



Linking Transformational Leadership to Employee Performance Through Work Engagement: Study at STIE Mulia Pratama Bekasi

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan struktural antara kepemimpinan transformasional, work engagement, dan kinerja karyawan pada sebuah institusi pendidikan tinggi. Berlandaskan pada kerangka Job Demands–Resources (JD-R), penelitian ini menguji peran mediasi work engagement dalam hubungan antara kepemimpinan transformasional dan kinerja karyawan. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dengan teknik sampling jenuh yang melibatkan 48 karyawan tetap. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) untuk mengevaluasi model pengukuran dan model struktural. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap work engagement. Work engagement juga terbukti berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja karyawan. Namun, pengaruh langsung kepemimpinan transformasional terhadap kinerja karyawan tidak signifikan. Analisis mediasi mengindikasikan bahwa work engagement memediasi secara penuh hubungan antara kepemimpinan transformasional dan kinerja karyawan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kepemimpinan meningkatkan kinerja terutama melalui peningkatan keterlibatan psikologis karyawan, bukan melalui pengaruh langsung terhadap hasil kerja. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dengan menegaskan peran sentral work engagement sebagai mekanisme psikologis yang menghubungkan kepemimpinan dengan kinerja, khususnya dalam konteks institusi pendidikan tinggi. Secara praktis, hasil penelitian menekankan pentingnya strategi peningkatan keterlibatan karyawan sebagai jalur utama dalam mendorong kinerja organisasi.

Kata kunci: kepemimpinan transformasional, work engagement, kinerja karyawan, mediasi, pendidikan tinggi.

Abstract: This study examines the structural relationships among transformational leadership, work engagement, and employee performance within a higher education institution. Drawing upon the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, the research investigates whether work engagement mediates the effect of transformational leadership on employee performance. A quantitative approach was employed using census sampling, involving 48 permanent employees. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess the measurement and structural models. The results indicate that transformational leadership has a strong and significant positive effect on work engagement. Work engagement, in turn, significantly influences employee performance. However, the direct effect of transformational leadership on employee performance is not statistically significant. Mediation analysis reveals that work engagement fully mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. These findings suggest that leadership improves performance primarily by enhancing employees' psychological engagement rather than through direct performance-driving mechanisms. The study contributes to leadership and organizational behavior literature by highlighting the central role of engagement as a transmission mechanism linking leadership practices to performance outcomes, particularly in the context of higher education institutions. Practically, the findings emphasize the importance of fostering employee engagement as a strategic pathway for improving organizational performance.

Keywords: transformational leadership, work engagement, employee performance, mediation effect, higher education institution.

INTRODUCTION

Transformational leadership has emerged as a central theme in human resource management research due to its capacity to energize employees, foster inspiration, and enhance individual effectiveness within organizations ([Madi Odeh et al., 2023](#); [Tian et al., 2020](#)). This leadership approach is characterized by four core dimensions idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration which enable leaders to mobilize employees toward the achievement of strategic objectives in a sustainable and purposeful manner ([Buil et al., 2019](#)). Rather than relying solely on formal authority, transformational leaders cultivate shared vision and intrinsic motivation to elevate performance standards.

In the context of contemporary organizational dynamics, work engagement has likewise gained prominence as a critical construct. High levels of engagement are consistently associated with favorable individual and organizational outcomes ([Monje-Amor et al., 2020](#)). Employees who are emotionally and cognitively immersed in their work tend to demonstrate stronger commitment, higher productivity, and a reduced intention to leave the organization ([Lambe, 2024](#)). Engagement reflects a positive, fulfilling state of mind that reinforces discretionary effort and sustained involvement in work activities ([McAnally & Hagger, 2024](#)).

Previous empirical studies have documented a positive linkage between transformational leadership and work engagement, while also confirming that engagement significantly predicts employee performance ([Aftab et al., 2022](#)). Evidence across various organizational settings indicates that transformational leadership enhances employees' level of engagement, which subsequently translates into improved performance outcomes ([Jiatong et al., 2022](#)).

Nevertheless, much of the existing literature remains concentrated within specific sectors, such as hospitality or small and medium-sized enterprises ([Buil et al., 2019](#); [HALIK et al., 2023](#)). Empirical investigations that explicitly examine the mediating mechanism of work engagement in higher education institutions remain limited. This gap is particularly noteworthy given the distinct social interactions, professional norms, and organizational cultures that characterize educational institutions, which

differ substantially from those found in profit-oriented sectors.

Supporting Data or Empirical Evidence

To provide an empirical overview of the phenomenon underlying this study, the following table presents a comparison of work engagement levels and employee performance outcomes based on several recent and relevant studies. This comparison highlights consistent patterns reported in contemporary research regarding the relationships among transformational leadership, work engagement, and employee performance.

Table 1. Recent Relevant Studies

Study / Source	Main Variables	Key Findings
Aftab et al. (2022)	TFL → WE → Performance	Transformational leadership positively influences performance through work engagement (Paradigm).
Buil et al. (2019)	TFL, WE, Performance	Work engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and performance (Journal STIEIP).
Jiatong et al. (2022)	TFL → WE → Performance	Significant positive relationships were found among the variables (Journal of YKPN).
Monje-Amor et al. (2020)	TFL → WE → Performance	Both transformational leadership and work engagement are positively associated with employee performance (PLJ).

Source: Compiled from prior empirical studies (2025).

The terms TFL (Transformational Leadership), WE (Work Engagement), and employee performance consistently emerge in recent scholarship as interrelated and strategically significant constructs. Contemporary empirical findings increasingly position these variables within an integrated explanatory framework, suggesting that leadership practices shape psychological engagement, which in turn drives performance outcomes.

