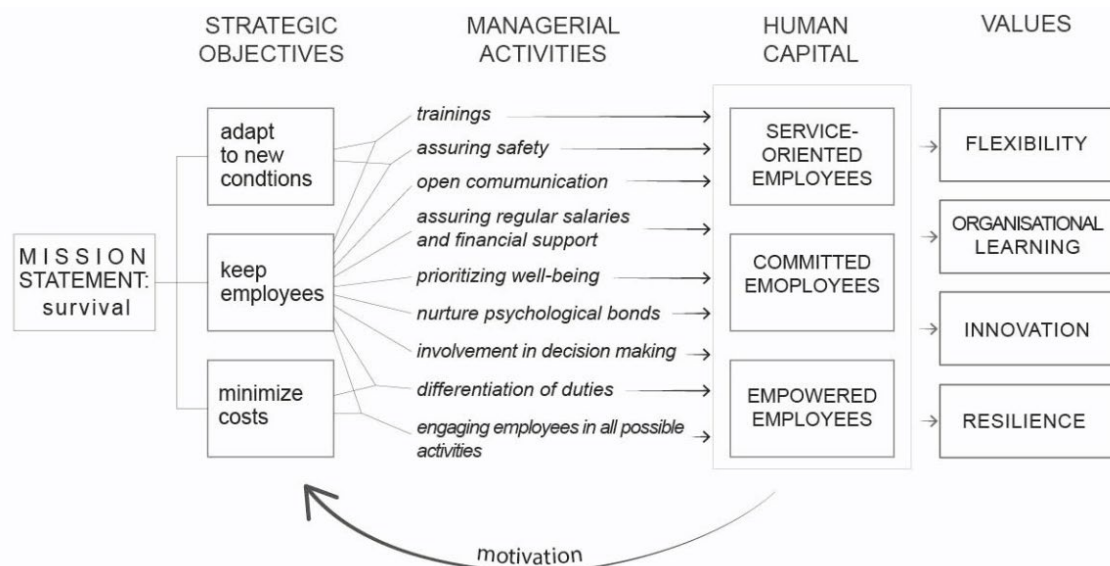


Figure 1: Hospitality Human Capital Process Model in Crisis Management Source: Goll and Zieba (2025)

## 3. Methodology

The study is based on the same data as the assumed guiding framework (Goll and Zieba, 2025). The authors employed face-to-face semi-structured interviews to understand organizational processes, interviewees' emotions, expressions, motivations, and reasons for decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the context of employees. This approach allowed flexibility in conversations and resulted in high-quality, open-ended narrative data (Creswell, 2009).

Convenience sampling was used to maximize data quality and credibility (Maxwell, 2012). Unlike previous studies focused on HR professionals in large hospitality enterprises (e.g., Young, 2005), this research targeted small restaurant owners and managers in a distinct hospitality sector to offer a typically neglected perspective. The sample comprised 12 restaurant managers or owners—6 male and 6 female—from diverse types of restaurant establishments in Tricity (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot), Poland. The table below summarizes the sample structure and statistics.

Restaurants were selected based on their survival of the COVID-19 pandemic (operational for at least one year before the pandemic and still open as of April 2022). We also excluded the businesses that were used to takeaway services before the pandemic or operated only during the summer tourist season since such restaurants faced different challenges regarding pandemic restrictions. The study was conducted in 2022,

focusing on the crisis event (March 2020) and early post-crisis phases (December 2021) of the Crisis Management framework.

