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# Evaluation of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Türkiye in Terms of Leadership Styles and Behaviors: The Case of Fahrettin Koca



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### Abstract

This study was conducted to reveal the leadership styles and behaviors exhibited by the Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca, in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye. It is believed that this study will make an important contribution to the literature on crisis management in general and the relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and political leadership in particular by highlighting the relationship between leadership styles and behaviors exhibited during the pandemic process and the success of pandemic management. This study uses an exploratory case study approach to examine what kind of leadership style emerges through the example of Fahrettin Koca and how this leadership style affects pandemic management. This study used an individual interview data-collection technique. The data obtained from the study were analyzed using Maxqda analysis program. In this study, we concluded that Fahrettin Koca exhibited the most task-oriented leadership style among the leadership styles. This study makes an important contribution to the literature by showing that political leaders, in an effective fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in particular and other transnational crises in general, can behave in a way that includes not only one leadership style but also some characteristics of different leadership styles.

### Keywords

Crisis management • COVID-19 pandemic • Leadership styles • Fahrettin Koca

### Author Note

This manuscript is based on an finished doctoral dissertation entitled “Evaluation of COVID-19 pandemic management in Turkey in terms of leadership behaviors: The case of Fahrettin Koca



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## Evaluation of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Türkiye in Terms of Leadership Styles and Behaviors: The Case of Fahrettin Koca

The COVID-19 outbreak occurred in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and it spread to many countries worldwide in a short time, affecting the entire world. A pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, in response to the global crisis. The COVID-19 crisis, which occurred unexpectedly and faced unprepared countries, negatively affected them socially and economically. Countries can cope with problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and develop solutions by implementing effective crisis management. In effective crisis management, leaders' behaviors and policies implemented by the administration play an important role. Political, social, and economic crises emphasize the importance of good leadership and effective management in identifying risks, contingency planning, and coordinating the various organizations that can solve these challenges (Head, 2019, p. 189).

The Covid-19 pandemic was observed in Türkiye on March 11, 2020, approximately 1-2 months later than in other European countries, with preliminary preparations and measures taken by the executive within the framework of the advisory decisions of the members of the Scientific Committee. In Türkiye, the pandemic has been monitored under the control of the Ministry of Health and the recommendations of the members of the Scientific Committee from the beginning until the transition to a controlled life on June 1, 2021. In Türkiye, strict measures were taken by imposing curfews in March, April, and May 2020, which can be expressed as the first period after the official announcement of the COVID-19 outbreak. The number of cases was controlled during this period, and successful crisis management was demonstrated. Starting in June, curfews were lifted, measures were relaxed, and a controlled social life was initiated. At the end of the summer months, the number of cases increased rapidly, and the process that can be described as the second period of the pandemic. In particular, restrictions and bans were implemented in October and November 2020, given the significant increase in COVID-19 cases. Within the framework of the fight against COVID-19, the process that can be expressed as the third period of the outbreak began with the introduction of the first vaccine in January 2021.

It has been determined that the most important factor for the increase in the number of cases in Türkiye is the desire to be in public places, human mobility, and the desire of people to be in closed areas more intensively with the onset of winter months. Vaccines are administered free of charge to citizens according to the priority order in vaccination programs established within the framework of the fight against the pandemic. Based on Türkiye's pandemic control policy, it can be seen that the pandemic was first defined and put on the agenda, proposals for solution strategies were developed, participation mechanisms were activated, and decisions were made based on evidence from the opinions of the members of the Scientific Committee; at this stage, the necessary legal infrastructures were created and supported by legal regulations regarding the decisions taken in line with the precautionary strategy; the adopted precautionary strategies were put into practice, and citizens were informed by explaining the current developments (Turan and Çelikyay, 2020, p.12).

Although there was an increase in the number of cases and mortality rates in the second and third periods, the COVID-19 crisis was successfully managed in Türkiye (especially in the first period) compared to many other countries (Gül and Çelebi, 2020, p. 1703; Güngör, 2020, p. 819). According to the statement of the

World Health Organization (WHO) on December 4, 2020, Türkiye is in a better situation than other countries in the fight against the pandemic (WHO, 2020).

The role of political leadership in effectively managing the H1N1 pandemic is undeniable. The approach of political leaders as effective agents of power against a pandemic is an important factor in the process of struggle. The behaviors and statements of leaders affect the agenda and direction of the fight against the pandemic. Simultaneously, political leaders' attitudes are crucial to countries' role in the fight against the pandemic and affect the course of the picture regarding the number of cases. In this regard, New Zealand and Germany are good examples of political leaders' approaches and fights against the pandemic. By contrast, Brazil and the USA can be considered bad examples (Gezgüç and Duman, 2020, p. 255).

In studies addressing the fight against the Covid19 crisis in terms of leadership, it is seen that the leadership behavior exhibited by political leaders is generally addressed by establishing a relationship with the level of trust in the leader and the success or effectiveness of crisis management (Fukuyama, 2020; Kleinfeld, 2020; Uzun, 2021). In these studies, it is generally stated that in countries such as Turkey and Germany, which responded quickly to the Covid-19 pandemic and displayed a strong and decisive attitude, the level of support and trust in leaders increased, which increased the success of pandemic management. Some studies have stated that leaders who tend to challenge restrictions, act narcissistically and ideologically, and engage in populist behavior are inadequate and ineffective in pandemic management (Maak et al., 2021; Oktay, 2024; Tourish, 2020). For example, Tourish (2020), in his study conceptualizing populist leaders, stated that the President of Madagascar displayed incompetent leadership, UK Prime Minister Johnson displayed denial, US President Trump displayed denial and marginalization, and Hungarian Prime Minister Orban displayed authoritarian leadership. Maak et al. (2021) characterized New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern and German Chancellor Merkel as responsible leaders in terms of their quick responses to Covid-19 and their trust in science, while US President Trump and Brazilian President Bolsonaro were characterized as ineffective leaders who exhibited narcissistic and ideological behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

When the studies in the literature are examined, it is emphasized that the Minister of Health Koca, who manages the process in Turkey, also exhibits trustworthy leadership behavior. Analyzing the studies on the fight against the Covid-19 crisis in terms of leadership, it is seen that the studies are generally theoretical, not based on a comprehensive empirical study, and remain at the level of general conclusions. In addition, effective or ineffective leadership behavior exhibited by political leaders can be explained through uniform leadership styles. However, while fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders may exhibit behaviors that include some characteristics of different leadership styles during different time periods. The leadership styles exhibited may also have different effects on the level of trust in the leader and the success of crisis management.