Despite the growing body of research examining the relationships among transformational leadership, work engagement, and employee performance, empirical

investigations situated within Indonesian higher education institutions remain limited, including at STIE Mulia Pratama Bekasi. This gap is noteworthy, given that the effectiveness of higher education institutions is heavily dependent on the performance of lecturers and administrative staff who are deeply involved in achieving academic and organizational objectives. The complexity of academic governance, collegial culture, and dual academic-administrative responsibilities further distinguishes higher education settings from other organizational sectors.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address this empirical gap by examining the mediating role of work engagement in explaining how transformational leadership influences employee performance within a higher education context. By doing so, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the underlying psychological mechanism through which leadership practices translate into measurable performance outcomes.

Research Questions

Based on the background and research urgency outlined above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. Does transformational leadership significantly influence employee performance at STIE Mulia Pratama Bekasi?
2. Does transformational leadership significantly influence employee work engagement at STIE Mulia Pratama Bekasi?
3. Does work engagement significantly influence employee performance at STIE Mulia Pratama Bekasi?
4. Does work engagement mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance at STIE Mulia Pratama Bekasi?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grand Theory: Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership represents a leadership paradigm that emphasizes inspiration, empowerment, and the internal motivation of followers to achieve superior outcomes through the articulation of shared vision, values, and collective purpose ([Halik, Rantererung, et al., 2024](#)). The theoretical foundation of transformational leadership is rooted in the work

of Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio, who conceptualized leadership as a process that elevates followers' motivation, morality, and performance beyond transactional exchanges ([Bass, 1999](#)). According to transformational leadership theory, leaders cultivate strong relational bonds with followers, thereby strengthening intrinsic motivation and fostering commitment to organizational goals ([Kehr et al., 2023](#)).

The model identifies four core dimensions: idealized influence, where leaders act as role models; inspirational motivation, which involves articulating an appealing and meaningful vision; intellectual stimulation, encouraging creativity and critical thinking; and individualized consideration, reflecting personalized attention and developmental support. These dimensions collectively enhance followers' psychological empowerment and organizational attachment.

Recent empirical research continues to affirm the explanatory power of transformational leadership across organizational contexts. Contemporary studies indicate that transformational leadership exerts a significant positive influence on employee performance and work engagement, suggesting that leadership behaviors that inspire and intellectually stimulate employees contribute to higher levels of dedication, vigor, and job-related effectiveness ([Buil et al., 2019](#); [Jiatong et al., 2022](#); [Monje-Amor et al., 2020](#)).

Within higher education institutions, where professional autonomy and intrinsic motivation play central roles, transformational leadership is particularly relevant. Academic environments demand leaders who can align diverse stakeholders under a shared mission while simultaneously encouraging innovation and personal development ([Jiatong et al., 2022](#); [Supangkat et al., 2026](#)). Thus, transformational leadership serves as the grand theoretical framework underpinning this study, explaining how leadership behaviors may foster work engagement and ultimately enhance employee performance.

Work Engagement as a Positive Psychological Construct

Work engagement is conceptualized as a positive, fulfilling, and work-related psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. These three

dimensions reflect high levels of energy and mental resilience (vigor), a strong sense of significance and enthusiasm (dedication), and deep concentration and immersion in work activities (absorption) ([Sypniewska et al., 2023](#)). Unlike transient job satisfaction, work engagement represents a relatively stable and persistent cognitive–emotional connection to one’s work role ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2016](#); [Rumopa et al., 2025](#)).

The theoretical underpinning of work engagement is commonly associated with the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model developed by Wilmar B. Schaufeli and Arnold B. Bakker. The JD–R framework posits that job resources—such as leadership support, autonomy, and developmental opportunities—stimulate motivational processes that enhance engagement and, ultimately, performance outcomes ([Bakker et al., 2023](#); [Schaufeli, 2017](#)). Within this framework, transformational leadership can be understood as a critical job resource that fosters employees’ psychological attachment to their work.

Empirically, work engagement is frequently measured using the Utrecht University Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which operationalizes vigor, dedication, and absorption as observable indicators. In higher education institutions, where intellectual autonomy and intrinsic motivation are central, work engagement serves as a pivotal psychological mechanism linking leadership behavior to tangible performance outcomes ([Schaufeli, 2017](#); [Schaufeli et al., 2002](#)).

Employee Performance as an Objective and Subjective Outcome

Employee performance refers to the extent to which individuals accomplish work tasks in accordance with organizational standards and expectations ([Rumopa et al., 2025](#); [Yusuf et al., 2019](#)). It encompasses multiple dimensions, including productivity, effectiveness, quality of output, timeliness, and overall contribution to institutional objectives. Performance may be assessed through objective indicators (e.g., output targets, completion rates) as well as subjective evaluations (e.g., supervisory ratings and perceived effectiveness) (Wulandari et al., 2024).

Recent quantitative research in human resource management increasingly positions employee performance as a dependent variable shaped by both leadership behavior and

employees’ psychological states ([Susanti et al., 2024](#)). Transformational leadership influences performance not merely through direct supervision, but through motivational and cognitive pathways that enhance engagement, commitment, and discretionary effort ([Heri Prabowo et al., 2023](#)).

Within the higher education context, performance extends beyond administrative efficiency to include academic support quality, responsiveness, collaboration, and alignment with institutional missions ([Saprudin et al., 2025](#); [Supangkat et al., 2026](#)). Therefore, examining employee performance as an outcome variable provides a comprehensive assessment of how leadership and psychological engagement jointly contribute to institutional effectiveness.

