

## Linking Transformational Leadership, Compensation, and Employee Performance: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the effect of transformational leadership and compensation on employee performance. The survey involved as many as 157 employees. The structural Equation Model is used to examine the research model. The statistical analysis tool used to test the hypothesis is Smart PLS. According to hypothesis testing analysis, this research concludes that transformational leadership significantly affects employee performance. However, contrary to the prediction, the result reported that compensation did not significantly impact employee performance. In addition, this study investigates work engagement as a mediating variable. The result showed that work engagement mediates the relationship of compensation with employee performance. Work engagement also significantly mediates the connection between transformational leadership and work performance. This study provides the managerial practice regarding improving employee performance through leadership, compensation and work engagement. Primarily, we recommend that SME leaders be more open and maintain employee development. Besides, compensation as a motivation strategy should be evaluated regarding the impact on employee work engagement.

**Keywords:** Compensation, Employee Performance, Transformational Leadership, Work Engagement

## **INTRODUCTION**

In today's fierce global business competition, every business is challenged to be more adaptive and remark outstanding performance. Companies must anticipate unpredictable changes in customer demand for the services and products offered. Customer expects better quality, relatively low prices, faster delivery, and more straightforward or practical services. Besides, the fact showed that many companies have bankrupts because they could not compete with new companies that propose new business model. Therefore, every company must optimize its resources effectively and efficiently, especially employee performance as human resources. This study proposed to examine the role of transformational leadership, compensation, on employee performance.

Leaders play a significant role in achieving employee performance. Leaders are expected to provide direction and solutions to problems faced by employees. This study examines the effect of transformational leadership on employee performance. Transformational leadership is a leader who motivates his subordinates to work optimally in achieving company goals, while transactional leadership is the attitude of a leader who guides and motivates his followers by rewarding them for their work. Previous studies revealed that transformational leadership significantly affects employee performance (Xu, Zeng, Wang, Qian, & Gu, 2022). However, the relationship still remains inconsistent findings. Prabowo, Noermijati, & Irawanto (2018) found that transformational leader has no significant effect on employee performance. The study argued that transformational leader has often evoke psychological strain that hinder employee performance Rizka, Sumardjo, and Setiadi (2022) also conclude that most employees depend on the leader's direction. Employees are indolent about improving work methods which impacts their employee performance. This is important for further research to scrutinize the connection between transformational leadership and employee performance.

Compensation is a management strategy to motivate employees to achieve high work performance. According to expectancy theory, employees will perform their best when they believe they will be rewarded fairly (Lee, 2018). High performance employee will get a reward from the company, such as bonuses, salary increases or promotions. Past study conclude that employees will show optimal performance to get the compensation offered by the company. The connection between compensation and job performance in the previous literature also elevates the research gap. Study Butarbutar and Nawangsari (2022) demonstrated that compensation has insignificant effect on work performance. In their research, some employees complained about the high targets that were difficult to access. Moreover, the compensation could be more attractive to employees.

Based on previous research, this present study proposed to scrutinize the research gap by testing the linkage between transformational leadership and compensation on work performance through work engagement as a mediating variable. Work engagement is defined as a psychological state in which a person can commit to an organization emotionally and intellectually. According to social exchange theory, this study assumes that transformational leadership encourages work engagement and, in turn, increases work engagement (Mubarak, Khan, Yasmin, & Osmadi, 2021). On the other side, compensation motivates employees to be more engaged, and it will improve work performance. Practically, this research contributes to managers regarding how transformational and compensatory leaders can maintain employee performance through increasing work engagement.

