

# HOW TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IGNITES OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE IN STARTUP COMPANY THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Richardo Lumbantoruan<sup>1</sup>, Zamralita Zamralita<sup>2</sup> & Rita Markus Idulfilastris<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Psychology, University Tarumanagara Jakarta  
Email: richardo.707222022@stu.untar.ac.id

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Psychology, University Tarumanagara Jakarta  
Email: zamralita@fpsi.untar.ac.id

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Psychology, University Tarumanagara Jakarta  
Email: ritamarkus@fpsi.untar.ac.id

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## ABSTRACT

*In recent years, startup companies, particularly in Indonesia, have garnered attention due to several startup closures resulting from a lack of product-market fit, marketing issues, team problems, and financial challenges. These issues are related to what employees do, as their tasks stem from the company's objectives that must be executed swiftly and accurately. Additionally, employees have responsibilities and obligations that demonstrate behaviors of working on and supporting tasks in line with the company's goals and to achieve SDG 9, with a specific focus on their roles in driving innovation and sustainable development within the evolving landscape of startup industries. The purpose of this research is to examine the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between transformational leadership and performance in startup company X, using a non-experimental qualitative method. This study utilized three questionnaires: the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, and the Psychological Empowerment Scale, administered to employees at startup company X. The participants in this study consist of 154 employees at startup company X in Jakarta, Indonesia. The results indicate that the role of psychological empowerment can mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and performance. The findings of this study support the Job Demand and Resource Theory and the Broaden-and-Build Theory in their influence on performance.*

**Keywords:** Job performance, transformational leadership, psychological empowerment, startup company, startup industries, SDG 9

## 1. PREFACE

In recent years, startup companies especially in Indonesia have gained attention due to their rapid growth in the digitalization era. According to Startup Ranking data as of June 14, 2023, there are 2,482 startups in Indonesia, ranking sixth globally and first in Southeast Asia (Startupranking, 2023). Start-ups have the chance to build their business models around robust sustainability, often incorporating novel technologies and seizing opportunities presented by digitalization (Ciulli et al., 2019; Harvey et al., 2019; Närvänen et al., 2020). When engaging in institutional work, start-ups must find a delicate balance among the three pillars of sustainability; economic, environmental, and social (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016). To achieve this, start-ups must formulate fresh, sustainable value propositions to attract and involve customers, investors, and other stakeholders (e.g. Calabrese et al., 2018; Närvänen et al., 2020).

While some startups achieve unicorn status or higher due to market trends, effective marketing, creative business ideas, and financial support from investors, building a successful startup is challenging. Nine out of ten startups fail, with 30% closing within two years, 50% within five years, and 70% within ten years (Firstsiteguide, 2023). In Indonesia, some well-known startup companies have faced challenges leading to their closure in 2023, including JD.ID, Fabelio, Airi Rooms, among others. This highlights the importance of addressing issues like product-market fit,

marketing, team dynamics, and financial stability to ensure a startup's success (CNBC Indonesia, 2023).

These challenges are directly related to what employees do, as their tasks are derived from the company's goals and must be executed swiftly and accurately. Employees have responsibilities and obligations that reflect their commitment to performing tasks in line with the company's objectives. Startup company X has experienced low performance in its finance and revenue divisions over the past three years. Performance appraisal in these divisions is based on two aspects: behavior (including leadership, judgment and decision-making, communication, teamwork, interpersonal relations, planning and organizing, integrity, technical skills, and knowledge) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The revenue division's KPIs include gross margin growth, collection rate, active workshops, salary sales cost to revenue ratio, and revenue target achievement. The finance division's KPIs involve business financial reporting, financial reporting accuracy, and budget variance. Behavior and KPIs are combined to assess the actual performance each year.

To identify the causes of poor performance in both divisions at startup company X, interviews were conducted with employees from the revenue division. One employee expressed dissatisfaction with policies that affected their job, such as salary deductions related to accounts receivable, which added financial stress and lacked a solution from their supervisor to help achieve sales targets. Similarly, a finance division employee stated that despite prioritizing their tasks, they were not given autonomy to prioritize work and suggest more effective strategies. In contrast, an employee in the BD division, which experienced improved performance, highlighted their alignment with the job, combining their knowledge and experience gained from previous positions and education. They also considered risks and discussed innovative strategies with their supervisor, leading to successful business development aligned with the company's goals.