Operational Definitions of Variables

a. Transformational Leadership Definition

Transformational leadership refers to a leadership style that inspires and motivates followers to achieve exceptional outcomes beyond initial expectations while fostering the development of their individual potential ([Lambe, 2024](#)). Leaders exhibiting transformational behaviors articulate a compelling vision, encourage innovation, and provide individualized support to subordinates (Anggraini et al., 2023).

Measurement

In this study, transformational leadership is measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), originally developed by Bernard M. Bass ([Bass, 1999](#)). The instrument captures four core dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Respondents assess leadership behaviors using a Likert-type scale.

Empirical Basis

Recent empirical findings across industrial, service, and public sector contexts consistently demonstrate that transformational leadership significantly influences both work engagement and employee performance. These studies suggest that leadership behaviors function as strategic organizational resources that stimulate psychological attachment and enhance work outcomes ([Jiatong et al., 2022](#)).

b. Work Engagement

Definition

Work engagement is defined as a positive psychological state characterized by high levels of emotional involvement, energy, and concentration in one's work ([Bienkowska & Tworek, 2020](#)). It reflects the extent to which employees feel vigorous, dedicated, and fully absorbed in their job roles.

Measurement

Work engagement is measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), developed by Wilmar B. Schaufeli and Arnold B. Bakker ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2017](#); [Schaufeli, 2017](#); [Schaufeli et al., 2002](#)). The scale consists of three principal dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Responses are typically recorded on a Likert scale to quantify the degree of engagement experienced by employees.

Theoretical Foundation

The construct is grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, which conceptualizes work engagement as the outcome of an interaction between job demands and job resources ([Schaufeli et al., 2002](#)). Within this framework, transformational leadership is considered a key job resource that fosters motivational processes and strengthens engagement levels.

c. Employee Performance

Definition

Employee performance refers to the level of achievement attained by an individual in fulfilling assigned tasks according to organizational standards within a specific period ([Susanti et al., 2024](#)). It reflects contributions to productivity, effectiveness, service quality, and the attainment of organizational objectives.

Measurement

Employee performance is commonly measured through supervisor evaluations, quantitative performance indicators (e.g., achievement of work targets), or a combination of subjective and objective assessments ([Halik, Lintang, et al., 2024](#); [Susanti et al., 2024](#); [Wulandari et al., 2024](#)). In quantitative organizational research, perceptual measures using structured questionnaires are frequently

employed to ensure consistency and comparability across respondents.

Empirical Basis

Contemporary literature consistently identifies leadership behavior and work engagement as significant determinants of employee performance. Empirical studies indicate that leadership influences performance both directly and indirectly through psychological mechanisms such as engagement, thereby reinforcing the relevance of examining mediation effects in organizational settings (Anggraini et al., 2023; [Krisnandi & Nurjihan, 2023](#)).

Theoretical Foundation and Prior Research Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement

A growing body of empirical research demonstrates that transformational leadership exerts a positive influence on work engagement. Within the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) framework, leadership behavior is conceptualized as a critical job resource that stimulates employees' motivational processes (Bakker et al., 2023). Transformational leaders provide vision, recognition, and developmental support, thereby enhancing employees' psychological meaningfulness and energy at work ([Aftab et al., 2022](#)).

Recent empirical studies conducted in Indonesian public sector institutions report that transformational leadership significantly strengthens work engagement, which subsequently contributes to improved organizational outcomes through robust psychological pathways ([Rachman et al., 2024](#)). These findings reinforce the proposition that leadership behavior is not merely structural or administrative, but motivational and relational in nature.

From a theoretical standpoint, transformational leadership functions as a contextual resource that activates vigor, dedication, and absorption—core dimensions of engagement as conceptualized by Wilmar B. Schaufeli ([Schaufeli, 2017](#)) and Arnold B. Bakker ([Bakker et al., 2023](#)). Thus, leaders who inspire and intellectually stimulate followers are likely to cultivate higher levels of work engagement.

Work Engagement and Employee Performance

Empirical evidence consistently indicates that work engagement is positively associated with employee performance ([Sypniewska et al., 2023](#)). Engaged employees tend to exhibit higher levels of concentration, persistence, and discretionary effort, which translate into improved productivity and work quality.

The JD–R model explains this relationship by suggesting that job resources foster engagement, which subsequently enhances performance outcomes through a motivational process ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2017](#)). Employees who experience high vigor and dedication are more willing to invest additional effort and sustain performance even under demanding conditions.

Recent quantitative research across educational and service sectors confirms that work engagement significantly predicts employee performance, both directly and indirectly, by strengthening commitment and task-focused behavior ([Supangkat et al., 2026](#)). These findings support the assumption that engagement operates as a proximal determinant of performance outcomes.

Direct Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Employee Performance

In addition to its indirect influence through engagement, transformational leadership has also been shown to directly affect employee performance. Leaders who articulate a compelling vision, provide intellectual stimulation, and offer individualized consideration can elevate followers' confidence and strategic alignment with organizational goals ([Hafidz & Noviyati, 2022](#)).

Contemporary quantitative studies across industrial and service contexts consistently reveal a positive and statistically significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance ([Anggraini et al., 2023](#); [Heri Prabowo et al., 2023](#)). Transformational leaders enhance performance by fostering intrinsic motivation, strengthening goal clarity, and creating a supportive work climate that encourages optimal contribution.

However, some scholars argue that the direct effect may be overestimated when psychological mediators are not simultaneously examined ([Monje-Amor et al., 2020](#)). This perspective underscores the importance of testing

engagement as an intervening variable rather than assuming a purely direct causal pathway.

