

The Moderating Role of Transformational Leadership on the Relationship Between Perceived External Prestige and Employee Performance

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Abstract

An in-depth exploration of how the dimensions of transformational leadership individually moderate the influence of perceived external prestige on employee performance is still lacking. This research uses a quantitative approach measured by three scales: the transformational leadership perception scale modified from previous research (reliability value of .957), the perceived external prestige scale constructed by revealing aspects of personality, social development, and career training (reliability value of .962), and the employee performance scale modified from previous research (reliability value of .961). The research sample consisted of employees from various agencies, totaling 213 people. Data analysis in this research used moderated regression analysis. The results showed that transformational leadership serves as a moderator that strengthens the influence of perceived external prestige on employee performance, which means that the positive influence of perceived external prestige on employee performance will be more substantial if it is supported by transformational leadership.

Abstrak

Eksplorasi yang mendalam tentang bagaimana dimensi-dimensi kepemimpinan transformasional secara individual memoderasi pengaruh *perceived external prestige* terhadap kinerja karyawan masih kurang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif yang diukur dengan tiga skala, yaitu skala persepsi kepemimpinan transformasional yang dimodifikasi dari penelitian sebelumnya (nilai reliabilitas sebesar 0.957), skala *perceived external prestige* yang dikonstruksi dengan mengungkap aspek-aspek kepribadian, pengembangan sosial, dan pelatihan karir (nilai reliabilitas sebesar 0.962), dan skala kinerja karyawan yang dimodifikasi dari penelitian sebelumnya (nilai reliabilitas sebesar 0.961). Sampel penelitian ini adalah karyawan dari berbagai instansi, dengan jumlah 213 orang. Analisis data dalam penelitian ini menggunakan *moderated regression analysis*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional berfungsi sebagai moderator yang memperkuat pengaruh *perceived external prestige* terhadap kinerja karyawan. Artinya, pengaruh positif *perceived external prestige* terhadap kinerja karyawan akan semakin kuat apabila didukung oleh kepemimpinan transformasional.



INTRODUCTION

In the competitive business era, employee performance is central to organizational success. Employee performance manifests in various aspects, reflecting individual contributions to organizational goals. It is a challenge for an organization to manage its human resources to provide maximum performance (Widjaja, 2021). Employee performance can impact and contribute to the company's performance (Virgiawansyah et al., 2016).

Various studies have acknowledged that employee performance not only refers to quantitative results but also includes qualitative factors, such as creativity, initiative, and engagement, as well as organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Nugraha, 2020). In this perspective, it is understood that employee performance is not just a measure of individual achievement but also reflects the health and vitality of the organization and has an effect on other variables. Other studies show that high employee performance can increase morale and motivation among colleagues, creating a positive and productive work environment (Lestary & Harmon, 2017; Sihaloho & Siregar, 2020).

In addition, employee performance correlates with employee retention rates. Employees who feel recognized for their performance tend to be more loyal to their organization and create stability in the workforce structure (Suhendar, 2021). However, problems arise when achieving optimal employee performance is challenging. The literature identifies variables such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, managerial support, and working conditions as key factors that can measure employee performance (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2018).

Intrinsic motivation, for instance, is associated with increased productivity and job satisfaction (Widyaputra & Dewi, 2018). Furthermore, adequate working conditions play a role in ensuring optimal performance. A study by Pratiwi et al. (2019) suggested that comfortable work facilities, adequate equipment, and a safe environment can increase employee satisfaction and well-being and improve performance.

One of the recent studies by Cheng et al. (2022) highlighted that external factors, such as perceived external prestige, play an important role in shaping employee perceptions and performance. Perceived external prestige (PEP) has become a topic in human resource management and organizational behavior studies. PEP refers to how external parties, the public, customers, and partners perceive the organization. Recent studies show that these perceptions play an important role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of employees in organizations or agencies. Cheng et al. (2022) also found that positive external prestige perceptions can increase employee pride and job satisfaction, which, in turn, can encourage improved performance.