In this regard, this study aims to reveal which leadership styles and leadership traits are exhibited by the Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca, in effective crisis management and to what extent. In the fight against Covid-19, the focus is on leadership behaviors of heads of state or prime ministers, according to the government system. Although the political leader of Turkey is President Erdoğan, since the management of the pandemic process in Turkey is carried out through Fahrettin Koca and the scientific board under his leadership, the leadership styles of Fahrettin Koca were determined as the subject of the study. It is believed

<sup>1</sup>The authors also make a link between gender, the COVID-19 crisis, and leadership. According to the authors, the "lucky" countries in the pandemic have all had women leaders who have acted quickly, trusted science, and led with warmth and compassion. Examples include Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, Angela Merkel in Germany, Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan, Mette Fredriksen in Denmark, Sanna Marin in Finland, Erna Solberg in Norway, and Karin Jakobsdot in Iceland.

that this study will make an important contribution to the literature on crisis management in general and the relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and political leadership, in particular, by showing the relationship between leadership styles and behaviors exhibited during the pandemic and the success of pandemic management. The theoretical part of the study presents general information about the concepts of crisis management, the role of leaders in the crisis management process, and the main leadership styles exhibited in crisis management. After providing information about the methodology and scope of the research in the methodology section, the leadership styles and behavioral characteristics of Fahrettin Koca during the COVID-19 outbreak were revealed in the research section. In the conclusion part of the study, recommendations were made by providing information obtained from the analyses.

### Conceptual Framework: Leadership Styles in Crisis Management

A *crisis* can be defined as "a situation in which there is a perceived threat to the core values or life-sustaining functions of a social system, and which requires immediate corrective action under uncertain conditions" (Rosenthal et al., 1989, p. 10). The basic concepts describing a crisis are uncertainty, serious threat, limited time, and urgent decision-making. Uncertainty is the main characteristic of crises. This is because the causes, consequences, and possible solutions are yet to be fully understood in the early stages of a crisis (Boin and Bynander, 2015, p. 125). Although there is an urgent need for action, what can or should be done must be clarified. The circumstances under which decisions must be made are complex, disorganized, and dynamic (Christensen et al., 2015, p. 355). When crises occur, they cause significant damage and disasters and therefore involve serious threats that must be managed or minimized.

On the other hand, crisis management can be expressed as a management model developed to overcome serious threats that require urgent decisions within a limited time in an environment full of uncertainties in the best way with the least damage. *Crisis management* involves systematically making decisions, forming a team that can act on decisions, and making new decisions by quickly taking the results of the implementation. At the same time, it includes a collection of activities carried out in a systematic, rational, and planned manner to eliminate the situation characterized as a crisis (Tüz, 2004, p. 85). Today's transboundary crises, such as the H1N1 pandemic, major earthquakes, hurricanes, and economic crises, which impact national borders and policy areas, are more challenging to manage (Ansell et al., 2010, p. 195). Leadership has come to the fore in the successful management of such crises.

*Leadership* can be defined as the process of influencing other individuals to identify their needs within the context of the tasks that need to be done and to understand how the task will be done and the totality of personal and collective efforts to achieve shared or targeted goals (Yukl, 2010, p. 8). In times of crisis, leaders are given extraordinary importance, and how leaders manage crises has come to the fore. This is because a lack of leadership during a crisis can worsen things, making the crisis effects unmanageable. Effective leadership is essential for successful crisis management and communication healthily and accurately. Leaders' skills, abilities, and characteristics are important in planning and managing crisis processes. In an uncertain and dynamic crisis environment, leadership requires a rapid understanding of risks, selection, and processing of information, timely search and exchange of information across multiple institutions and jurisdictions, the ability to anticipate potential risks, and the ability to make timely decisions during crisis intervention (Sadiq et al., 2021, p. 75).

To demonstrate appropriate behavior in a crisis, the leader must correctly apply skills such as decision-making, communication, and maintaining an effective organizational culture (Wooten and James, 2008,

p. 352). Basic leadership competencies that are effective in crisis management include communication, decisiveness, flexibility, problem-solving approach, creativity, motivation, team building, strategic planning, decision-making and influencing (Kapucu and Üstün, 2018, p. 553). Leaders who play an active role in the crisis process should try to prevent crises or reduce the costs caused by crises by successfully managing the risks in the organization (Hittle and Leonard, 2011, p. 1191). In times of crisis, leaders are expected to think holistically, bring together experts and stakeholders, systematically act compassionately, and mediate by mobilizing others to solve problems (Maak and Pless, 2006, p. 112).

In addition to leaders' skills and abilities, leadership styles and behaviors are also of great importance in effectively managing crisis processes. When leadership styles in crisis management are examined in the literature, it is found that task-oriented, charismatic, visionary, transformational, servant, collaborative, and authoritarian leadership types are effective.

When task-oriented leadership is considered in general terms, it appears in the context of behaviors, such as planning, clarifying, and controlling (Yukl, 2010, p. 288). Task-oriented leaders prioritize achieving set goals and setting clear deadlines for the timely completion of their tasks (Fey et al., 2001, p. 622). Simultaneously, leaders create a high level of morale and motivation in the group to accomplish their tasks and share their views to solve problems (Hermann, 2005, p. 180). Task-oriented leadership is more effective, especially in crisis environments, where the structure of a job is uncertain, and in emergency arrangements. It can be stated that a task-oriented leadership style can reduce and balance the level of anxiety experienced by individuals during the crisis process, and for this reason, the preference for task-oriented leadership increases when there is a high level of anxiety in society (Özkılıçcı and Mamatoğlu, 2021, p. 229). Some empirical studies have found that task-oriented leadership has the highest impact on the effectiveness of crisis management and that task-oriented leaders perceive crises more positively (İbrahimoglu, 2011, p. 731; Kapucu and Üstün, 2018, p. 548).

Charismatic leaders, another type of leadership that emerges in times of crisis, have extraordinary qualities with their role in saving others thanks to their strong personality traits. The strong personality traits of such leaders include self-confidence, admiration, courage, motivation, and persuasiveness (Çelik and Sünbül, 2008, p. 52). Charismatic leaders often emerge in times of high anxiety and crisis to meet people's needs and improve their organizational climate. In the eyes of followers, the charismatic leader is seen as a hero who knows everything and can cope with all difficulties (Zel, 2001, p. 152). An examination of the studies conducted in the literature, it is clear that charismatic leadership characteristics have a significant positive effect on the management of crisis processes and that it is a type of leadership that increases success (Ceylan and Yöndem, 2021, p. 302; Alkhawani et al., 2016, p. 126; Balaban, 2018, p. 116).