Hypothesis Development

Based on the theoretical arguments and prior empirical findings discussed above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on employee performance. This hypothesis is grounded in transformational leadership theory, which posits that inspirational and supportive leadership behaviors enhance employees' motivation and capacity to achieve superior outcomes ([Bakker & Demerouti, 2017](#); [Schaufeli, 2017](#)).

H2: Transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on work engagement. Transformational leaders create empowering and meaningful work environments, thereby increasing employees' emotional and cognitive involvement in their work ([Khan et al., 2020](#)).

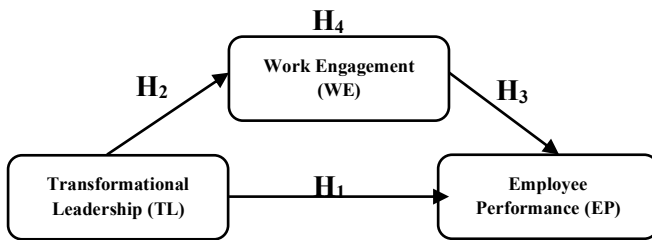
H3: Work engagement has a significant positive effect on employee performance. Higher levels of engagement strengthen employees' internal drive, commitment, and persistence, leading to improved work outcomes ([McAnally & Hagger, 2024](#)).

H4: Work engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. Employees led by transformational leaders are more likely to develop stronger engagement, which subsequently translates into enhanced performance ([Buil et al., 2019](#); [Jiatong et al., 2022](#)). This hypothesis tests whether engagement functions as a psychological mechanism linking leadership behavior to performance outcomes.

The authors conceptualize the research framework of this study as illustrated in **Figure 1** below.

The conceptual model proposes that Transformational Leadership (TL) directly influences Employee Performance (EP) and also indirectly affects performance through Work Engagement (WE) as a mediating variable. In this framework, transformational leadership serves as the exogenous variable, work engagement functions as the mediating (intervening) variable,

and employee performance represents the endogenous variable.



Source: Author's perception (2025)

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach using an explanatory survey design to examine the causal relationships among transformational leadership, work engagement, and employee performance (Sugiyono, 2021). The explanatory design was selected because the primary objective of the study was to test theoretically grounded hypotheses and to analyze both direct and indirect effects among variables within a structured model (Hair, Page, et al., 2021). Quantitative methods are particularly suitable for hypothesis testing and theory verification in organizational research, as they allow for statistical estimation of relationships among latent constructs and enhance generalizability within a defined population (Hair, Howard, et al., 2021).

The research was conducted at STIE Mulia Pratama Bekasi, an Indonesian higher education institution operating in the private sector. The institution was selected due to its organizational structure, which includes academic and administrative personnel working within a formal leadership hierarchy. Data collection was carried out over a three-month period, from October to December 2026. This timeframe allowed sufficient opportunity for questionnaire distribution, follow-up, and data verification to ensure completeness and accuracy of responses.

The population of this study consisted of all permanent employees of STIE Mulia Pratama Bekasi, including lecturers and administrative staff. Given the relatively limited population size, a census (total sampling) technique was applied, whereby all accessible members of the population were invited to participate. A total of 48 valid responses were obtained and used in the final analysis. The decision to include the entire population aligns with methodological recommendations suggesting that census

sampling is appropriate when the population size is small and manageable, as it minimizes sampling error and increases representativeness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, for structural equation modeling using partial least squares, a minimum sample size of 10 times the largest number of structural paths directed at a particular construct is generally considered adequate (Hair et al., 2019). With the maximum number of arrows pointing to a latent variable being two in this model, the sample size of 48 satisfies the minimum requirement.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed in printed and digital formats. All constructs were measured using established scales adapted from prior empirical research. Transformational leadership was measured using selected indicators from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass (1999). Work engagement was measured using items adapted from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli (2017). Employee performance was assessed using perceptual performance indicators commonly employed in organizational research (Saprudin et al., 2025; Susanti et al., 2024). All items were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The use of validated instruments enhances content validity and construct reliability, which are critical in quantitative behavioral research.

Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for predictive and exploratory models, accommodates relatively small sample sizes, and does not require strict assumptions of multivariate normality (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis was conducted in two stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and evaluation of the structural model (inner model). The measurement model was assessed through indicator loadings, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted (AVE) to ensure convergent and discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and bootstrapping procedures to test the significance of direct and indirect effects. Mediation analysis was conducted using bootstrapping to determine whether work engagement significantly mediated the

relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance (Santosa, 2018).

By employing a quantitative explanatory design, census sampling, validated measurement instruments, and PLS-SEM analysis, this study ensures methodological rigor while maintaining alignment with contemporary standards in organizational and human resource management research.