In addition, research by Mujianto and Indarto (2021) emphasizes that employees who work in agencies with a high reputation tend to be more motivated and more committed to their work. PEP reflects how the organization is viewed by external parties, shaping employees' perceptions of the value and relevance of their work. When an organization is perceived as prestigious in the eyes of the public, employees tend to feel more connected to the organization's mission and vision, which can affect their performance (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2018).

This is also consistent with what happens to employees in one of the organizations in Sorong. Interviews conducted with two employees regarding the performance of the organization's employees revealed that most employees work very well because they always get good organizational image reviews from the community and adequate facilities. Given the phenomena in the organization above, it is interesting to analyze whether PEP can influence employee performance.

Research conducted by Cheng et al. (2022) reinforces the interview results, where increased employee performance is inseparable from the importance of employees feeling proud of the organiza-

tion's external image. Dalton et al. (2020) also convey that an external image can create a competitive work environment, improving employee performance. The existence of a positive external reputation has an impact on reducing deviant behavior and improving employee performance (Tuna et al., 2016). Furthermore, a study by Alnehabi (2024) showed that good employee performance provides empirical evidence of how an organization's reputation, perceived from the outside, can improve employee outcomes internally. However, this study must be unraveled and integrated with various other studies. A context by Kang et al. (2011) stated that leadership plays a significant role in shaping employee work attitudes and performance.

Interviews that were then conducted with other employees from different fields revealed that the average employee performs well because of the good image of the organization and the role of managerial support led by the organization's leadership. This implies that more productive and high-performing teams are more likely to be led by individuals who provide constructive feedback and support employee development. Leaders who can provide constructive feedback and bring change to their employees are included in the transformational leadership style category (Amaliah & Sakir, 2023).

It has been proven that transformational leadership positively correlates with employee performance (Saad Alessa, 2021). This emphasizes the importance of leaders who can provide individualized support and inspiration to their subordinates, which can positively affect performance. Transformational leadership has been shown to motivate employees through individualized attention and aspirations that improve performance and motivation in crises (Rule & Regehr, 2024).

Several studies have found that PEP is a personal psychological factor in perceiving the value and relevance of each employee's work and affects their performance. On the other hand, the role of transformational leadership is also a determining factor for employee performance. However, from various studies reviewed, people have not discussed the relationship between these three variables, even though it is known that this variable can affect the relationship between PEP and employee performance. The variable in question is transformational leadership. Thus, this research places transformational leadership as a moderating factor. Based on this, this research was conducted to see how the role of transformational leadership in improving the relationship between PEP and employee performance. The aim is to identify the role of transformational leadership in moderating the relationship between PEP and employee performance.

METHODS

The research design uses a quantitative research approach by involving specific numbers and using statistical procedures (Creswell, 2014), with a survey type to determine the role of transformational leadership as a moderating variable, the relationship between PEP as an independent variable, and employee performance as the dependent variable. The respondents of this research were 213 private employees in the southwest Papua region who worked in the service and goods sectors. This research was conducted for three weeks, considering the time used to collect all the respondents and then process them with the help of a statistical program. Data were collected using random sampling techniques, where each respondent was given the same opportunity to be included in each population element.

Respondents interested in participating were then contacted to complete the instrument directly or through a Google Form link that included the consent and the scale used to measure each variable. This research was measured using a Likert scale with five alternative answer choices: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.

The employee performance scale, the third instrument, was modified from previous research using aspects of output quantity, output quality, time efficiency, use of resources, and abilities and skills.

These aspects were taken from Mathis and Jackson (2010). Examples of performance scale items include, “I do my work in accordance with the agency’s daily work targets” and “I am able to work quickly and responsively.” Furthermore, 35 employee performance instrument items were tested, and 30 valid items were obtained with a validation index of .341 to .854 and a reliability of .961.

Data analysis begins with a classic assumption test and continues with data processing using moderated regression analysis (MRA) v4.2 for SPSS by Andrew F. Hayes. This aims to see how transformational leadership variables moderate the effect of PEP on employee performance. Suppose transformational leadership is related to the magnitude of the influence of PEP on employee performance. In that case, transformational leadership moderates the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable (Hayes, 2013).