Visionary leadership is a horizon leadership style that can look at the future from a different perspective, try to shape the future in the best way, open new horizons for organizations and followers under all circumstances, convince employees that they can do better than their jobs by making good use of their potential, answering the question of where they want to be with dreams that can be realized, and try to move their followers further than their current situation (Özden, 1999, p. 48). Unlike other leaders, leaders with visionary and innovative perspectives can observe different events and developments. The most important characteristic of visionary leaders is to protect the organization from future uncertainties by enabling it to adapt to changes (Doğan, 2018, p. 99). Among the leadership styles that play an important role in crisis management, visionary leadership adopted by managers was found to be more effective, especially in the pre-crisis period (Düzgün, 2020, p. 492).

Transformational leaders can be defined as leaders who can make their followers perform beyond their capabilities by enabling them to achieve their goals, desires, and expectations and make significant contributions to the success of the organization (Williams et al., 2009, p. 71; Walter and Bruch, 2010, p. 765). Bass's (1990) transformational leadership model can be expressed as an effective leadership style, especially in situations that arise with change, uncertainty, and distress (Nemanich and Keller, 2007, p. 50). Transformational leaders develop a common vision during a crisis, encourage their followers to achieve this vision, and effectively combat disinformation that emerges during a crisis (Çelik et al., 2006, p. 205). Transformational leaders, who are effective in managing crises, have a positive impact on employees and give them confidence and satisfaction (Emen and Hamza, 2020, p. 110). Transformational leaders predict crises before they occur, manage the crisis process, recover from them, maintain all kinds of communication with target audiences in times of crisis, and make significant contributions to organizations by coming out of the crisis with the most benefits.

Servant leaders can be defined as people who work for a lifetime within the framework of understanding serving others, who want the welfare and happiness of people, who are aware of the events around them, and who guide and protect them from dangers (Bakan and Doğan, 2012, p. 9-10). The personal characteristics of servant leaders who focus on the services to be provided in managing the crisis process and see them as a priority include having moral love, humility, sacrifice, having a vision, giving confidence, empowering employees, and serving them (Patterson, 2003, p. 8). According to Fernandez and Shaw (2020, p. 39), servant leadership, which emphasizes empowerment, participation, and collaboration, plays an important role in combating the unforeseen challenges posed by epidemics.

*Collaborative leadership* is based on influencing people, communication, persuasion, soft power, reconciliation, solidarity, and dialog (Head and Alford, 2015, p. 731). Collaborative leaders play an important role in mediating different stakeholders. The mediating role, power sharing, and voluntary participation form the basic structure of collaborative leadership. Thus, collaborative leaders play an important role in managing and mitigating conflicts through their mediating roles (Ansell and Gash, 2012, p. 11). Because the complexity and uncertainty of crises make it impossible to come up with clear solutions, leaders should invite people to find solutions (Heifetz, 1994; Head and Alford, 2015, p. 729). Such an approach requires a pattern of leadership and action based on collaboration outside and beyond the organization, rather than simply exercising formal authority within the organization (Benington and Hartley, 2010, p. 190). Within the collaborative approach, the fact that leaders or managers have an approach based on cooperation and consensus by bringing parties together is of great importance in reducing disagreements, implementing appropriate solutions, and legitimizing the solutions developed.

In an autocratic leadership style, a leader usually makes all decisions because all authority is concentrated in the leader. In a study conducted by Frangieh (2023, p. 9), it was concluded that it is necessary for the organization's survival that managers who have a significant impact on combating the crisis process exhibit autocratic leadership characteristics according to the conditions of the current situation. The study conducted by Rosing et al. (2020, p. 13) revealed that autocratic leadership is sometimes costly and sometimes increases followers' trust in urgent situations such as crisis processes.

A review of the literature shows that task-oriented and transformational leaders are preferred in situations of uncertainty-induced anxiety. At the same time, the autocratic leadership style has also been studied, in which all authorities are concentrated to make quick decisions in urgent situations such as crisis processes. According to the study conducted by Özkılıçcı and Mamatoğlu (2021, p. 585), a significant majority

of participants in Türkiye during the Covid-19 pandemic preferred task-oriented leadership style, with a rate of 61.8% more than charismatic and relationship-oriented leadership styles.

## Methodology

This study seeks to answer the question, "What is the relationship between the behaviors exhibited by the leader in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and successful crisis management?" This study aimed to reveal the leadership styles and behavioral characteristics of the Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca, who was selected as the spokesperson and leader of crisis management communication in an effective fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in Türkiye. Although the studies in the literature are based on the leadership behaviors of heads of state or prime ministers, since Fahrettin Koca came to the forefront in the process of combating the pandemic in Turkey, the subject of the study is the leadership styles exhibited by Koca. An exploratory case study method was used in the study. *Case studies* are defined as designs that are suitable for investigating and examining an individual, process, institution, or group in detail and can provide a lot of information about the "truth" in a meaningful way when examining a single case (Vural and Cenkseven, 2005, p. 126).

The purposive sample of this study consists of a group of experts' opinions of certain individuals who can evaluate the pandemic process in different dimensions. Within the framework of the study, an in-depth semi-structured interview data collection technique was used. Some issues were considered during the sample selection process. In this context, in order to obtain comprehensive and detailed information, some members of the scientific committee established for the management of the Covid-19 outbreak and chief physicians, academicians and management scientists who are experts in the field of leadership were interviewed to reveal the leadership behaviors exhibited, the provincial health director who can evaluate the effectiveness of pandemic management and the role of Fahrettin Koca in the management of this process. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 participants, including the member of the provincial pandemic board and the inspector of the Ministry of Health, communicators and NGO representatives who could evaluate Fahrettin Koca's statements and attitudes during the pandemic process, and the provincial disaster and emergency manager who would evaluate the crisis management by examining the Covid-19 outbreak as a disaster.