This research was conducted in the context of small and medium enterprises in Kebumen Regency. The research survey was conducted on small businesses in the

fashion sector. Kebumen is one of the districts with a reasonably high growth rate in the fashion industry. Even more so when the fashion business spreads through social media, some businesses have their brand, which is a feature and differentiator from other brands. This local brand competes with other products on the market. Therefore, innovative employees constantly creating new ideas to be implemented in fashion services or products are needed to ensure business continuity. This study provides recommendations for small business managers, especially in the fashion sector, regarding how leadership, compensation, and work negativity influence employee performance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Transformational Leadership and Work Performance**

Transformational leadership is a condition in which employees feel a sense of trust, respect, obedience, admiration, and loyalty and are motivated to do something beyond what was initially expected (Yukl, Mahsud, Prussia, & Hassan, 2019). Transformational leader motivate their employees to carry out their responsibilities for their work and increase employee awareness through the attraction of high values, morality, and idealism, including balance, justice, freedom, humanity, and peace (Shafi, Zoya, Lei, Song, & Sarker, 2020). Transformational leadership is effective in improving work performance and supporting organizational effectiveness. Organization requires the transformational leader to promote individual considerations in dealing with a job, motivate employees, and encourage employees to contribute more to their work, as well as prioritize high commitment from employees to improve employee performance (Lee & Chon, 2021). Based in past research, this study proposes hypothesis:

H1: Transformational leadership positively influence employee performance

### **Compensation and Work Performance**

Compensation is a form of remuneration employees receive from the company for their work. Based on previous research explains that salary and benefits significantly affect employee performance (Butarbutar & Nawangsari, 2022). They argued that employees motivated by salaries and benefits would work enthusiastically and earnestly in carrying out the tasks assigned by the company to employees (Musonnafa, Sumiati, & Djazuli, 2022). There is a relationship between compensation and performance; employees work on time if salaries are paid on time (Kim & Jang, 2020). With compensation that is in accordance with the workload, employees will not feel that their efforts are in vain, so they always provide good performance. Not only financial compensation, such as wages or salaries, but non-financial compensation also plays an essential role in maintaining employee motivation (Butarbutar & Nawangsari, 2022). For example, praise from colleagues and even superiors in the company for performance can maintain and even increases his work productivity. This study proposes hypothesis:

H2: Compensation positively influence employee performance

### **Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement**

This present study connects transformational leadership to work engagement. Leaders with transformational leadership influence and encourage employees to involve themselves in their work with enthusiasm and positive thoughts (Rizka et al., 2022). Employees value the meaningfulness of their work and have a strong mentality so that they are absorbed in completing work even though the tasks and work are challenging. Transformational leaders pay attention to the employees, try to understand their employees' needs, and provide emotional support when employees feel frustrated at work (Lai, Tang, Lu, Lin, & Lee, 2020). Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis:

H3: Transformational leadership positively influence work engagement

### **Compensation and Work Engagement**

According to Isah, Ibrahim, Karim, and Gwadabe (2022), compensation is one of the important attributes for employee engagement, because with fair compensation employees can be motivated at work, so they are eager to improve their personal abilities. Employees will be more motivated by companies that have good compensation programs, including financial and non-financial compensation (Tjadi, Rawis, Londa, & Lengkong, 2021). Research conducted by Rojikinnor, Gani, Saleh, and Amin (2022) and Hendriks, Burger, and Commandeur (2023) shows that the compensation variable can positively affect the employee engagement. Employees who are satisfied with the compensation they receive from the company where they work, they will be more loyal and work better. The existence of compensation can create a work environment that is sporty and competitive in daily work. Companies provide bonuses to their employees so that employees have a good and professional relationship with the company where they work. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis:

H4: Compensation positively influence work engagement

### **Work Engagement and Work Performance**

Employee engagement conceptualized as a condition where members of an organization carry out their work roles, work and express themselves physically (the energy issued by employees when carrying out their work), cognitive (desires that employees have about organizations, leaders, and working conditions in the organization) and emotional (including employees' feelings towards the organization and their leaders) during their performance (McBain, 2007; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Work expresses the degree to which employees at work can perform themselves totally both physically, cognitively, affectively, and emotionally. Employees find meaning in work, pride in being part of the company where they work, work to achieve the overall vision and mission of a company. Employees will go the extra mile and strive for work beyond what is expected both in time and energy (Xu et al., 2022). Previous research showed that employees who have high work engagement have good performance (Lai et al., 2020). This study proposes hypothesis:

H5: Work engagement positively influence work engagement

### **Mediating Role of Work Engagement**

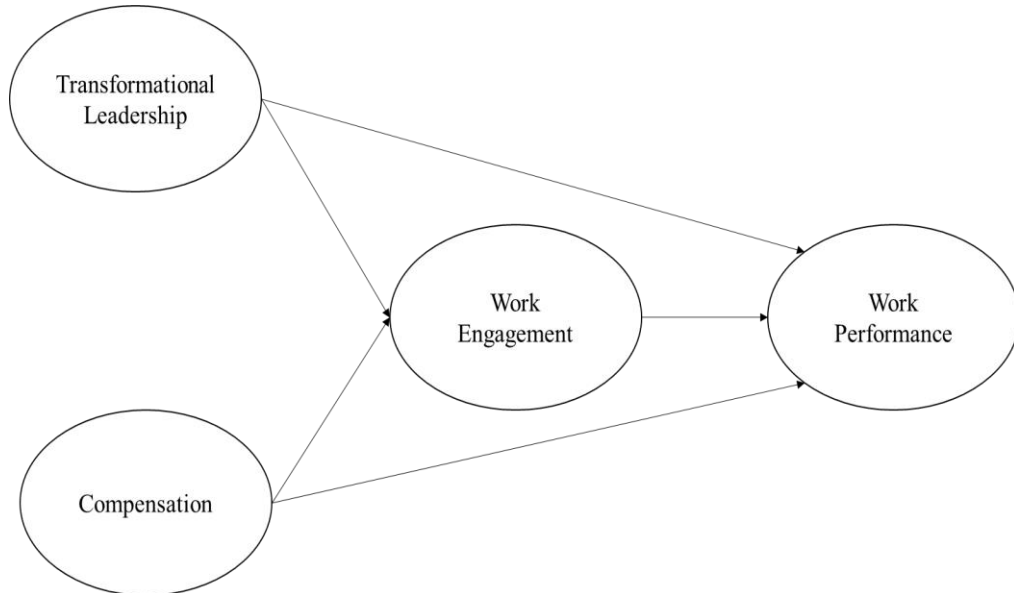
Transformational leadership theory directs employees to put aside personal interests and prioritize the goals of the company's collective interests. Transformational leaders also tend to engage employees to commit to company goals and are willing to sacrifice personal interests to achieve collective goals (Keparamareni & Pradnyawati, 2021). Past research support the positive influence between transformational leadership and job performance (Prabowo et al., 2018) through work engagement as a mediating variable (Rizka et al., 2022). This indicates that work engagement mediates the positive influence between transformational leadership and employee performance. Therefore, this research proposes hypothesis:

H6: Work engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance

Compensation encourages employees to be more involved and energized in the workplace. Employees who consider the compensation given by the company interesting will show a decisive engagement. Compensation certainly arouses the will of individuals to move themselves and the company for the better, including its form by using energy and mind and not easily giving up on challenges in the company (Hendriks et al., 2023). Compensation motivates employees to be more engaged in work, which stimulates employees to work better and have performance that exceeds the target. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis:

H7: Work engagement mediates the relationship between compensation and employee performance

**Figure 1.** Empirical Model



## RESEARCH METHOD

This study was carried out in a company engaged in the in Fashion Industry in Kebumen Regency. This type of research can be categorized as quantitative research with a survey approach. The survey involved as many as 157 employees carried out during December-January 2023. Based on the respondent characteristics in table 1, it is known that the majority of employees who are respondents are male (77.07%). Most respondents were aged 30-49 years (52.23%). For the level of education, the majority of respondents in this study had completed a diploma/graduate education, namely 66.88%. Most of the work tenure is 2-5 years (45.86%).

**Table 1.** Respondent Characteristic

	Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	121	77.07%
	Female	36	22.93%
Age	Aged 29 and Lower	32	20.38%
	Aged 30-49	82	52.23%
	Aged 50 or older	43	27.39%
Education	High-School Graduate	52	33.12%
	Diploma/ Bachelor	105	66.88%
Work Tenure	< 2 years	16	10.19%
	2-5 years	72	45.86%
	> 5 years	69	43.95%

## Measurement

All variable measurements use a scale of 1-5 starting from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Transformational leadership variables are measured using a 7-item instrument developed by (Carless, Wearing, & Mann, 2000). Compensation variable is measured by the 10 items scale used by Hafanti & Lubis (2015). Work engagement

variable uses 9 items developed by Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9). Work performance variable uses a 6 item self-report scale developed by Kuvaas (2006).

