

Performance Enhancement Strategy through Work Engagement: The Role of Transformational Leadership and Structural Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Having a strategy to enhance human resource performance is important for every organization in order to ensure its sustainability in a global, competitive world. Organization needs to recognize the key factors which play fundamental roles in improving performance so that the efforts are effective and right on target. Transformational leadership and structural empowerment are two factors which have vital roles. The aim of this study is to analyze the effect of transformational leadership and structural empowerment on human resource performance through work engagement. The population in this study were employees in a furniture manufacturing company in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The sampling technique employed in this study was purposive random sampling with 100 respondents and it used questionnaire as a research instrument. Partial Least Square (PLS) was used as data analysis technique. The results showed that transformational leadership and structural empowerment have positive and significant effect on work engagement and human resource performance. Work engagement was also found to mediate the influence of transformational leadership and structural empowerment on human resource performance.

Keywords: *Human Resource Performance; Transformational Leadership; Structural Empowerment; Work Engagement*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive global business, to increase profits and sustainability, organizations need an extra effort in business development in order to survive. Business development including product innovation, utilization of high technology, service improvement and most importantly, improving human resources performance are the foundation for the organization to carry out its business activities. The competition in the use of human resources is very tight in the furniture industry indicated by relatively high employees' voluntary turnover. As the use of human skills are vital in this industry, the efforts to retain human resource in the company through work engagement and transformational leadership, is a significant issue to address in this study. Management of human resources plays a fundamental role in improving the quality of human resource performance as it is an important source of organizational competitive advantage (Bowen & Ford,

2002). Currently, organizations worldwide recognize that human resource performance is a strategic imperative. According to Quade et al. (2020), performance is the work result of human resources in terms of quantity, quality, time, and cooperation to achieve the goals set by the organization. Therefore, the performance of human resources is an important factor for organizations to achieve success ahead of the competitors.

Leadership is an important issue to achieve the high level of human resource performance in an organization. Transformational leadership style is one of the leadership styles that can move or increase the response of subordinates to any changes in the organization, so that the desired performance of human resources can be achieved. Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which the leader identifies the need for change, creates a vision to guide change through inspiration and positive behavior to increase the commitment of members in the organization (Yukl, 1999). Furthermore, transformational leadership has a strong positive effect on employee work outcomes (Mackenzie et al., 2001). Experts note that these transformational leaders are positively related to employee performance, employee commitment, satisfaction, individual and group performance, organizational effectiveness and employee customer orientation (Demir & Budur, 2019).

Structural empowerment is also another important factor in achieving human resources performance in the organization. Structural empowerment is an empowerment in the work environment that provides human resources with access to information, resources, support, and opportunities to learn and develop (Kanter, 1993). Structural empowerment is policies and structures that gives human resources more autonomy in making decisions and getting work done. Human resources feel psychologically empowered when they believe their work is meaningful, are confident in their ability and capacity to do their job, enjoy the freedom to determine the achievement of the desired results, and think that they contribute to the organization with the skills and knowledge they have. These attitudes shown by human resources become a supporting factor for improving their performance. This is in accordance with the results of several previous studies which stated that there is a significant positive correlation between structural empowerment and human resource performance (Jaffery & Farooq, 2015).

Work engagement is an excellent predictor of human resource performance. Work engagement can be defined as “a positive, satisfying, work-related state of mind characterized by passion, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli, 2012). Work engagement is when an individual involved in work has high energy levels, very enthusiastic about work, is completely immersed in daily work activities, finds meaning in work and has pride in being a part of an organization to achieve its vision and mission. Work engagement is one of the significant factors in improving the performance of human resources (Kim et al., 2019).

Several previous studies agreed that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on human resource performance (Top et al., 2020; Atmojo, 2012), but research from Elgelal & Noermijati (2014) found different results, that transformational leadership does not have significant effect on the human resources performance. Transformational leadership style encourages the culture and human resource practices that motivate employees to participate in organizational development. These traditions engage employees in their jobs and creates positive feelings toward jobs and organization. It means employees understand that they mean a lot for the betterment of the organization as the positive feelings will improve the employees' organizational attitude and ultimately will enhance the quality of work being performed. Based on the research gap and discussion above, the primary purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent the relationship between transformational leadership and human resource performance is mediated with work engagement. Furthermore, this study also focuses on the impact of structural empowerment towards human resource performance through work engagement.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Transformational Leadership, Work Engagement and Human Resource Performance

Leadership theory can be derived from social exchange theory which states that human behavior in social exchange generally refers to a two-sided reward process that involves at least two or more social groups (Zhang et al. 2018). It has been used successfully in many fields including in investigating transformational

leadership. Social exchange scholars have suggested that during social interaction between the leaders and the subordinates, such interaction is the reason both the leaders and the subordinates gain general expectation about the benefits for both sides.