**Table 1**

*Study Methodology Information*

Type of Research	Research Design	Sampling Technique	Data Collection	Data Analysis
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Qualitative-Exploratory	Case Study	Purposive Sampling	Interview Technique	Qualitative-Content Analysis

The participants were from Istanbul, Ankara, Trabzon, and Giresun. The participants' qualifications are shown in the table below. For this study, an ethics committee decision dated 18.10.2023 and protocol number E-26014373-05001.04-43444 was obtained from the Rectorate of Karadeniz University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

**Table 2**  
*Information on Participants' Characteristics*

Participants	Gender	Age	Position	Mode of Interview	Time	Date
P1	Female	60	Doctor	Face-to-face communication	75 dk	20.10.2023
P2	Male	53	Chief Physician	Face-to-face communication	50 dk	23.10.2023
P3	Male	50	Head of Civil Society Organization (CSO)	Face-to-face communication	60 dk	25.10.2023
P4	Male	60	Head of Civil Society Organization (CSO)	Face-to-face communication	60 dk	15.11.2023
P5	Male	43	Academician (communication field)	Face-to-face communication	60 dk	26.10.2023
P6	Male	50	Academician (leadership field)	Face-to-face communication	90 dk	27.10.2023
P7	Female	65	Academician (management field)	Face-to-face communication	90 dk	30.10.2023
P8	Male	50	Academician (management field)	Face-to-face communication	60 dk	31.10.2023
P9	Male	55	Provincial Pandemic Committee members	Face-to-face communication	90 dk	01.11.2023
P10	Male	57	Provincial health director	Face-to-face communication	60 dk.	13.11.2023
P11	Male	53	Ministry of Health inspector	Phone and e-mail	35 dk	15.11.2023
P12	Male	54	Science committee member	Phone and e-mail	30 dk	21.11.2023
P13	Male	55	Science committee member	Phone and e-mail	30 dk	22.11.2023
P14	Male	52	Science committee member	Phone and e-mail	35 dk	9.12.2023
P15	Male	43	Provincial disaster and emergency manager	Face-to-face communication	55 dk	4.12.2023

Data obtained from the interviews were subjected to content analysis. In the first stage of conducting content analysis, it is necessary to determine the research problem or questions, population, sample, and content categories. After these are determined, the stage of coding the obtained data begins. In this study, coding was performed using the general framework proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). In general framework coding, a general conceptual structure is created prior to data analysis, and coding is performed according to this conceptual structure. General categories or themes are predetermined, and more detailed codes that can be included under these themes emerge as a result of analyzing the data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006, p. 228). In this study, as a result of the literature review, a scale was created to determine the leadership styles exhibited by Fahrettin Koca by determining seven leadership style themes: task-oriented, charismatic, autocratic, collaborative, visionary, servant, and transformational leadership, and the general characteristics of each leadership style as sub-codes under these leadership style themes.

The Likert-type transformational leadership scale developed by Dönmez and Toker (2017, p. 762), scale on charismatic leadership perceptions developed by Çelik (2013, p. 26), servant leadership scale developed by Dennis and Bocarnea (2006, p. 607-608), characteristics related to servant leadership in Patterson's (2003, p. 11) Ph. D. study, and information on leadership styles in the literature were used to determine the scale



within the scope of the study. To increase the validity and reliability of the study, the opinions of five faculty members who are experts in their fields were sought to create codes and categories to determine the characteristics of leadership types that are effective in crisis management. The Maxqda software program, which allows data collection, organization, analysis, and visualization using tables, was used to analyze the data (Çayır and Sarıtaş, 2017, p. 526).

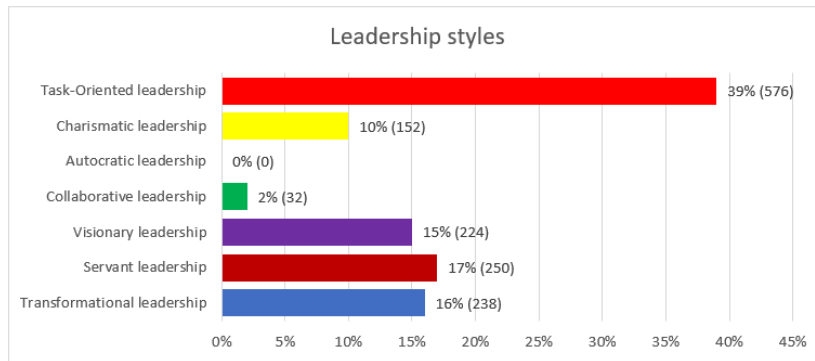
## Findings

### Fahrettin Koca's Leadership Styles and Behaviors in the Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Figure 1 shows the participants' findings regarding the leadership styles exhibited by Fahrettin Koca.

**Figure 1**

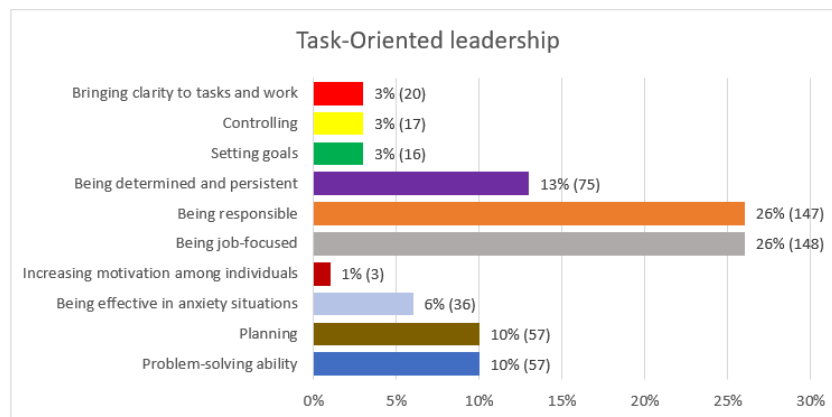
*Analysis of Participants' Statements on Leadership Characteristics of the Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca*



The results of the analysis of the data obtained through the in-depth interview in Figure 1 regarding the leadership characteristics exhibited by Fahrettin Koca according to the statements of the participants during the pandemic process revealed that he exhibited the highest task-oriented leadership characteristics (39%) among the leadership styles. The second leadership style with the highest share among the leadership characteristics exhibited by Minister of Health Koca was servant leadership (17%), and the third leadership style was transformational leadership (16%). Fahrettin Koca also exhibited visionary leadership traits (15%), charismatic leadership traits (10%), and collaborative leadership traits (2%). According to the participants' statements, Mr. Koca did not exhibit autocratic leadership characteristics in managing the pandemic process.

**Figure 2**

*Analysis of Participants' Statements on Task-Oriented Leadership Characteristics of Minister of Health Fahrettin Koca*



Examining the analysis results in Figure 2, it can be seen that Fahrettin Koca's task-oriented leadership style has the highest level of being focused on work (26%) and being responsible (26%). These behaviors were followed by being determined and persistent (13%), problem-solving ability (10%), planning (10%), and effectiveness in anxiety situations (6%). Task-oriented leadership behaviors that clarify tasks and work (3%), control (3%), set goals (3%), and increase motivation among individuals (1%) were less common than the others. Table 3 presents the sample participants' statements regarding these traits.