## RESULTS

This study tests the direct effect of transformational leadership and compensation on employee performance. In addition, this research also tests the work role of the Engagement as a mediation variable. This study uses smart PLS analysis tools to test the research model. The test begins with the analysis of the measurement model followed by the assessment of structural models.

### Measurement model analysis

The measurement model of the test phase or measurement model is the testing stage aims to prove the validity & estimate the reliability of indicators and construction. This test consists of convergent validity, combined reliability, discriminant validity. Convergent validity valid validity when the loading factor value of each instrument > 0.7. Some construct items in this study were removed because they were below 0.7. After re - testing, the result showed as table 2.

**Table 2.** The Result of Convergent Validity and Cronbach Alpha

Constructs	Loading Factor	Cronbach Alpha
TL1	0.716	0.786
TL2	0.824	
TL3	0.812	
TL4	0.712	
TL5	0.734	
TL6	0.754	
TL7	0.734	
COM1	0.716	0.881
COM2	0.724	
COM5	0.712	
COM6	0.812	
COM7	0.734	
COM9	0.754	
COM10	0.734	
WE1	0.733	0.765
WE2	0.778	
WE3	0.784	
WE4	0.877	
WE5	0.743	
WE6	0.755	
WP1	0.773	0.891
WP2	0.782	
WP3	0.871	
WP4	0.744	

Cronbach Alpha value for all variables above 0.6, which indicates all variable items variable meets reliability. Furthermore, the AVE value above 0.5 shows the variable in the model of the validated discriminant (see table 2.). According to the table 3, in the Fornell-Larcker Criterion Test, the roots of the every on the construct are higher than the construct correlation with other later variables, thus accepting discriminant validity. A construct is expressed as reliable if the composite reliability (CR) value > 0.6. Test results showed that CR for all variables above 0.6.

**Table 3.** The Result of Discrimen Validity and Composite Reliability

Construct	CR	AVE	TL	COM	WE	WP
Transformational Leadership (TL)	0.812	0.712	<b>0.812</b>			
Compensation (COM)	0.715	0.812	0.113	<b>0.783</b>		
Work Engagement (WE)	0.882	0.713	0.345	0.134	<b>0.882</b>	
Work Performance (WP)	0.891	0.734	0.217	0.106	0.234	<b>0.782</b>

### Structural Model Analysis

The structural model analysis focused on investigating the direct connection between transformational leadership and compensation on work performance. In addition, the structural assessment also aimed to test a mediation effect of work engagement in the link between transformational leadership and compensation on work performance. The results of the structural model test are known that transformational leadership significantly affects work engagement ( $\beta = 0.671$ ;  $t = 8.388$ ) and work performance ( $\beta = 0.812$ ;  $t = 6.246$ ), so H1 and H3 are accepted. Furthermore, the compensation variable significantly affects work engagement ( $\beta = 0.324$ ;  $t = 2.701$ ) and supports H4. However, in contrast to predictions, compensation has no significant effect on employee performance ( $\beta = 0.121$ ;  $t = 1.008$ ), resulting in rejecting H2. For mediation test results, based on the specific Indirect Effect value shows that work engagement can mediate transformational leadership relationships ( $\beta = 0.341$ ;  $t = 2.435$ ) and compensation of employee performance ( $\beta = 0.423$ ;  $t = 4.701$ ); these results support H7 and H8.