**Table 1: Sample structure and statistics**

Restaurant	Type	Interviewee	Gender	Time of the interview	Amount of obtained data [words]
A	Fine-dining	Manager	Female	68 minutes	4927
B	Fine-dining	Manager	Male	32 minutes	3300
C	Fine-dining	Owner	Female	58 minutes	5872
D	Fine-dining	Owner	Male	50 minutes	6801
E	With specific cuisine	Owner	Female	37 minutes	5153
F	With specific cuisine	Owner	Male	33 minutes	4945
G	With specific cuisine	Manager	Female	28 minutes	3001
H	"Home kitchen"	Owner	Female	35 minutes	5085
I	"Home kitchen"	Manager	Female	24 minutes	2806
J	Based on regional products	Manager	Male	30 minutes	3065
K	Canteen	Co-owner	Male	47 minutes	7102
L	Canteen	Brand manager	Male	57 minutes	4164

As a data analysis method, we used narrative analysis (Earthy and Cronin, 2008) to capture the complex emotions, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of interviewees, which are critical for assessing leadership style. We aimed to identify which strategic objectives and managerial activities respondents prioritized and why. Data saturation was reached, confirming that extending the sample would not yield additional insights (Creswell, 2013).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

When asked about the first days and weeks of the pandemic and what did it look like female and male respondents described different memories. Women, focused mainly on emotions, like fear or sadness and helplessness. For example, respondent A (details in Table 1) said: *"The greatest stress I had was about the people. I was truly overwhelmed, I cried many nights... I had printed termination letters, reductions... and I didn't know what to do, what I will have to do but do not want to... In the end I decided not to do any of that because I believed when they said some aid was coming. [...] they have families, children, and homes, all of which come with expenses covered by their current salary."* This shows the emotional turmoil the owner faced when considering the impact on her employees, she was aware of their financial obligations and empathized them, and also her emotionally driven decision to protect employees even in uncertain circumstances. Other female respondents also expressed deep concern regarding the staff, and their future, as they felt responsibility for assuring them stable income, which was emphasized by respondent E: *"I thought, 'Oh God, what's going to happen?' Because with so many people on employment contracts, I couldn't possibly let them go – I didn't want to!"* Female respondents often called their staff "family members" (A, E, H). Some even declared that caring for and maintaining the staff as employees was as crucial as ensuring a safe financial situation for their families. Such data proves that female restaurant business owners have higher emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 2008), a deep connection, a feeling of responsibility for employees, and prioritize keeping employees as a goal during the crisis. It all presents female leaders as remarkably socially capital-oriented.

Considering the male perspective, their first answers regarding the beginning of the pandemic concentrated mainly on specific actions taken, decision-making processes, and analysis of the situation. Respondent B, while elaborating on the moment of the first lockdown and some doubts regarding keeping the restaurant open or closing, said: *"It was about what we could gain and what we could lose. Pure calculation. On paper, we looked at what we [could] gain and what we lose."* His response was very firm and showed that the prioritization of actions was driven by the aim to adapt to a new reality while minimizing possible losses. A very similar approach was described by respondent L. Respondent L very directly pointed out his priorities concerning financial obligations during the crisis: *"For us, the priority was the employee working with us, then bills, and lastly*

ourselves. We knew that if we lost people, we'd lose the restaurant." However, even though he mentioned employees' regular salaries to keep employees, he emphasized that the goal was framed around the operational necessity of retaining skilled staff. Respondent K said: *"Every day, we read new regulations and thought about what we could do to get through it all."* This reflects his leadership focus on continuous adaptation and rapid execution of solutions. Other male respondents, while referring to the beginning of the pandemic, also mentioned many direct actions and decisions made, like the pasteurization of food that could be wasted to avoid losses, quick redesign of the menu to switch to delivery mode overnight, what highlights their focus on adaptation as the strategic objective.

Both male and female leaders set the three main strategic objectives outlined in Goll and Zieba's (2025) Hospitality Human Capital Process Model: keeping employees, adapting to new conditions, and minimizing costs. However, this study's results show that the emphasis on each objective varied based on gender. While female leaders quite straightforwardly emphasized maintaining the workforce, male leaders' top priorities were cost minimization and adaptation to new realities, with employee retention viewed as a means to sustain operations.

Furthermore, considering specific managerial activities adopted by leaders during the pandemic, results also showed some discrepancies regarding prioritizing specific actions. Men mainly concentrated on operational challenges and financial constraints regarding pandemic effects on the business and staff. Female respondents directly expressed deep care for the health and safety of the staff to a much wider extent, emphasizing its importance during the lockdowns.