The behaviors and activities of employees at work that contribute value to the organization and align with the organization's goals are known as job performance (Campbell, 1990). Job performance encompasses three dimensions: task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior (Koopmans, 2013). Poor performance in the revenue division affects unmet sales targets, leading to a decline in the company's income (50% of the company's income comes from revenue). Poor performance in the finance division results in delayed debt collection, slowing down the company's cash flow. It is essential for the company to focus on and improve the performance of every employee to achieve its goals.

A previous study examined job performance with three dimensions: Work Environment (task significance, coworker social support, and supervisor social support) and two Leadership behaviors (transformational leadership and empowerment) in the dairy, canning, bakery, and frozen pastry industries. The findings showed that the most critical variable affecting job performance was transformational leadership. Employee empowerment and task significance seemed to play secondary roles in influencing employee job performance. Lack of coworker social support and supervisor social support did not affect job performance. The study suggested that simultaneous conditions of transformational leadership and empowerment were necessary for job performance (Cabarcos et al., 2022). In more stable industry environments, argue that empowering leadership behavior is likely to have a more positive effect on the performance of startups with heterogeneous top management teams than in dynamic industry environments (Hmieleski & Ensley, 2007).

Job demands-resources theory explains that every job has specific risk factors related to work-related stress, divided into two major factors: job demands and job resources. Job demands encompass physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects that require effort or physical or psychological abilities (such as cognitive and emotional support). Transformational leadership has dominated research on leadership in recent years. It describes how leaders influence followers to go above and beyond expectations and prioritize the organization's interests over personal ones (Bass, 1990). This influence process occurs as leaders become role models for their followers, provide motivation and inspiration, encourage creative and innovative thinking, and guide with special attention. Several authors have concluded a positive and direct relationship between transformational leadership and job performance (Angelas et al., 2022; Matsunaga, 2021; Lee & Ding, 2020). Some studies also found that transformational leadership, through mediating variables like job satisfaction, job self-efficacy, work engagement, leader identification, organizational identification, leader-member exchange, and distributive justice, positively influences job performance (Ng, 2017).

Saira, Mansoor, & Ali's study (2021) examined the mediating role of Psychological Empowerment in the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) and Turnover Intention. The results indicated that Psychological Empowerment could mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and OCB, showing a strong positive mediation, and between transformational leadership and Turnover Intention, showing a strong negative mediation. Transformative Leadership increases Psychological Empowerment by fostering participatory decision-making, directing employees towards the organizational process, and reducing their intention to leave the organization (Abouraia & Othman, 2017). The research demonstrated that transformational leadership significantly and positively influences Psychological Empowerment, aligning with previous studies (Avolio, 1999; Bono & Judge, 2004; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Peterson & Speer, 2000). The study also assumed that Psychological Empowerment could influence job performance, as found in Bartram's (2020) research, which showed that Psychological Empowerment mediated the relationship between High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) and job performance. The study also indicated a positive correlation between Psychological Empowerment and job performance, consistent with previous research (Chiang et al., 2012; Huang & Jie, 2012).

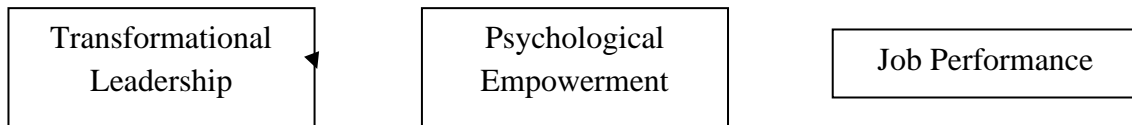
In the rapidly evolving startup era, transformational leadership and psychological empowerment play pivotal roles in guiding the direction of innovation and industrial development. Leaders capable of providing inspiration, motivation, and empowerment to employees not only create a productive work environment but also ignite the creativity and collaboration essential for the advancement of the startup industry. Therefore, this research aims to delve into the influence of both aspects on efforts to achieve SDG 9, with a specific focus on their roles in driving innovation and sustainable development within the evolving landscape of startup industries.

In conclusion, this comprehensive discussion highlights the various factors and dimensions related to job performance in a startup environment, emphasizing the importance of transformational leadership and psychological empowerment in enhancing employee performance and organizational success. Based on the reasoning, the first hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Psychological Empowerment can mediate the influence of Transformational Leadership on Job Performance.