RESULTS

This research was conducted on 213 respondents with an age range of 17 years to 51 years, of which 19 and 20 years were the most respondents. Then, the distribution of respondents based on male gender was 87 people and 126 women. Furthermore, based on the length of work, 67 people have worked in their institutions for 1–2 years, 32 people have worked for 2–3 years, and 77 people have worked for less than 1 year at the agency where they work. The results of statistical testing on the residual value show a significance value of .200 ($p > .05$), so the resulting residuals are said to fulfill the normality assumption. Furthermore, the research hypothesis test was obtained as follows.

Table 1.
Data Analysis Results

Variables	R-squared	β	t-count	Sig.
Model 1	.720			.00
Constant		73.824	98.250	
PEP		.792	23.274	
Model 2	.756			.00
Constant		74.992	103.005	
PEP		.572	11.284	
Transformational Leadership		.409	5.606	
Model 3	.765			.00
Constant		73.543	82.917	
PEP		.582	11.643	
Transformational Leadership		.341	4.495	
Interaction X*M (<i>Product</i>)		.005	2.773	

Note. Y = Employee Performance

Table 1 shows three types of models, namely model 1 to model 3, which correspond to the predictors included in the regression and MRA. Model 1 (which contains PEP only) has a predictor contribution of 72% ($p = .00$; $p < .05$), meaning that PEP can predict employee performance. The data analysis results using MRA show a positive influence between PEP and employee performance ($\beta = .792$); this indicates that the better the PEP, the better the employee performance; otherwise, the worse the PEP, the lower the employee performance.

Model 2 (transformational leadership entered as an influence) shows that transformational leadership can also predict employee performance well. The effective contribution is 75% ($p = .00$; $p < .05$) and significant.

Model 3 (interaction between independent variables and moderator or product as test material) shows that interaction can predict employee performance with an effective contribution of 76% and significant ($p = .00$; $p < .05$). MRA results show a positive impact of transformational leadership on PEP on employee performance ($\beta = .05$). Transformational leadership can explain the increased influence of PEP on employee performance by 4.5%.

Transformational leadership can increase the effect of PEP on employee performance. Respondents with high PEP will increase employee performance with perceptions of transformational leadership.

DISCUSSION

This research examines the moderating role of transformational leadership on the effect of PEP on employee performance. The results of the data analysis show that this research succeeded in answering the formulation of problems and research statements. The findings show that PEP significantly influences employee performance, which aligns with research conducted by Firdausi and Nirawati (2024), which states that employee perceptions of a positive external image of the agency can encourage employees to work better. In addition, the results of this research also show that transformational leadership can strengthen the relationship between PEP and employee performance, explaining that the presence of inspirational and supportive leadership can increase the positive impact of PEP.

The test results show that PEP significantly predicts employee performance, with a predictor contribution of 72% in the first model, supported by research from Mujianto and Indarto (2021), which shows that employee perceptions of the external image of the institution are positively related to employee performance. When employees feel that their organization has a positive image in the eyes of the public, a sense of pride and loyalty to the organization increases, and employees feel valued and motivated to work harder and improve their performance. In this context, PEP is an intrinsic driver that affects employees' work psychology (Wang, 2022).

The performance of employees affected by PEP tends to be better than those who work in organizations with lower external reputations. Research has shown that employees who perceive a strong external reputation are more motivated to maintain high work standards, not only to maintain the organization's reputation but also because they feel associated with its values (Sürücü et al., 2022). In other words, PEP helps create a work culture where employees feel their hard work is valued not only internally but also publicly recognized. However, not all employees respond optimally to an organization's reputation. Some employees may feel that the organization's reputation alone is insufficient to encourage them to deliver top performance. This is where transformational leadership is important in strengthening PEP on employee performance (Schwarz, 2017; Shao et al., 2022).