Respondent A, while explaining why she decided to fully close the restaurant at the beginning, said: *"None of us [respondent referring to her as the owner and her husband as her support] wanted to put the team or our and their loved ones at risk..."*. Moreover, female leaders also described additional efforts (besides those advised by the government regulations) taken to mitigate the risk of employees getting infected, like specific communication channels and notification systems when someone had contact with an infected person (respondent G). Another managerial activity emphasized by female respondents was open communication. They wanted to be fully transparent with employees and express their concerns regarding the future of the business. For example, respondent C said: *"We openly discussed what worked and what didn't. This way, everyone felt like part of the team and understood why we made certain decisions."* This highlights the trust-building approach of a women leader.

Female leaders also showed awareness and empathy towards their team members; for example, respondent C said: *"Everyone wanted to return to normal... Isolation was a terrible psychological change [for them]."* During the interviews, female leaders, while referring to reasons behind their actions, very often emphasized that they wanted to comfort their employees, give them a sense of normality in times of hard restrictions, and assure them of emotional support, which is reflected in statements of respondent E:

*"We continued running an organic farmer's market [a new service provided by restaurant]... so that the team would feel they'd have something to return to. It was about not losing our minds and ensuring our team's morale didn't drop to the point where we wouldn't know what to do."*

Respondent H: *"We worked only to keep the people. Even though the deliveries didn't even cover our costs, we kept going because it was more important to us that the employees had something to do and felt that we weren't abandoning them."*

Respondent A: *"For my mental health and that of the employees, we needed to start doing something to maintain a connection to everyday life."*

The owners' decisions were driven by a desire to protect mental health and general well-being, even when operations were not profitable. Furthermore, all female respondents claimed that they treated the pandemic as time for tightening bonds and bringing the whole team closer together.

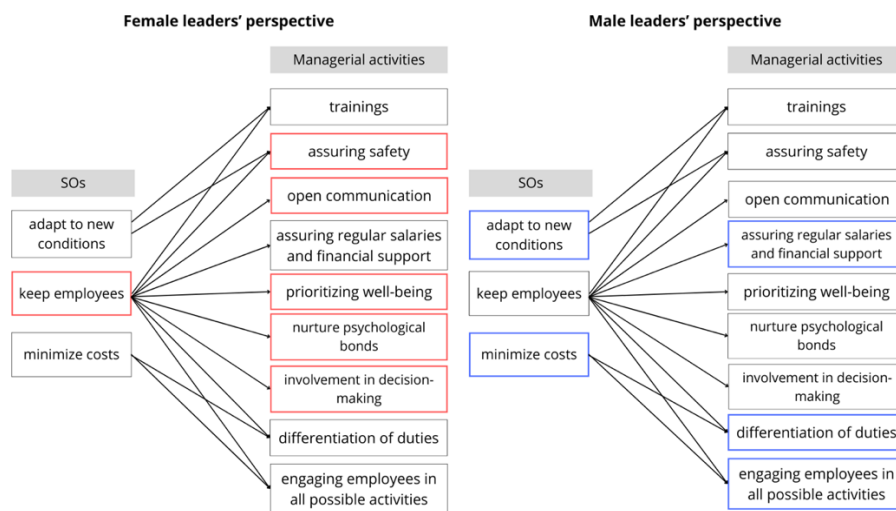
Another highly emphasized aspect of managing human capital mentioned by female respondents considered involving all staff members into all decision-making processes. They emphasized that it was a way of showing employees that their opinions mattered, giving them hope for a better future and a sense of influence over the situation. For example, respondent H claimed: *"Every day we would gather and develop new dishes. Everyone got involved in creating the new menu, which not only occupied us but also built the belief that we were preparing for better days"*.