**Table 3**

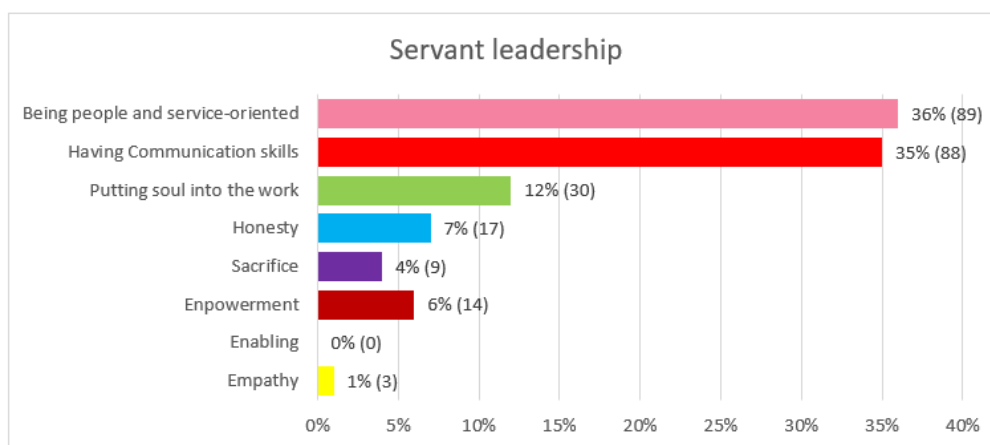
*Participants' Statements on Fahrettin Koca's Task-Oriented Leadership Characteristics*

Being Job-Focused	<p>"He was responsible, focused on his work, and aware of what to do and when to do it because he is a doctor." From the beginning to the end, he practiced what needed to be done by focusing on his work." P1</p> <p>"Under all circumstances, he tried to create perception by using slogans focused on his duty with certain body movements." He did his job successfully with diligence and workaholism. He contributed to the successful management of the pandemic process." P10</p> <p>"Fahrettin Koca, as chairman of the Scientific Committee, clearly assessed what the public should and should not do with his statements at the weekly meetings." He took responsibility from the beginning to the end of the pandemic and kept the public informed with accurate information." P1</p>
Being Responsible	<p>"In the fight against the pandemic, masks, distance, what at-risk groups should do, isolation of the sick and disinfectants came to the fore. The Minister of Health had the power to influence the citizens by assuming his responsibility as an administrator and as a doctor specialized in his field." P9</p> <p>"Fahrettin Koca's informative, work-oriented, determined, and determined work as an expert in his field is one of the important features of his success." P5</p> <p>"During the pandemic, Fahrettin Koca showed the characteristics of a cold-blooded and self-confident physician who dedicated himself to pandemic management, working day and night." With these characteristics, he played an effective role in crisis management." P12</p>
Determined and Persevering	<p>"Fahrettin Koca's informative, work-oriented, focused, and determined work as an expert in his field is one of the most important features of his success." P5</p> <p>"During the pandemic, Fahrettin Koca showed the characteristics of a cold-blooded and self-confident physician who dedicated himself to pandemic management, working day and night." With these characteristics, he played an effective role in crisis management." P12</p>
Planning	<p>"Fahrettin Koca played an active role in planning and supervision, with practices such as prioritizing vaccination practices, disinfectant liquid, masks, and skipping seats." When the vaccine arrived, it was planned to start with the health workers." P1</p> <p>"The measures Fahrettin Koca took regarding the pandemic, the arrival of vaccines, the supply of medicines, and taking the necessary actions at the specified time show that he made the necessary plans." In this process, vaccines were planned in order of priority, and health care workers and the elderly were protected first." P3</p>
Problem-solving ability	<p>"It ensured people's credibility by showing that there was a scientific dimension to the fight against the epidemic and that scientists were the decision-makers." Necessary plans were made in the fight against the pandemic, and an effective role was played in solving the problems." P10</p> <p>"Although respect for people and kinship relations are important in Turkish culture, he restricted people's gatherings. The elderly and children were given priority for protection. Gatherings and hugging were forbidden on holidays. Medication was taken without prescription to prevent overcrowding." P1</p>

Being Job-Focused	<p>"He was responsible, focused on his work, and aware of what to do and when to do it because he is a doctor." From the beginning to the end, he practiced what needed to be done by focusing on his work." P1</p> <p>"Under all circumstances, he tried to create perception by using slogans focused on his duty with certain body movements." He did his job successfully with diligence and workaholicism. He contributed to the successful management of the pandemic process." P10</p> <p>"Fahrettin Koca ensured that the public was protected from unnecessary fear and anxiety during the fight against the pandemic." He prevented the spread of unscientific and dubious messages." P2</p>
Being Effective in Anxiety Situations	<p>"During the pandemic, Fahrettin Koca prevented the level of anxiety from increasing by showing characteristics such as constructive approach, eloquence, clearly defining the problem and producing solutions, embracing everyone, being transparent, constructive, in harmony and knowledgeable." P8</p>

**Figure 3**

Analysis of Participants' Statements on Minister of Health Fahrettin Koca's Servant Leadership Characteristics



According to the analysis results in Figure 3, Fahrettin Koca's servant leadership style was characterized by being people- and service-oriented (36%) and having communication skills (35%). These characteristics are followed by putting soul into the work (12%), honesty (7%), empowerment (6%), sacrifice (4%), and altruism (4%). Empathy (1%) was exhibited at an extremely low level, and enabling (0%) was not exhibited at all. Table 4 presents the sample participant statements regarding leadership traits exhibited in the context of the servant leadership style.

**Table 4**

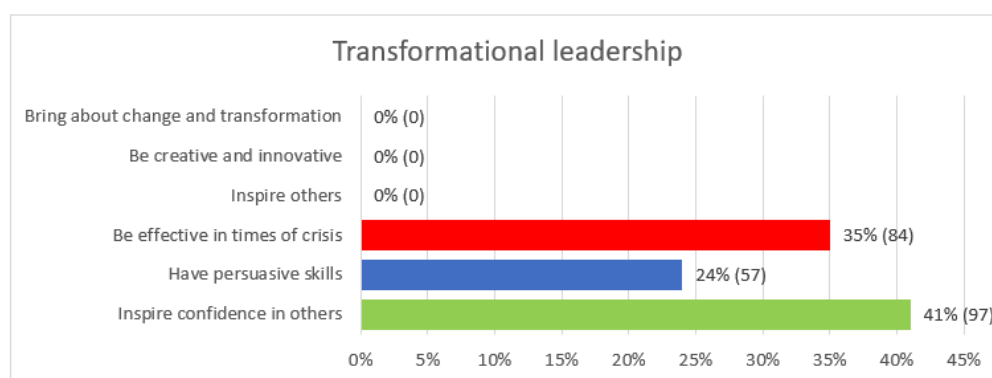
Participants' statements on Fahrettin Koca's servant leadership characteristics