Table 2. Measurement Items

Variable	Co de	Measure ment Item	Dimension	Instrum ent Source	
Transformati onal Leadership (TL)	TL 1	The leader provides a clear vision regarding the direction and goals of the organization.	Inspirational Motivation	(Bass, 1999)	
		The leader acts as a role model in attitudes and work behavior.			
		The leader encourages me to think creatively and innovatively in completing tasks.			
		The leader pays attention to employees' individual needs and development.			
	TL 2		Idealized Influence		
Work Engagement (WE)	WE 1	I feel full of energy at work.	Vigor	(Schaufeli, 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2002)	
	WE 2	I am enthusiastic	Dedication		

Variable	Co de	Measure ment Item	Dimension	Instrum ent Source
Employee Performance (EP)		c about my job.		(Sapru ^{di} n et al., 2025; Susanti et al., 2024)
	WE 3	I feel proud of the work that I do.	Dedication	
	WE 4	I am immersed in my work.	Absorption	
	WE 5	My job provides meaning and challenge to me.	Vigor/Dedic ation	
	EP1	I am able to complete my work according to establishe d standards.	Task Performance	
	EP2	I complete my tasks on time.	Task Performance	
	EP3	I work effectively and efficiently.	Task Performance	
	EP4	I produce work of high quality.	Task Performance	
	EP5	I strive to deliver the best possible results for the organizati on.	Contextual Performance	

Source: Adapted from prior empirical studies (2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Research Object

This study was conducted at STIE Mulia Pratama Bekasi, a private higher education institution offering academic programs in

economics and management. The institutional structure comprises executive leadership, permanent lecturers, academic support personnel, and administrative staff who collectively support academic operations and institutional governance. Within this organizational setting, leadership practices play a central role in shaping work climate, coordination mechanisms, and employee motivation.

At the time of data collection, the total number of active permanent employees was 48 individuals, consisting primarily of educational support personnel and administrative staff. Given the relatively small and manageable population size, this study applied a census (total sampling) approach, whereby all members of the population were included as research respondents. This strategy minimizes sampling bias and enhances internal representativeness, particularly in organizational-level studies with limited population frames.

As a higher education institution, leadership quality carries strategic importance beyond routine administrative oversight. Leaders are expected to foster an adaptive work culture, encourage professional commitment, and align employee efforts with institutional academic and managerial objectives. In this context, transformational leadership becomes especially relevant, as it may influence employees' psychological engagement and ultimately contribute to improved organizational performance outcomes.

Respondent Characteristics

The demographic profile of respondents was analyzed based on gender, age, educational background, and tenure. A total of 48 valid responses were included in the analysis.

Table 3. Respondent Characteristics (n = 48)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	20	41.7
	Female	28	58.3
Age	< 30 years	8	16.7
	31–40 years	17	35.4
	41–50 years	14	29.2
	> 50 years	9	18.7

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	12	25.0
	Master's Degree (S2)	28	58.3
	Doctoral Degree (S3)	8	16.7
Tenure	< 3 years	7	14.6
	3–5 years	12	25.0
	6–10 years	16	33.3
	> 10 years	13	27.1

Source: Primary data processed (2025)

The data indicate that female employees represent a slightly larger proportion of respondents (58.3%) compared to male employees (41.7%). In terms of age distribution, the largest group falls within the 31–40-year range (35.4%), suggesting a workforce that is predominantly in its productive and professionally active stage.

Regarding educational attainment, the majority of respondents hold a master's degree (58.3%), followed by bachelor's degree holders (25.0%) and doctoral degree holders (16.7%). This distribution is consistent with the characteristics of higher education institutions, where academic and administrative personnel are generally required to possess advanced qualifications.

In terms of tenure, most respondents have worked for 6–10 years (33.3%), indicating a relatively mature level of organizational experience. A substantial proportion (27.1%) have served for more than 10 years, reflecting institutional stability and accumulated organizational knowledge. Collectively, these characteristics suggest that the respondents possess sufficient educational background and work experience to provide informed and reliable assessments of leadership practices, engagement levels, and performance within the institution.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis is conducted to provide an initial overview of the data distribution and central tendencies of each measurement indicator before proceeding to inferential testing. This analysis serves several important purposes. First, it allows the researcher to examine the general pattern of respondents'

perceptions regarding transformational leadership, work engagement, and employee performance. Second, it helps identify the dispersion of responses through standard deviation values, indicating the degree of variability among respondents. Third, descriptive analysis ensures that the data fall within the expected measurement range and that no abnormal patterns (e.g., extreme skewness in minimum or maximum values) are evident prior to structural modelling (Santosa, 2018).

By examining the mean, median, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation values, researchers can assess whether respondents generally perceive leadership practices, engagement levels, and performance outcomes positively or otherwise (Haryono, 2017).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistical Analysis (n = 48)

Code	Mean	Median	Observed Min	Observed Max	Standard Deviation
TL1	3.917	4.000	2.000	5.000	1.115
TL2	3.958	5.000	2.000	5.000	1.207
TL3	3.604	4.000	2.000	5.000	1.015
TL4	3.396	3.000	2.000	5.000	0.907
WE1	3.792	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.789
WE2	3.958	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.865
WE3	4.062	4.000	2.000	5.000	1.029
WE4	3.562	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.788
WE5	3.833	4.000	2.000	5.000	1.143
EP1	3.417	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.909
EP2	3.708	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.999
EP3	3.312	3.000	2.000	5.000	1.003
EP4	3.271	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.973
EP5	3.229	3.000	2.000	5.000	0.872

Source: Data processed with Smart-PLS (2025)

Overall, the descriptive statistics indicate that respondents tend to perceive transformational leadership, work engagement, and employee performance at moderately high levels. The mean scores for transformational leadership items range from 3.396 to 3.958, suggesting that employees generally agree that leadership behaviors reflecting vision, role modeling, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are present within the institution. Among these, TL2 (role modeling behavior) records one of the highest mean values (3.958), indicating strong recognition of leaders as behavioral exemplars.

For work engagement, mean values range from 3.562 to 4.062, reflecting a relatively high degree of vigor, dedication, and absorption among employees. The highest mean is observed for WE3 (4.062), indicating that respondents feel proud of their work, which signals strong affective attachment to their roles. The relatively lower mean of WE4 (3.562) suggests that full immersion in work may vary across individuals.