In the second model, transformational leadership is also proven to predict employee performance with an effective contribution of 76%. This finding shows that transformational leadership directly affects employee performance and strengthens the influence of PEP. In other words, transformational leadership can be an important factor that strengthens employees' motivation to perform better when they positively perceive the agency's external image (Mujianto & Indarto, 2021). Transformational leaders help employees see a greater purpose in their work and encourage them to achieve maximum potential. This leadership style is very effective in improving employee performance, especially in situations where employees already feel a positive PEP.

The interpretation of these findings shows that PEP significantly influences performance, and this influence can be increased by transformational leadership. Good transformational leadership can increase management's knowledge regarding the conditions of the agency, and this knowledge can help connect the agency's external prestige with employees' personal goals, ultimately improving perfor-

mance (Baskoro et al., 2021). In addition, these results also show that transformational leadership can be an important tool in increasing the effectiveness of PEP as a predictor of employee performance (Zhang et al., 2021).

When transformational leadership is present in an organization with high PEP, employees will get a double boost. First, they are driven by the pride of working in an organization with a good reputation. Secondly, they are supported by leaders who continuously provide positive feedback, inspire with visions of a better future, and provide individual attention. This combination makes employee performance likely to improve much more significantly compared to a situation where the organization's reputation is high in the absence of transformational leadership (Wang, 2022).

The long-term effects of the interaction between PEP and transformational leadership can impact the organization as a whole. Employees who feel inspired and valued perform better and are more likely to stay with the organization, thereby reducing turnover rates and increasing loyalty. Organizations that maintain their external reputation and implement transformational leadership styles will benefit in terms of employee performance and long-term stability (Schwarz, 2017).

The results of this research in the context of previous research also found that transformational leadership positively influences various aspects of organizational performance, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee productivity (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This research extends that understanding by showing that leadership has its role.

Overall, the results of this research support the theory and state that transformational leadership and PEP are two important factors that can affect employee performance. This finding suggests that agencies that want to improve employee performance should pay attention to how their employees perceive the agency's external image and ensure that employees have leaders who can inspire and motivate them (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

This research also provides important practical implications for managers and leaders in various organizations and agencies; by ensuring that employees have a positive perception of the external image of the agency and by practicing a transformational leadership style, the agency can improve employee performance. This is also conveyed by Antonakis (2012), showing that practicing charismatic leadership, in this case transformational leadership, can improve organizational performance. This shows that the strategy of managing the external image of the institution and leadership development must go hand in hand to achieve optimal performance.

In addition, the results of this research also provide a significant theoretical contribution by showing that transformational leadership not only has a direct influence on employee performance but also serves as a moderator that strengthens the influence of other variables. This opens up opportunities for further research to explore the moderating role of transformational leadership in the context of other variables related to employee performance. This research also has several limitations that need to be considered. First, this research uses a cross-sectional form, meaning that data is collected at one point in time, so it cannot capture the relationship dynamics between variables over time. Therefore, longitudinal research that examines how the relationships between PEP, transformational leadership, and employee performance evolve over time would be beneficial in strengthening these findings.

Furthermore, although this research shows that transformational leadership strengthens the influence of PEP on employee performance, the mechanism underlying this relationship needs to be explored. Future studies could further examine how transformational leadership affects employees' perceptions of agency image and employee performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis results, the research found that PEP is proven to have a significant positive effect on employee performance. Employees' perceptions of the agency's positive external reputation can encourage improved performance. Employees who feel they work in agencies with a good public image tend to be more motivated and more committed to their work. This research also shows that transformational leadership is a moderator that strengthens the influence of PEP on employee performance. This means that the positive influence of PEP on employee performance will be more substantial if supported by transformational leadership. In other words, when employees feel proud to work in agencies with good external reputations and are led by transformational leaders, they perform better. This finding implies that agencies must consider these factors to improve employee performance. Agencies should endeavor to build and maintain a positive external reputation in the eyes of the public while implementing a transformational leadership style. Thus, agencies not only improve employee performance but also create a work environment that supports the growth of individual development. Further research is to explore other variables that may moderate or mediate the relationship between PEP and transformational performance and test these findings in different contexts.

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