Being People- and Service-Oriented	<p>"His work on vaccine supply, coordination of health workers during the pandemic, supply of medicines, and supply of masks quickly shows that he focuses on people and service." Fahrettin Koca has done his duty with love." P3</p> <p>"Fahrettin Koca, with his sincere and honest attitude in managing the pandemic process, worked humanely and service-oriented and did his duty with love." P14</p> <p>"Fahrettin Koca had an open communication with people." He answered people's questions and provided solutions about health." P5</p>
Communication skills	<p>"A good manager emerges during a crisis." Fahrettin Koca significantly impacted the pandemic by informing, maintaining calm, giving transparent speeches, expressing false events, and guiding the public based on scientific data. He appealed to people through body language." P10</p>

Being People- and Service-Oriented	<p>"His work on vaccine supply, coordination of health workers during the pandemic, supply of medicines, and supply of masks quickly shows that he focuses on people and service." Fahrettin Koca has done his duty with love." P3</p> <p>"Fahrettin Koca, with his sincere and honest attitude in managing the pandemic process, worked humanely and service-oriented and did his duty with love." P14</p>
Putting Soul into Work	<p>"During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was as if he had been integrated with the disease and its effects." Fahrettin Koca conducted service-oriented activities by putting his soul into his work." P2</p> <p>"I think that Fahrettin Koca managed the burden and responsibility he took well in the fight against the pandemic." He established good communication with the citizens. He put his soul into his work because he is a health professional and took on an important task related to human life." P9</p>
Honesty	<p>"Fahrettin Koca raised the level of trust through his honesty, integrity, on-screen behavior, and actions during the pandemic." His tiredness was reflected even in his eyes as he worked day and night." P3</p> <p>"Fahrettin Koca, who analyzed the pandemic process as a doctor as required by his profession, increased the level of trust on citizens a little more." I believe he was the most trustworthy person during the pandemic. His accurate information about the pandemic also impacted citizens' trust." P9</p>

**Figure 4**

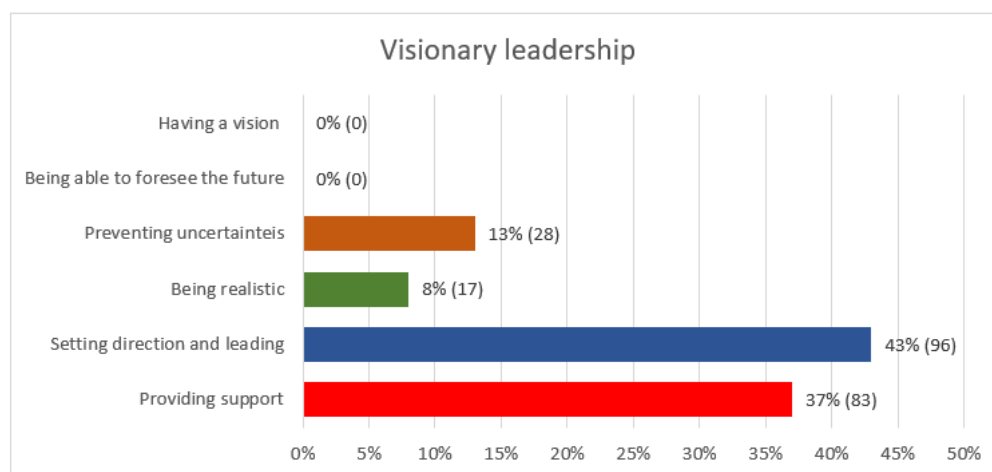
Analysis of Participants' Statements on Transformational Leadership Characteristics of the Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca



According to the results of the analysis in Figure 4, Fahrettin Koca's transformational leadership style includes the following characteristics: inspiring confidence in others (41%), being effective in times of crisis (35%), and having persuasive skills (24%). According to the participants' statements, Fahrettin Koca did not exhibit the characteristics of inspire others, be creative and innovative, and cause change and transformation. Table 5 presents the sample statements of the participants regarding leadership traits exhibited in the context of the transformational leadership style.

**Table 5***Participants' statements about Fahrettin Koca's transformational leadership characteristics*

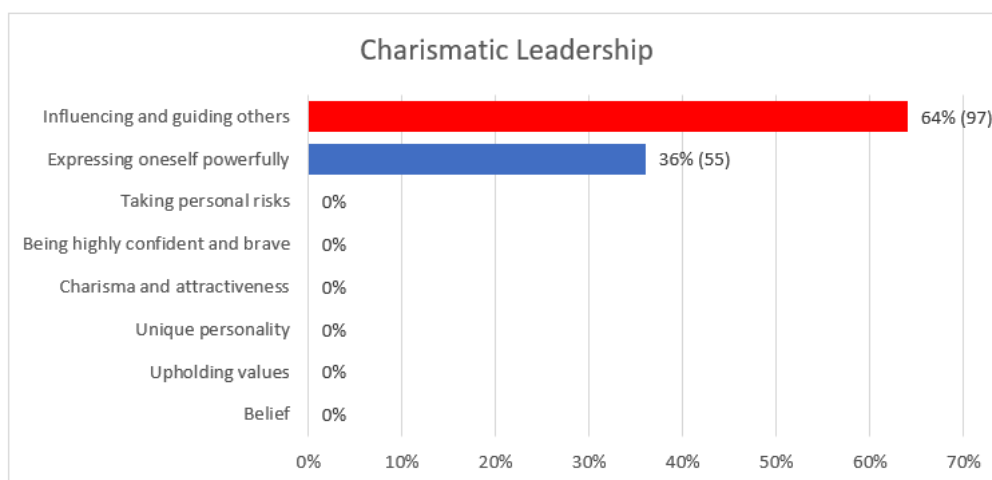
Inspire Confidence in Others	"He is a leader who is trusted, listens to, and regularly educates the public." Fahrettin Koca shared information in the correct places at the right time. He took his job seriously. He was reliable during the pandemic and efficiently managed the process." P6 "The level of trust in Fahrettin Koca was high." He demonstrated a transparent management approach. He would give daily updates on what was happening. He informed everyone in a way that reached all citizens. These situations increased the level of trust. His facial expression, the way he spoke, the way he approached people gave confidence." P8
Be Effective in Times of Crisis	"In crisis management, managers' capacity, diligence, and coordination are the most important parameters in any period and under any conditions." With his attitude, the Minister played a leading role in preventing the devastating effects of the pandemic from becoming even more devastating." P2 "Fahrettin Koca met society's expectations of a state official in the fight against the pandemic." He gave messages to the society that the crisis was being taken care of by the state authorities." P8
Persuasive Skills	"In his statements to the press, Fahrettin Koca often mentioned precautions, masks, distance, hygiene, and the 14 rules." During the pandemic, he comforted society by giving positive speeches and saying that things would get better. He influenced and convinced the citizens by informing them regularly." P6 The fact that he was a doctor and committed to his duty was effective during the pandemic. It would not have been as effective if he had only seen it as his duty. He convinced everyone that he loved his job. People were willing to stay away from their loved ones. Citizens followed the rules for the sake of each other's health. Fahrettin Koca convinced the citizens by saying what needed to be done, thanks to his credibility." P1