Regarding employee performance, mean scores range from 3.229 to 3.708, demonstrating that respondents evaluate their performance positively, though slightly lower compared to engagement levels. EP2 (timely completion of tasks) shows the highest mean (3.708), while EP5 (striving to provide the best results) records a comparatively lower value (3.229), suggesting potential room for strengthening discretionary performance behaviors.

Standard deviation values across all indicators range between 0.788 and 1.207, indicating moderate variability in responses. None of the indicators exhibit extreme dispersion, suggesting a relatively consistent perception pattern among respondents. Additionally, the observed minimum and maximum values fall within the predefined Likert scale range (1–5), confirming that the data distribution is appropriate for subsequent structural model analysis.

In summary, the descriptive analysis demonstrates that transformational leadership and work engagement are perceived at relatively strong levels, while employee performance, though positive, presents opportunities for further enhancement. These findings provide an empirical foundation for proceeding to inferential and mediation analyses.

Outer Model Test

Outer model testing (also referred to as measurement model evaluation) is conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments used to represent latent constructs (Hair, Howard, et al., 2021). In Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the outer model examines the relationship between latent variables and their observed indicators. The primary objective is to ensure that each indicator adequately reflects the construct it is intended to measure before proceeding to structural model analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

According to methodological guidelines in PLS-SEM, convergent validity is evaluated

through outer loading values and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where outer loadings should exceed 0.70 and AVE should be greater than 0.50. Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with recommended thresholds above 0.70 for exploratory and confirmatory research (Hair et al., 2019). Establishing measurement validity and reliability is essential to avoid biased structural parameter estimates and incorrect hypothesis conclusions.

Table 5. Outer Model Evaluation

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Transformational Leadership (TL)	TL1	0.918	0.908	0.936	0.786
	TL2	0.934			
	TL3	0.894			
	TL4	0.794			
Work Engagement (WE)	WE1	0.848	0.894	0.922	0.703
	WE2	0.790			
	WE3	0.894			
	WE4	0.809			
	WE5	0.848			
Employee Performance (EP)	EP1	0.885	0.905	0.929	0.725
	EP2	0.895			
	EP3	0.845			
	EP4	0.886			
	EP5	0.736			

Source: Data processed with Smart-PLS (2025)

The results demonstrate that the measurement model satisfies the recommended criteria for reliability and convergent validity in PLS-SEM analysis.

First, all outer loading values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that each indicator has a strong relationship with its respective latent construct. For Transformational Leadership (TL), outer loadings range from 0.794 to 0.934, with TL2 (0.934) showing the strongest contribution to the construct. Although TL4 (0.794) is relatively lower compared to other indicators, it still surpasses the acceptable limit, confirming its adequacy as a reflective measure.

For Work Engagement (WE), outer loadings range from 0.790 to 0.894. The strongest indicator is WE3 (0.894), suggesting that this item most strongly captures the engagement construct. Even the lowest loading (WE2 = 0.790) remains

above the minimum threshold, indicating consistent indicator reliability.

Similarly, Employee Performance (EP) shows outer loadings between 0.736 and 0.895. Although EP5 (0.736) is the lowest among the indicators, it still meets the acceptable standard for convergent validity, and therefore does not require elimination. Overall, the loadings indicate that all items substantially reflect their respective constructs.

Second, internal consistency reliability is confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values. Transformational Leadership ($\alpha = 0.908$; CR = 0.936), Work Engagement ($\alpha = 0.894$; CR = 0.922), and Employee Performance ($\alpha = 0.905$; CR = 0.929) all exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70. These results indicate strong internal consistency and confirm that the indicators within each construct measure the same underlying concept coherently.

Third, convergent validity is further supported by AVE values, which are all above 0.50 (TL = 0.786; WE = 0.703; EP = 0.725). This means that each construct explains more than 70% of the variance of its indicators on average, reflecting a high level of shared variance between constructs and their measurement items.

In summary, the outer model evaluation confirms that all constructs meet the criteria for indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. Therefore, the measurement model is statistically sound and appropriate for proceeding to structural model (inner model) testing.

Inner Model Test

Inner model testing (structural model evaluation) is conducted to examine the relationships among latent constructs and to test the proposed hypotheses. In PLS-SEM, the inner model assessment focuses on evaluating the model's explanatory power and model fit. According to Hair et al. (2019), structural model evaluation includes examining the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2) and model fit.

The primary objective of this stage is to determine whether Transformational Leadership significantly influences Work Engagement and Employee Performance, and whether Work Engagement mediates the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Performance.

Table 6. R-Square Value

Endogenous Variable	R-square	R-square Adjusted
Employee Performance	0.517	0.495
Work Engagement	0.582	0.573

Source: Data processed with Smart-PLS (2025)

The R-square (R^2) values indicate the proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs explained by their respective predictor variables within the structural model.

The R^2 value for **Work Engagement** is 0.582, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.573. This means that 58.2% of the variance in Work Engagement is explained by Transformational Leadership. According to commonly accepted criteria in PLS-SEM, this value can be interpreted as **moderate to substantial explanatory power**. It suggests that leadership practices play a significant role in shaping employees' psychological engagement within the institution.

For **Employee Performance**, the R^2 value is 0.517, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.495. This indicates that 51.7% of the variance in Employee Performance is jointly explained by Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement. This value reflects a **moderate level of explanatory strength**, demonstrating that more than half of performance variation is accounted for by the proposed model.

The relatively small difference between R^2 and adjusted R^2 values in both constructs indicates model stability and suggests that the explanatory power is not inflated by model complexity. Overall, these findings confirm that the structural model possesses adequate predictive capability and provides meaningful explanatory insight into the relationships among transformational leadership, work engagement, and employee performance.