Transformational leadership plays a very important role in increasing productivity, satisfaction, work motivation and human resource performance. Transformational leadership involves developing human resources, supporting them, encouraging motivation and morality, and meeting their needs (Ismail et al., 2009). Furthermore, Bass & Avolio (1994) showed that transformational leadership plays a role in bridging the gap between leaders and followers to develop a clear understanding of followers' interests, values, and motivational levels. Transformational leadership is widely recognized as a leadership style that motivates with a clear organizational vision which is achieved by developing closer relationships with subordinates, sensing their needs, and helping them to unlock their potential (Fitzgerald & Schutte, 2010). These transformational leadership traits have a relationship with work engagement constructs such as trust in the leader, support from the leader, and developing a blame-free culture which are elements of psychological security that encourage engagement in the workplace (Kahn, 1990). Based on the description above, the hypotheses proposed in this study are:

H₁: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on the engagement of human resources with their work.

H₂: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on human resource performance.

2.2 Structural Empowerment, Work Engagement and Human Resource Performance

Kanter (1979) in her theory of Structural Power in Organizations, posited that empowering workplace provides employees with accessibility into four sources, namely (1) information, (2) support, (3) resources and (4) opportunity so that they will be able to do their job to the best of their ability. In order able to have access to these structures it requires social contacts within the organization and job characteristics which refers to power, either informal or formal. (Kanter, 1979). Formal power is relevant to job authority while informal power develops from close contact, social alliances and connections both from internal and outside the organization. Social contact and connection facilitate cooperation from employees in order to perform their job effectively and efficiently.

Structural empowerment is a management practice and policy that aims to provide power from management to staff, which focuses on practical management and policies provided by upper management and distributed through power, decision-making authority, delegation, and responsibility to lower organizational level (Kassim et al., 2012). Ellis and Hartley (2012) defined empowerment as a process of conditions within the organization instead of personal characteristics. According to Melhem (2004), structural empowerment is freeing someone from tight control by the existence of instructions, policies, and orders, and giving the freedom to take responsibility to give ideas to management for decisions and actions taken in the workplace. Structural empowerment facilitates access to opportunities for learning and development, information, support and resources needed in a job (Kanter, 1993). Laschinger and Finegan (2005) found that structural empowerment has a positive effect on work engagement through five areas of work life, namely control, value alignment, respect, community, and justice. A study conducted by Boamah & Laschinger (2015) demonstrated that empowerment structures and psychological capital are associated with greater job involvement. Structural empowerment is the right component to determine job performance and job satisfaction (Sarmiento et al., 2004). Human resources who show a lot of work-related empowerment can be seen from their job performance and satisfaction, whereas, human resources with lower job satisfaction can experience frequent turnover which becomes expensive for the organization due to the lengthy recruitment process and intensive human resource training (Nedd, 2006). Furthermore, Laschinger and Havens (1997) stated that human resources who feel their work environment is empowered, experience power at work. Based on the description above, the hypotheses proposed in this study are:

H₃: Structural empowerment has a positive effect on the engagement of human resources with their work.

H₄: Structural empowerment has a positive effect on human resource performance.

2.3 Work Engagement and Human Resource Performance

Work engagement can be defined as the creation of opportunities for easier and wider communication among employees as well as the establishment of an encouraging and motivating environment in which human resources fulfill their 'want to communicate with their work', in addition to concern for higher performance (MacLeod, Quinn & Clarke, 2011). Work engagement is explained as a motivational concept, in which a person's physical, cognitive and emotional energy is directed to work (Kahn, 1990). Work engagement is also defined as a positive, satisfying, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, 2012). Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience, the willingness to invest effort in work, and persistence even in the face of adversity. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in work, and experiencing a sense of importance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Finally, absorption is characterized by full concentration and being immersed in work, where time passes quickly and has difficulty getting away from work. Human resources who are tied to their work are those who are attentive, connected, integrated, and focused on their task performance. They are more open to others, willing to build relationships with others in the workplace, and more likely to bring their whole selves to carry out their work roles (Kahn, 1990). Based on the description above, the hypotheses proposed in this research are:

H₅: Work engagement has a positive effect on human resource performance

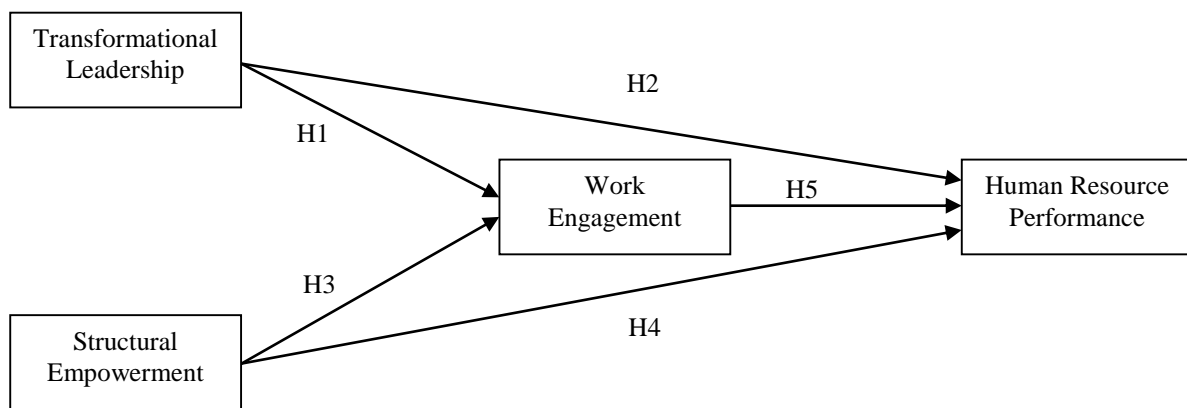


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted on employees who work in the operation department at a furniture manufacturing company in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The operation department was chosen as the object of research, considering that operations are the core department of a company, especially manufacturing, which carries out the production process and produces products that have selling value. This department works based on clear and measurable targets. The performance of this department will greatly determine the results of the company's overall performance. For this reason, the operational department needs a transformational leader who empowers structurally from top to bottom to optimize human resource performance and ensure optimal results.

3.1 Data Collection

This study uses purposive sampling with a total population of 296 employees. According to Hair (2020), the number of research samples is the total indicators multiplied by 5-10, therefore the number of minimum samples in this study is $19 \times 5 = 95$ respondents, which represents 32% of the total population. Primary data from this study was obtained by distributing by hand questionnaires to a total of 100 respondents. The questionnaire consists of general questions related to the identity of the respondents such as age, position, gender, years of service and recent education as well as several core questions that represent each research variable. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company continued to operate by regulating employee

attendance and ensuring the capacity of the workspace according to the rules permitted by the government. The variables used in this study consisted of Transformational Leadership, Structural Empowerment, Work Engagement and Human Resource Performance with a total of 19 questions using a Likert Scale of 1 for Strongly Disagree to 5 for Strongly Agree. In addition, there are also 4 open-ended questions, each of which represents each variable. The data collected was then processed using Partial Least Square (PLS).

3.2 Measurement

Transformational Leadership

We define Transformational Leadership as a leadership style that develops, encourages and motivates subordinates towards positive and valuable change for the organization. We measure the variables using 4 indicators, namely (1) the idealism of the leader, (2) the vision of the leader, (3) the intellectual stimulation of the leader, and (4) the individual attention of the leader. The indicator is adopted from Bass (1997). Based on the results of data processing, all indicators are declared valid with loading factors more than 0.5.

Structural Empowerment

We define Structural Empowerment as empowering human resources through access to information (company goals and targets), support (directions and assistance), resources (providing financial, material, time and goods needed to work) and learning opportunities (increasing knowledge and skills). We measure the variables using 4 indicators, namely (1) the existence of access to information, (2) the existence of support, (3) the availability of resources, and (4) the existence of learning opportunities. The indicator is adopted from Kanter (1993). Based on the results of data processing, all indicators are declared valid with loading factors more than 0.5.

Work Engagement

We define Work Engagement as the attachment felt by human resources in the form of physical and emotional exertion and bonding that aims to produce professional and optimal work. We measured the variables using five indicators, namely (1) feeling proud of their work, (2) having energy security at work, (3) feeling enthusiastic about their work (4) fully concentrated on work, and (5) being fully engaged with work. The indicator was adopted from W. Schaufeli et al. (2002). Based on the results of data processing, all indicators are declared valid with loading factors more than 0.5.

Human Resources Performance

We define Human Resource Performance as the achievement of work results produced by human resources in accordance with the task targets assigned to them. We measured the variables using 6 indicators, namely (1) being able to behave innovatively, (2) being able to build positive relationships, (3) being able to prioritize work, (4) achieve targets, (5) reach deadlines, and (6) achieve quality work. The indicator is adopted from Bacong & Encio (2017). Based on the results of data processing, all indicators are declared valid with loading factors more than 0.5.