**Figure 5***Analysis of Participants' Statements on the Visionary Leadership Characteristics of the Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca*

According to the analysis results in Figure 5, Fahrettin Koca's visionary leadership style is characterized by setting directions, leading (43%), and providing support (37%). This was followed by preventing uncertainty (13%) and being realistic (8%). According to the participants' statements, Fahrettin Koca did not exhibit the characteristics of having a vision and being able to foresee the future. Table 6 presents the sample statements of the participants regarding leadership characteristics exhibited in the context of the visionary leadership style.

**Table 6***Participants' Statements on the Visionary Leadership Characteristics of Fahrettin Koca*

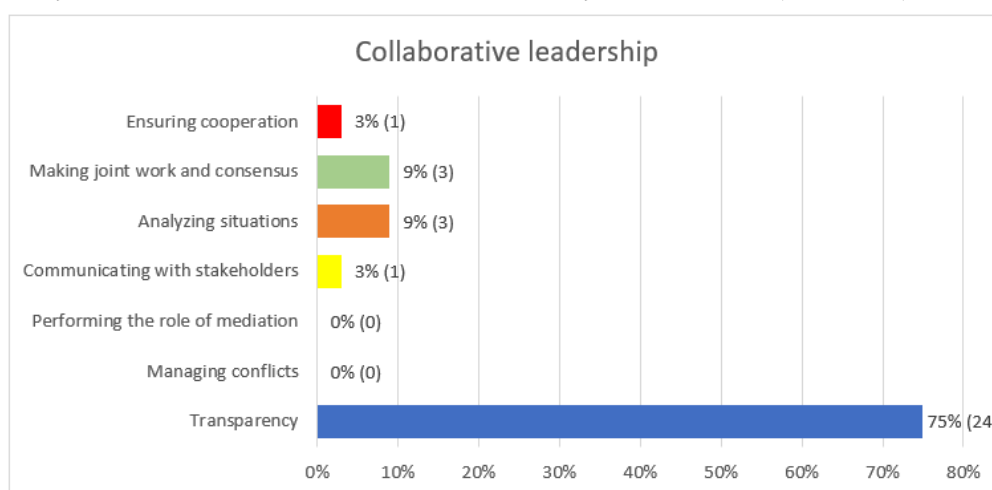
Setting Direction and Leading	"Fahrettin Koca ensured objective and efficient use of hospital resources and facilitated the creation of new bed capacity within a short time. He has been a pioneer in both the efficient and safe functioning of health personnel and service delivery." P2 "Fahrettin Koca pioneered the recognition and awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic, taught the measures to be taken to combat the pandemic, and informed and guided the public about all the effects of the pandemic." P2
Providing Support	"Fahrettin Koca's professional qualities as a scientist and doctor came to the fore in the fight against the pandemic." His political party identity was not visible. He performed his duties with a inclusive style and did not separate people. He provided support in taking and implementing measures in the fight against the pandemic." P7
Preventing Uncertainty	"I did what Fahrettin Koca said. He made his statements at the right time and informed the public with accurate data. There was a lot of disinformation on social media. The scientific committee was consulted, and the public was informed in line with expert opinion and credibility was ensured." P6
Being Realistic	"The establishment of the Scientific Committee, chaired by Fahrettin Koca, shows that scientific data are being acted upon." In this context, the formation of the Scientific Committee increased the credibility of the decisions in the eyes of the public and ensured the effective management of the crisis." P10

**Figure 6***Analysis of the Participants' Statements on the Charismatic Leadership Characteristics of the Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca*

Analyzing the results of the analysis in Figure 6, it can be seen that Fahrettin Koca exhibits the trait of influencing and guiding others the most among charismatic leadership styles (64%), followed by the trait of expressing oneself powerfully (36%). Participants did not emphasize that Fahrettin Koca exhibited characteristics specific to charismatic leadership style, such as taking personal risks, being highly confident and brave, charisma and attractiveness, unique personality, upholding values, and beliefs. Table 7 presents sample statements made by participants regarding the leadership characteristics exhibited in the context of charismatic leadership styles.

**Table 7***Participants' statements on Fahrettin Koca's charismatic leadership characteristics*

Influencing and Guiding Others	"Fahrettin Koca had a lot of power to influence society during the pandemic." Because he had the power to influence and direct the society, this situation made him a protected power. He had successful effects by raising public awareness." P5 "During the pandemic, society itself is awaiting leadership." Fahrettin Koca influenced society through his statements. The fact that the Minister of Health has technical knowledge as a doctor specialized in his field made this job easier." P9
Expressing Oneself Powerfully	"Fahrettin Koca has been satisfactory to the public and health workers in terms of credibility and the dissemination of accurate information." P2 "Fahrettin Koca played an important role in the pandemic by expressing himself strongly, being a health professional, having technical knowledge about health, reassuring people, making decisions together with the members of the scientific committee, and using a clear and understandable communication language that everyone can understand like a member of the public." P9

**Figure 7***Analysis of Participants' Statements on the Collaborative Leadership Characteristics of Minister of Health Fahrettin Koca*

An analysis of the results in Figure 7 reveals that Fahrettin Koca showed the highest transparency (75%) among the collaborative leadership styles that he displayed at a very low level. This was followed by analyzing situations (9%), making joint work and consensus (9%), communicating with stakeholders (3%), and ensuring cooperation (3%) at a lower level. According to the participants' statements, Fahrettin Koca did not demonstrate the characteristics of performing the role of mediating and managing conflicts. Table 8 shows a sample of the participants' statements regarding the leadership characteristics exhibited in the context of collaborative leadership style.