Table 7. Effect Size (F-Square)

Structural Path	f^2 Value	Effect Size Category
Transformational Leadership → Work Engagement	1.393	Large
Transformational Leadership → Employee Performance	0.084	Medium
Work Engagement → Employee Performance	0.176	Medium

Source: Data processed with Smart-PLS (2025)

The f-square (f^2) values indicate the relative contribution of each exogenous construct to the R^2 of the endogenous variable when included in the structural model. Using conventional benchmarks (0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large), the results reveal differentiated levels of impact.

The effect of Transformational Leadership on Work Engagement ($f^2 = 1.393$) falls into the large category, indicating a very strong contribution. This suggests that transformational leadership is a dominant predictor of work engagement within the model. Substantively, leadership behaviors such as inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration strongly shape employees' psychological involvement at work.

The direct effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance ($f^2 = 0.084$) is categorized as small. Although statistically meaningful, its practical contribution to explaining performance variance is limited when work engagement is included in the model. This finding implies that leadership's influence on performance may operate more strongly through indirect mechanisms rather than direct pathways.

In contrast, Work Engagement on Employee Performance ($f^2 = 0.176$) demonstrates a medium effect size, indicating a meaningful contribution to performance outcomes. This suggests that employees' vigor, dedication, and absorption play a more substantial role in enhancing performance compared to the direct influence of leadership alone.

Overall, these results reinforce the mediating role of work engagement. Transformational leadership primarily drives engagement, and engagement, in turn, exerts a stronger practical influence on employee performance than leadership's direct effect.

Table 8. Model Fit

Model Fit Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.081	0.081
d_ ULS	0.688	0.688
d_ G	0.677	0.677
Chi-square	147.748	147.748
NFI	0.763	0.763

Source: Data processed with Smart-PLS (2025)

The model fit assessment evaluates how well the proposed structural model represents the empirical data. The SRMR value of 0.081 is

slightly above the conservative threshold of 0.08 but remains within an acceptable range in PLS-SEM applications, particularly in models with relatively small sample sizes. This suggests that the discrepancy between the observed and predicted correlation matrices is relatively low and still tolerable (Hair et al., 2019).

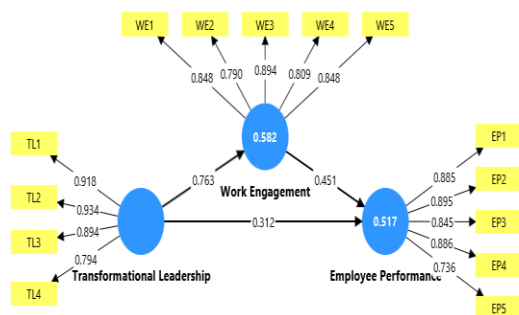
The d_{ULS} (0.688) and d_G (0.677) values represent discrepancy measures between the empirical and model-implied matrices. Since the saturated and estimated model values are identical, this indicates model consistency and stability.

The Chi-square value (147.748) is reported for completeness; however, in PLS-SEM, chi-square is not the primary criterion for model evaluation due to its sensitivity to sample size. Therefore, interpretation focuses more heavily on SRMR and NFI.

The NFI value of 0.763 falls below the commonly suggested threshold of 0.90. This indicates that while the model demonstrates acceptable absolute fit, its comparative fit relative to a null model is moderate rather than strong. In practical terms, the structural relationships are supported, but there may still be unexplained variance or potential room for model refinement.

Overall, the model fit results indicate that the structural model is acceptable for hypothesis testing, although it does not reach an optimal comparative fit level. The model remains statistically adequate and suitable for further interpretation of path relationships.

Having established the reliability and validity of the measurement model, as well as the adequacy of the structural model through R-square, effect size, and model fit evaluation, the structural relationships among the constructs are illustrated visually in the following diagram.



Source: Data processed with Smart-PLS (2025)

Figure 2. Structure Equation Model

Hypothesis Testing

Table 9. Hypothesis Testing Results

H	Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
H1	Transformational Leadership $\rightarrow$ Employee Performance	0.312	1.433	0.152	Rejected
H2	Transformational Leadership $\rightarrow$ Work Engagement	0.763	10.222	0.000	Accepted
H3	Work Engagement $\rightarrow$ Employee Performance	0.451	2.249	0.025	Accepted
H4	Transformational Leadership $\rightarrow$ Work Engagement $\rightarrow$ Employee Performance (Indirect Effect)	0.344	2.218	0.027	Accepted

Source: Data processed with Smart-PLS (2025)

The hypothesis testing results are evaluated based on the criteria of t-statistic > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05 at the 5% significance level (Hair et al., 2019).

H1 proposed that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on employee performance. Although the path coefficient is positive ($\beta = 0.312$), the t-statistic (1.433) is below 1.96 and the p-value (0.152) exceeds 0.05. Therefore, **H1 is rejected**. This indicates that transformational leadership does not have a statistically significant direct effect on employee performance within this model.

H2 stated that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on work engagement. The results show a strong positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.763$), with a t-statistic of 10.222 and a p-value of 0.000. Since the statistical criteria are met, **H2 is accepted**. This confirms that transformational leadership significantly enhances employees' level of engagement.

H3 hypothesized that work engagement positively affects employee performance. The path coefficient ($\beta = 0.451$) is positive and statistically significant ($t = 2.249$; $p = 0.025$). Therefore, **H3 is accepted**, indicating that higher levels of engagement contribute significantly to improved employee performance.