**Figure 1**

*Research Model*



## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The study's research approach is quantitative and non-experimental, utilizing cross-sectional data collection. The study used convenient sampling to select the eligible respondents. The minimum sample size was determined to be 140, based on the total available population of 214, using a Krejcie and Morgan table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The participants in this study consist of 154 employees at startup company X in Jakarta, Indonesia. In addition, the study was approved by the Tarumanagara University Research Ethics Committee [287-TIM/KEPTM/3111/FPsi-UNTAR/IX/2023], where all of the procedures involving human participants were in accordance with the APA ethical standards. We informed all the participants about the aims and the course of the study and their rights to participate and withdraw at any time during the study. We confirmed their anonymity and confidentiality, and we started collecting the data after we obtained their participation consent to ensure that their participation was completely voluntary. The whole data collection process took 2 weeks, from the 3rd week to the end of 4th week of September 2023.

To measure job performance, the measurement tool used is the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) by Koopmans (2015) with 18 items that have been adapted into Indonesian by Widyastuti and Hidayat (2018) and the value of Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .869. One example item is 'I can plan my work so that I complete it on time.' This measurement tool utilizes a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (rarely) to 7 (always). Transformational leadership is assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 6s (MLQ) with 12 items that have been adapted into Indonesian by Kintan (2019) and the value of Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .957. One example item is 'My leader helps me in self-development.' This measurement tool also employs a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). To measure psychological empowerment, the Psychological Empowerment Scale (PES) by Spreitzer & Quinn (2001) is used with 12 items that have been adapted into Indonesian by Nesa (2018) and the value of Cronbach's alpha for the total scale .870. One example item is 'I have confidence in my ability to do my job.' It utilizes a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The participants in this study consist of 154 employees at startup company X in Jakarta, Indonesia. The study is predominantly composed of male participants total 92 (59.7%), while the female participants total 62 (40.3%). The range age of the participants is between 21 and 46 years, with 118 participants (76.6%) having worked for more than six months and 36 participants (24.4 %) for less than six months. Table 1 presents the means, SDs, Pearson's correlation coefficients of the study variables. As expected, all variables were positively correlated except for counterproductive work behavior (CWB).

**Table 1**  
*Means, standard deviations & correlations*

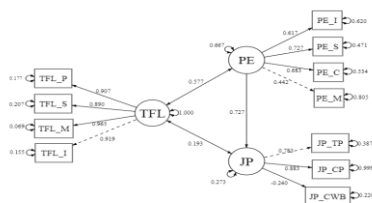
Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Task Performance	5.77	.861	—				
2. Contextual Performance	5.31	.849	0.692 ***	—			
3. CWB	2.29	.853	-0.102 ***	-0.210 ***	—		
4. Transformational Leadership	57.64	13.560	0.429 ***	0.550 ***	-0.380 ***	—	
5. Psychological Empowerment	68.88	8.159	0.540 ***	0.648 ***	-0.220 ***	0.470 ***	—

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model consisting of job performance (a second-order factor represented by its components of task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior, which were represented by five, eight, and five items respectively), transformational leadership (a second-order factor represented by its components of Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation and Individualized Consideration which were each represented by their three corresponding items), & psychological empowerment (a second-order factor represented by its components of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact which were each represented by their three corresponding items). Maximum likelihood estimation methods were used and the goodness-of-fit of each model was measured using absolute and relative indices. Job performance fit the data well (CFI = .917, TLI = .904, SRMR = .078, GFI = .970). Transformational leadership fit the data (CFI = .949, TLI = .930, SRMR = .034, GFI = .976). Psychological empowerment fit the data (CFI = .937, TLI = .913, SRMR = .072, GFI = .993).

The data processing was used is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method to test the hypotheses. Based on standardized regression coefficients (Table 2) we found that there is a significant. it was found that transformational leadership has a significant effect on psychological empowerment with a significance value (p-value) of <0.001 and an effect coefficient of 0.577 (positive). Furthermore, transformational leadership has a significant impact on job performance with a significance value (p-value) of 0.038 and an effect coefficient of 0.193 (positive). Additionally, psychological empowerment demonstrates a significant influence on job performance with a p-value of <0.001 and an effect coefficient of 0.727 (positive). The overall effect result between transformational leadership (TFL), psychological empowerment (PE), and job performance is 0.612 (positive). We found that psychological empowerment works as a mediator between transformational leadership towards job performance.