In contrast to females, male respondents paid much more attention to the assurance of regular salaries as the main form of supporting employees. They much more often referred to governmental aids, regular or even



advanced payments as a way of maintaining the staff. Respondents B and K even mentioned sacrificing owners' personal savings to cover all salaries on time. In general, during the interviews, males were much more concise and descriptive regarding their actions taken to manage their employees. They pointed out multiple examples of how they differentiated the workload among the staff members or engaged them in unusual activities. For instance, respondent K said: *"Those who were waiters or bartenders became our delivery drivers."* Respondent J said: *"We spent time thoroughly cleaning the restaurant. Those who weren't on duty painted furniture and cleaned."* Respondent F said: *"We always created a plan for the coming week, setting out who was responsible for what. Employees had clearly defined roles, which allowed us to maintain control in the chaos."*

Even though they expressed that they were aware of the importance of employees' well-being, they did not use any words or statements that would indicate their emotional connection to staff members. Figure 2 below visualizes the summary of the differences in the prioritization of strategic objectives and managerial activities of female and male leaders following Goll's and Zięba's (2025) model.



**Figure 2: Prioritization of the specific strategic objectives and managerial activities with regard to Human Capital during crisis by female (left graph) and male (right graph) leaders.**

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the Hospitality Human Capital Process Model in Crisis Management by Goll and Zięba (2025)

Current gender leadership research shows varied and complex findings on what type of leadership (task- or relationship-oriented) females and males represent (Gipson et al., 2017). Our study partially clarifies this issue concerning the crisis management context. Taking an overall look at interviewees' expressions and attitudes and bearing in mind their prioritized strategic objectives and managerial activities, female leaders represent a more relationship-oriented leadership style during the crisis (Peters et al., 1985). They put more emphasis on their own and employees' feelings and psychological needs, treating them as a very important aspect of their decision-making. Respondent A even straightforwardly stated: *"I strongly believe in a woman's instinct [as my key to success]... women that are responsible for the emotions [in the workplace and work environment]. I definitely make daily decisions based on emotions."* That highlights females' belief in emotional intelligence and instinct as core elements of the leadership style (Kachniewska and Para, 2023; Mayer et al., 2008). On the other hand, male leaders were much more concentrated on the achievement of the strategic objectives and how they did it through the lenses of Human Capital management during the crisis. They described actions taken without diving into many details or personal reflections. That goes in line with the characteristic of task-oriented leadership (Peters et al., 1985). This approach can be briefly summed up by a quote from respondent D: *"It was an idea, a reaction, and we implemented it immediately. I'm someone who moves fast, so when an idea arises, I act right away... [...] I want to see results immediately."*

Overall, female leaders displayed a much stronger relationship-oriented leadership style, emphasizing emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and team cohesion, which supports findings by Hoque and Islam (2022). Male leaders, by contrast, exhibited a more task-oriented approach, prioritizing operational stability, resource management, and financial pragmatism.

However, obtained findings do not suggest that female leaders are exclusively relationship-oriented or that male leaders lack emotional intelligence and focus solely on task completion. Instead, the results highlight the predominant leadership styles observed among female and male leaders during the pandemic. From a broader perspective, both male and female leaders emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence and strategic thinking in navigating crises. These findings align with previous research, which suggests that androgynous traits are most effective in leadership roles (Kachniewska and Para, 2023). Furthermore, our study reinforces the significance of integrating relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership traits for successful crisis management. This approach includes fostering an environment where employees are encouraged to propose creative solutions, such as by actively involving them in decision-making processes and contributing to the continuous improvement of crisis management strategies (Ledi et al., 2024).

Overall, Both male and female leaders recognized the same strategic objectives and implemented similar managerial activities concerning Human Capital during the crisis, but the prioritization of these efforts varied by gender. Our findings, alongside the work of Goll and Zieba (2025) on human capital management, provide empirical evidence that hospitality managers and owners view employees as the cornerstone of their business success. This perspective is deeply rooted in the recognition of employees' general and mental well-being as very important aspect of human capital management, resulting in organizational resilience and performance. Leaders' focus on empathy, team cohesion, and supportive workplace dynamics not only fostered high staff morale and loyalty but also directly aligned with the principles of social sustainability. These principles, as outlined by Ahmad et al. (2024) and Quintana-García et al. (2018), emphasize the importance of providing decent work conditions, promoting employees' well-being, and ensuring good treatment across the workforce. Actions taken during the pandemic, such as prioritizing mental health, maintaining open communication, and reinforcing team unity, highlight a commitment to creating a socially sustainable work environment. This alignment underscores the critical role of the hospitality industry in advancing social sustainability goals, particularly during times of crisis. By fostering a culture of care and well-being, hospitality leaders demonstrated that prioritizing the human element is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic advantage (Wang and Cheung, 2024). These findings emphasize the necessity of integrating social sustainability into workforce management strategies to enhance resilience and long-term success in the hospitality sector.