H4 examined the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. The indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0.344$; $t = 2.218$; $p = 0.027$). Given that the indirect effect is significant while the direct effect (H1) is not, this indicates full mediation. Thus, **H4 is accepted**, meaning that transformational leadership influences employee performance indirectly through work engagement.

Overall, the findings suggest that transformational leadership enhances performance primarily by increasing employees' psychological engagement rather than through a direct performance-driving mechanism.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced structural relationship among transformational leadership, work engagement, and employee performance. Although transformational leadership demonstrates a strong and significant effect on work engagement, its direct effect on employee performance is statistically insignificant. Instead, performance is influenced indirectly through work engagement, indicating a full mediation mechanism. This pattern provides important theoretical and practical insights.

First, the strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement confirms that leadership behaviors characterized by vision articulation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration serve as critical psychological resources for employees. This result aligns with prior empirical findings suggesting that transformational leaders enhance employees' sense of meaning, enthusiasm, and emotional attachment to their work ([Heri Prabowo et al., 2023](#); [Saprudin et al., 2025](#)). Within the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) framework, leadership functions as a key job resource that fosters motivational processes, ultimately increasing engagement levels ([Bakker et al., 2023](#); [Schaufeli, 2017](#)). The exceptionally large effect size found in this study reinforces the argument that, in knowledge-based institutions

such as higher education, leadership influence is primarily psychological rather than procedural.

Second, the significant effect of work engagement on employee performance supports a well-established proposition in organizational behavior literature: engaged employees exhibit higher energy, stronger dedication, and deeper concentration, which translate into better task execution and discretionary effort. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that engagement enhances both in-role and extra-role performance ([McAnally & Hagger, 2024](#)). However, the present study extends prior evidence by showing that in a relatively small institutional setting, engagement serves as the central performance-driving mechanism rather than leadership directly.

The most notable finding—and arguably the primary contribution of this study—is the absence of a significant direct effect of transformational leadership on employee performance. While many previous studies report a significant direct relationship ([Anggraini et al., 2023](#); [Heri Prabowo et al., 2023](#)), this study finds that the effect becomes non-significant once work engagement is included in the model. This suggests that leadership does not automatically translate into performance outcomes unless it first stimulates employees' internal motivational states. In other words, leadership behaviors alone may be insufficient to improve performance if employees do not internalize those behaviors into psychological engagement.

This full mediation result provides a refinement to existing leadership-performance models. Rather than viewing transformational leadership as a direct performance driver, this study supports a process-based explanation in which engagement acts as the critical transmission mechanism. This offers novelty, particularly within the context of higher education administrative staff, where performance outcomes are often influenced by intrinsic motivation and affective commitment rather than direct supervisory control.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study strengthens the JD–R model by empirically confirming that transformational leadership operates as a job resource that enhances motivational pathways. The findings contribute to leadership theory by emphasizing the mediating role of psychological engagement, thereby challenging simplistic

direct-effect assumptions frequently found in leadership research.

Furthermore, the results suggest that leadership-performance relationships are context-dependent. In academic institutions, where autonomy and intrinsic motivation are central, performance improvements are more likely to emerge through engagement mechanisms rather than directive leadership influence. This provides a contextualized contribution to transformational leadership theory and enriches the ongoing debate regarding the universality of leadership effects.

Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings imply that institutional leaders should prioritize strategies that enhance employees' engagement rather than focusing solely on performance directives. Leadership development programs should emphasize behaviors that build meaning, recognition, empowerment, and intellectual stimulation.

For higher education institutions, fostering engagement may involve participative decision-making, professional development opportunities, and recognition systems that reinforce employees' sense of purpose. Since work engagement demonstrates a medium and significant effect on performance, institutional performance improvement initiatives should integrate psychological engagement strategies rather than relying exclusively on structural or administrative controls.

Additionally, the non-significant direct effect of leadership on performance suggests that performance management systems should incorporate engagement metrics as intermediate indicators. Leaders may need to monitor employee engagement levels to ensure that leadership efforts translate into measurable outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Three key findings emerge from this study:

- 1) Transformational leadership exerts a powerful influence on work engagement, positioning leadership as a critical psychological resource within the organization. The magnitude of this relationship indicates that leadership behaviors primarily shape employees' motivational and

emotional states rather than directly driving output metrics.

- 2) Work engagement serves as a significant determinant of employee performance. Employees who experience higher vigor, dedication, and absorption demonstrate stronger performance outcomes, confirming that internal motivational energy translates into measurable work effectiveness.
- 3) Work engagement fully mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. The absence of a significant direct effect suggests that leadership does not automatically improve performance; instead, it must first cultivate employees' engagement. This finding shifts the emphasis from leadership as a direct control mechanism to leadership as a catalyst of psychological activation.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted within a single higher education institution with a relatively small sample size, which may limit generalizability to other organizational contexts or industries. Second, the use of self-reported measures may introduce common method bias, although statistical evaluation indicates acceptable model robustness. Third, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, as dynamic changes in leadership influence and engagement over time were not captured.

Future research should consider expanding the sample across multiple institutions or sectors to test the stability of the mediation mechanism. Longitudinal designs would provide stronger evidence of causal relationships and allow examination of engagement as a dynamic process. Additionally, incorporating moderating variables—such as organizational culture, job autonomy, or employee resilience—may deepen understanding of when and under what conditions transformational leadership becomes more or less effective.

Ultimately, this study underscores a critical insight: leadership effectiveness is not measured merely by its presence, but by its capacity to ignite engagement. When leaders inspire psychological

investment, performance follows—not as a command, but as a consequence.

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