**Table 4.** Structural Model Assessment

Variables	Path Coefficient	SD	t-Statistics	Hypothesis
TL → WP	0.812	0.130	6.246	H1: Supported
COM → WP	0.121	0.120	1.008	H2: Unsupported
TL → WE	0.671	0.080	8.388	H3: Supported
COM → WE	0.324	0.120	2.701	H4: Supported
WE → WP	0.423	0.170	2.488	H5: Supported
TL → WE → WP	0.341	0.14	2.435	H7: Supported
COM → WE → WP	0.423	0.09	4.701	H8: Supported

Note: TL= Transformational Leadership; COM= Compensation; WE=Work Engagement; WP= Work Performance

### DISCUSSION

This study proposed to describe the research gap found in the previous studies. The research findings concluded that transformational leadership significantly affected employee performance. The transformational leadership style can inspire positive change of employees. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire employees by providing meaningful work that increases employees' spirit, enthusiasm, and optimism. Thus, leaders actively involve employees with intense communication patterns and show high commitment. Transformational leaders in the context of SMEs can be inspirational examples for employees in completing work or finding solutions to problems that arise. Transformational leaders are good problem solvers, so that they can improve employee performance. Transformational leaders can provide direction for problems employees face at work. The problems are dynamic, so it requires fast and effective solutions.

Transformational leadership was also found to share a positive effect on work engagement. As explained before, work engagement is an attitude or condition in an

individual in which an employee has a positive attitude related to behavior in his work as indicated by an increased performance at a higher level, commitment to the organization, sense of belonging and pride in work which is marked by vigour and dedication (dedication) and appreciation (absorption) in work. In the context of a small business, transformational leaders are able to provide the ideal influence to generate positive trust for their employees. The result is that followers will identify and align themselves with the hopes and ideals of the leaders so that the leaders can easily transmit motivation and inspiration to followers. Therefore, transformational leaders are able to generate individual engagement to their work. It means that the better the employee's perception of a transformational leader, the higher the employee engagement at work.

Furthermore, in contrast with the expectation, this research found that compensation has an insignificant effect on employee performance. The concept of compensation in business is everything that employees receive, both in physical form and not, which must be calculated and given as a form of reward for work performance. Previous research has concluded that compensation can motivate employees to show their best performance. One way to optimize performance is to provide compensation. However, in this study, compensation did not empirically impact employee performance. Several arguments can explain these results. First, compensation in small businesses is highly dependent on uncertain business conditions, so it only sometimes motivates employees. Second, the possible reason for the findings is that employees must force their energy and efforts to achieve compensation. So, compensation is not directly able to improve employee performance.

The result empirically found that compensation has positive effect in employee engagement. Although in this study, the compensation did not directly affect performance, the test results showed that compensation had a positive impact on employee engagement. The compensation provided by the company provides hope for the sustainability of the company's business. Companies that are still providing compensation mean that they have promising prospects for the business future. Therefore, this research conclude that the compensation can increase employee engagement with the company, so employee encourages to work totally and energetically to maintain the company's sustainability.

Work engagement has positive significant effect on work performance. Employees who have high engagement will make various efforts to achieve the target. Engaging employees will dedicate their energy to the company, including finding solutions to their problems at work. Employees with high engagement can also develop ways of working that are more adaptive to change so that they have a significant impact on their work results. On the other hand, work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and compensation for employee performance. This study concludes that transformational leadership inspires employees to engage more with their job. Inspiration from a leader can sharpen employee engagement, increasing work performance. Besides, compensation also nurtures a positive effect on employee engagement. The more SMEs company promise compensation, it will improve employees' trust and also engagement with the organization. Employees are encouraged to work more totality and energetic to increase performance and keep the business sustainability.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research seeks to dig deeper into the research gap found in previous research, namely in the relationship between transformational leadership and compensation on employee performance. This study states that transformational leadership has a

significant impact on employee performance. However, compensation in this study does not significantly affect employee performance. For test results using the mediation model, this study found that work engagement significantly mediates the effect of transformational leadership on employee performance. As a result, work engagement also significantly mediates the relationship between compensation and employee performance.

This research contributes both from a scientific perspective and from managerial practice. This research has proposed a research model that can be an alternative solution to the inconsistencies found in previous studies. This analysis proves the mediating role of work engagement in improving employee performance. Furthermore, for SME managers, this research's results suggest that managers practice an inspiring and open transformational leadership style. In addition, managers need to pay attention to managing the compensation given to employees in order to increase employee engagement. The better the transformational leadership and management of compensation, the more employee engagement will increase and ultimately improve employee performance.

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### **DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS**

The authors state that there is no potential conflict of interest regarding this manuscript.

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