**Figure 2**  
*Structural Equation Model*



**Table 2**  
*Regression coefficients*

Predictor	Outcome	Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	95% Confidence Interval		Standardized		
						Lower	Upper	All	LV	Endo
Psychological Empowerment	Job Performance	1.378	0.328	4.195	< .001	0.734	2.022	0.727	0.727	0.727
Transformational Leadership	Job Performance	0.124	0.060	2.070	0.038	0.007	0.241	0.193	0.193	0.193
Transformational Leadership	Psychological Empowerment	0.195	0.045	4.342	< .001	0.107	0.283	0.577	0.577	0.577

Based on data analysis the hypotheses were supported. Transformational leadership have positive impact on job performance via the mediating role of psychological empowerment. Transformational leadership contributes a significant impact on psychological empowerment and psychological empowerment contributes a significant impact on job performance. This finding provides a significant contribution to the literature by demonstrating that psychological empowerment not only mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and performance but also enhances its influence. This result addresses challenges in previous research that indicated a relatively small impact of transformational leadership on performance, suggesting that the mediating role of psychological empowerment can significantly amplify this influence (Angeles et al., 2022).

The results of this study indicate that the influence of transformational leadership on job performance is indeed very small. Individual reactions to transformational leadership can vary, some individuals may be more responsive to this leadership style, while others may be less influenced and similar to several previous studies (Matsunaga, 2021; Lee & Ding, 2020). Additionally, this research shows that the role of transformational leadership with psychological empowerment also has a positive impact on employees with low job tenure (Angeles et al., 2022). Furthermore, the study reveals a significantly positive influence of psychological empowerment on job performance and surpassing previous research findings (e.g., Zhai et al, 2022; Bartram et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2021). When employees in start-up X feel they have control over their work, are valued, and have room for growth, they tend to be more dedicated and perform at a higher level.

**4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The research results indicate that the role of psychological empowerment as a mediator can enhance the influence of transformational leadership on job performance among employees in startup company X. By empowering employees psychologically and having leaders who can effectively communicate the vision and mission while instilling confidence in employees, they can contribute effectively based on their tasks. Leaders can communicate efficiently, enabling mutual understanding of each other's needs and demands, making employees feel that their work is meaningful and has a positive impact on the company (Hmieleski & Ensley, 2007).

First, this research also demonstrates that transformational leadership has a significant positive relationship with psychological empowerment through job performance and supported the theoretical lens of job demands-resources theory. Job demands-resources theory explains that

every job has specific risk factors related to job stress, which are divided into two major factors: demands and resources. Resources are the means to complete the job (Baker, 2007). In the context of this research, transformational leadership becomes an external resource that employees need to complete their tasks, while psychological empowerment is an internal resource originating from employees themselves that can provide meaning to their work and have a positive impact on the tasks they perform (Bartram et al., 2020)

Second, Functionalist perspectives often from the management standpoint, take organisational outcomes as the primary research focus, whereas broaden-and-build theory helps avoid overlooking employee positive psychological experiences and positive emotions in workplaces (Macky & Boxall, 2007). The broaden-and-build theory states that positive experiences can broaden perspectives and build psychological resources. In other words, when someone experiences positive emotions or situations, it not only reinforces their current well-being but also builds psychological resources that can be utilized to cope with future challenges (Fredrickson, 2001). In this context, transformational leadership can create positive experiences through inspiration, motivation, and the establishment of a supportive work environment. Psychological empowerment then acts as a mediator, where autonomy, competence, and individuals' connection to their work shape positive psychological resources. The Broaden-and-Build theory explains that these positive experiences not only influence current well-being but also build individuals' capacity to face tasks and challenges more effectively, ultimately enhancing their long-term performance (Zhai et al., 2022).

The perspective in this research provides an explanation for the relationship between transformational leadership and performance, where the role of psychological empowerment serves as a mediator. In attaining SDG 9, particularly emphasizing their contributions to fostering innovation and sustainable progress in the dynamic realm of startup sectors, leaders who can offer inspiration, motivation, and empowerment to their team not only cultivate an efficient workplace but also spark the creativity and collaboration crucial for the progression of the startup industry. Recommendations for future research to explore the Influence of Moderation Variables in examining whether there are moderation variables that affect the relationship between transformational leadership, psychological empowerment, and performance. These variables may include employees' level of experience, educational background, or other characteristics. Additionally, conducting research in different organizational contexts, such as involving organizations from various sectors or different contexts, to understand whether the relationship between these variables remains consistent or if there are significant differences depending on the context.

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