## 5. Limitations, Practical Implications, and Further Research Directions

The study provides valuable insights into male and female leadership styles in the context of the pandemic crisis but acknowledges several limitations. Firstly, it focuses primarily on the experiences and perceptions of owners and managers regarding the pandemic, without including employees' perspectives, which could offer a more well-rounded understanding of leadership. Secondly, the research is framed within the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic, covering the crisis period and the early stages of post-crisis recovery, which may limit its generalizability to other situations. Additionally, the sample size is relatively small and geographically restricted to restaurant owners and managers in Northern Polish cities. Finally, using narrative qualitative data analysis introduces a potential for bias.

As future research directions, we propose intersecting leadership styles and social sustainability beyond crisis contexts, focusing on gender-specific approaches in diverse cultural and industry settings. Moreover, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term aspects of gender leadership styles within the hospitality industry. Additionally, future work could investigate employees' perspectives to complement managerial viewpoints, offering a holistic understanding of leadership styles and their impacts on employees' well-being. Expanding geographic and sectoral scope would also bring additional insights, showing potential differences depending on culture, environment, and organizational settings.

Ultimately, the general practical implication is that gender-diverse boards will likely be more efficient in ensuring long-term survival in the hospitality industry. However, this statement requires further empirical evidence. Moreover, the conclusion regarding women's emotional intelligence as a leadership advantage over males sounds convincing in the light of the given data, but it should also be more directly proven.

## 6. Conclusions

The results of this study reveal that during crises, female leaders of small and medium-sized restaurant enterprises often adopt an emotional intelligence-driven (visible in extreme empathy), well-being-oriented approach to human capital management. In contrast, male leaders focus more on task completion and operational efficiency. Despite these differences, both genders recognize the critical role of employees in

achieving business success and long-term resilience, making efforts to provide not only financial security but also emotional support to their teams.

The study showed that the alignment of leadership behaviors with social sustainability goals during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores that prioritizing HC is not only an ethical obligation but also a cornerstone of long-term organizational success. A people-centered approach is vital for hospitality leaders to secure competitive advantage, drive business success, and contribute to the sustainable development of the entire industry. The leadership style, however, may vary from more task-oriented to relationship-oriented, with the leader's gender being a significant factor explaining this variation. Our study casts some light on this issue concerning the crisis management context.

We found clear evidence that both genders recognize the critical role of employees in achieving business success and long-term resilience. They make efforts to provide financial security and emotional support to their teams. Consequently, both male and female leaders emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence and strategic thinking in navigating crises. Regardless of gender, the leaders set three strategic objectives: keeping employees, adapting to new conditions, and minimizing costs.

This being said, we find significant differences concerning emphasis on each objective. Female leaders focused primarily on maintaining the workforce, and male leaders concentrated on cost minimization and adaptation to new conditions. They also perceived employee retention mainly as a means to sustain operations during a crisis. When in hardship, female owners turn to an emotionally driven, well-being-oriented approach to HC management, whereas male owners execute leadership by focusing on task completion and operational efficiency.

Our findings suggest balancing traditionally masculine and feminine leadership styles is essential for effective crisis management. Both relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership traits should be integrated for successful business operations in turbulent times of crisis. In the context of small businesses, where leadership is concentrated in the person of the owner, that signals the need for fostering an environment where employees of both genders are encouraged to propose creative solutions, such as by actively involving them in decision-making processes and contributing to the continuous improvement of crisis management strategies. This way, a more integrated leadership style in small businesses may be achieved.

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