**Table 8***Participants' Statements on Fahrettin Koca's Collaborative Leadership Characteristics*

Transparency	"Coronavirus cases were followed by Fahrettin Koca from the moment they appeared, and information was openly shared with the public regularly." P1 "Fahrettin Koca managed the pandemic transparently. I liked his approach as a citizen rather than a minister. He was caring, fatherly, embracing attitude. As chairman of the scientific committee, he actively held regular meetings on social media." P3
Analyzing Situations	"During the pandemic, necessary plans were made, and solutions were created according to the conditions required by the current situation, according to the new situations that



Transparency	<i>"Coronavirus cases were followed by Fahrettin Koca from the moment they appeared, and information was openly shared with the public regularly." P1 "Fahrettin Koca managed the pandemic transparently. I liked his approach as a citizen rather than a minister. He was caring, fatherly, embracing attitude. As chairman of the scientific committee, he actively held regular meetings on social media." P3</i>
Joint work and consensus building	<i>emerged." During the planning, updates were made according to the vaccine stocks and developments." P8</i> <i>"As Minister of Health, he carried out the pandemic management process in cooperation with other ministries." He expanded the organization based on the opinions of the scientific committee." P13</i>

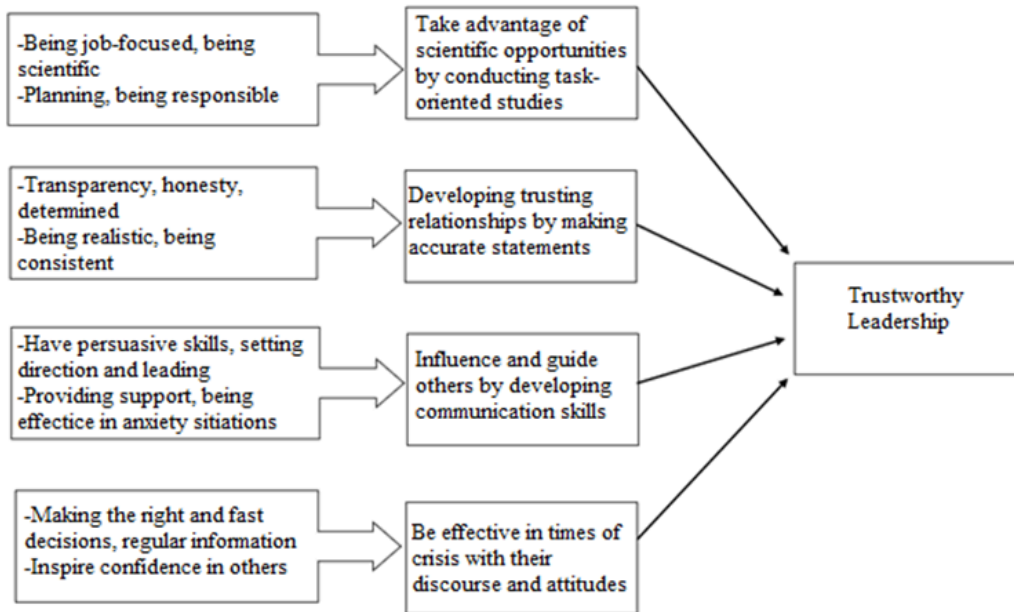
## Conclusion

This study examines the leadership styles exhibited by Fahrettin Koca in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, and the leadership behaviors that emerged in the context of this leadership style make important contributions to the literature in the context of the findings obtained.

The first contribution of this study to the literature is that it demonstrates that Fahrettin Koca, who is generally accepted as an effective crisis manager, exhibited leadership styles other than the autocratic leadership style during the Covid-19 outbreak. Studies on crisis management have revealed that task-oriented leaders perceive crises more positively and are effective in managing the process (Huynh and Hua, 2020, p. 583; İbrahimoglu, 2011, p. 731; Kapucu and Üstün 2018, p. 559). Considering the study findings, Fahrettin Koca exhibited the most task-oriented leadership style among the leadership styles. However, he also exhibited significant servant, visionary, transformational, and charismatic leadership styles in terms of behavioral characteristics. In general, the findings suggest that in an effective fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, and other transnational crises in general, political leaders may adopt not only one leadership style but also a behavior that includes some characteristics of different leadership styles. Tourism (2020, p. 261) argued that the coronavirus crisis was also a crisis of leadership theory and practice, and that the performance of key decision-makers during this period had a significant impact on the rise of political leadership.

The second contribution of this study is that it reveals Fahrettin Koca's leadership behaviors and characteristics that stand out among the leadership styles exhibited and enable effective crisis management. These characteristics are job-focus, responsible, determined and persistent. Being people and service-oriented, having communication and persuasive skills, being effective in a crisis, giving confidence to others, setting direction and leading, providing support, being able to direct others, being forceful and being transparent came to the forefront. The model created for the leadership characteristics exhibited by the Minister of Health Koca during the pandemic process is shown in Model 1. According to Model 1, Fahrettin Koca adopted a trustworthy leadership approach based on these characteristics. Within the framework of a trustworthy leadership approach, it can be stated that Fahrettin Koca has increased his power to influence and direct others, can persuade others, is effective in the case of anxiety by preventing uncertainty, and shows a successful struggle during the crisis.



**Model 1***Health Minister Fahrettin Koca's Leadership Model for Emerging from a Crisis*

The fact that there were some limiting factors in terms of the participants' participation in the in-depth interviews made it necessary to introduce limitations to the research. The limitations of this study were that some participants characterized the subject as political and refrained from conducting interviews because they were studying managers in the public sphere. Within the scope of the study, the desired interviews were conducted as much as possible by reaching experts in the desired field, and the target audience was ultimately reached. Some members of the scientific committee did not participate in the interviews; however, a sufficient sample was obtained. Another limitation of this study is that the COVID-19 pandemic process, which started in the last months of 2019 and spread worldwide, will continue until approximately 2023, and research on this topic is quite limited.

As sociocultural characteristics and political and administrative structures change, leadership styles also differ. Leadership styles exhibited according to the cultural characteristics of different social structures may also differ. In this context, different results are obtained in leadership behaviors exhibited according to other countries' sociocultural characteristics, administrative and political structure, and environmental conditions. Therefore, in another study, contextual conditions specific to Türkiye that affect the leadership styles and behaviors exhibited by Fahrettin Koca can be investigated. In Turkey, the Presidential Government System makes the President very powerful in the executive branch. In this context, it should not be ignored that political factors and President Erdoğan of the Republic of Turkey are also effective in the leadership behaviors exhibited by Fahrettin Koca in the context of making decisions, realizing, and following up services during the Covid-19 pandemic. Similar studies can be conducted in societies with different cultural characteristics and administrative structures, and comparative analyses can be conducted. Because the cultural characteristics of each society differ in terms of leadership behaviors, different results can be obtained.



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Ethical Approval	For this study, an ethics committee decision dated 18.10.2023 and protocol number E-26014373-05001.04-43444 was obtained from the Rectorate of Karadeniz University.
Informed Consent	Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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