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Hypothesis Test Result

Data obtained from this study which has been declared as valid was then processed using Partial Least Square (PLS) method by testing the outer model and inner model to see the validity and reliability of each variable. The result of data processing can be seen as follows:

Tabel 1. Coefficient Parameter, T-Statistic and P-Values

Hypothesis	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Statistic	P- Values	Hypothesis Test result
Transformational Leadership towards Work Engagement	0.228	0.228	0.090	2.528	0.012	Accepted

Transformational Leadership towards Human Resource Performance	0.297	0.299	0.118	2.515	0.012	Accepted
Structural Empowerment towards Work Engagement	0.586	0.589	0.081	7.288	0.000	Accepted
Structural Empowerment towards Human Resource Performance	0.297	0.291	0.131	2.266	0.024	Accepted
Work Engagement towards Human Resource Performance	0.326	0.329	0.112	2.910	0.004	Accepted
Work Engagement Mediates between Transformational Leadership and Human Resource Performance	0.074	0.073	0.038	1.970	0.049	Accepted
Work Engagement Mediates between Structural Empowerment and Human Resource Performance	0.191	0.196	0.078	2.454	0.014	Accepted

Hypothesis 1 states that Transformational Leadership has a positive effect on Work Engagement. The test results supported this with P-values $0.012 < 0.05$ so that H_0 was rejected. The coefficient value in the original sample column showed a positive number, which meant the effect was positive. This means that if the transformational leadership is higher, then human resources will be more engaged in their work, thus hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2 states that Transformational Leadership has a positive effect on Human Resource Performance. The test results supported this with P-values $0.012 < 0.05$ so that H_0 was rejected. The coefficient value in the original sample column showed a positive number, which meant the effect was positive. This means that if the transformational leadership is higher, the performance of human resources will increase, thus hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3 states that Structural Empowerment has a positive effect on Work Engagement. The test results supported this with P-values $0.000 < 0.05$ so H_0 was rejected. The coefficient value in the original sample column showed a positive number, which means the effect was positive. This means that if the structural empowerment is higher, then human resources will be more engaged to their work, thus hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Hypothesis 4 states that Structural Empowerment has a positive effect on Human Resource Performance. The test results supported this with P-values $0.024 < 0.05$ so that H_0 was rejected. The coefficient value in the original sample column showed a positive number, which means the effect was positive. This means that if the structural empowerment is higher, the performance of human resources will increase, thus hypothesis 4 is accepted.

Hypothesis 5 states that Work Engagement has a positive effect on Human Resource Performance. The test results supported this with P-values $0.004 < 0.05$ so H_0 was rejected. The coefficient value in the original sample column showed a positive number, which means the effect was positive. This means that if the work engagement is higher, the performance of human resources will increase, thus hypothesis 5 is accepted.

Mediating Variable

Based on the specific indirect effects result, Work Engagement mediated relationship between Transformational Leadership and Human Resource Performance with P-values $0.049 < 0.05$. It means that if transformational leadership is high, it will foster human resources engagement toward their work which

eventually will increase their performance.

Work Engagement also mediated relationship between Structural Empowerment and Human Resource Performance with P-values $0.014 < 0.05$. It means that if structural empowerment is high, it will foster human resources engagement toward their work which eventually will increase their performance.

4.2 Discussion

The result of this study shows that transformational leadership has influence on both work engagement and human resource performance. The highest indicator of transformational leadership itself is the idealism of the leader, where employees see their leader as a role model. A transformational leader will be a good example for his or her subordinates by demonstrating high standards of moral and ethical conduct (Buil et al., 2019). This kind of examples will motivate and drive subordinates to do the same thing. Furthermore, the vision of the leader is found to be the highest indicator which influences work engagement and human resource performance. A leader is required to have clear vision about where the organization will be heading to as well as having specific and clear objectives that encourage subordinates to set their goals (Top et al., 2020). In addition, leaders should be able to show their subordinates how this can be achieved. This is in line with answers from open-ended question by respondents related to how they describe transformational leadership. They wanted leaders that provide clear direction and guidance on how to achieve company goals, leaders that motivate subordinates to have better performance and also leaders that provide solution to any problems related to work.

The results of this study further supported the statement that a leader must be aware and understand that he/she is a central figure who has an important influence toward his/her subordinates. The transformational leadership as a role model is often used as an example and who inspiring their employees. When, the employees have already inspired then it will encourage employee's engagement higher, the employees have more attachment to their work further it will ultimately have an impact on employee performance. The idealism of the transformational leaders has contagious to their subordinates about idealism and when the idealism and principles are able to practicing in their daily life, thus idealism is crystalized and will be followed by the employees. The transformational leaders become the main reference in the work-life of their subordinates. Moreover, the ability to analyze the business environment in the future and translate the organization's vision to subordinates needs transformational leaders who have good communication skills. The communication skills such as doing two-way communication and ability to listening the complaints and opinions from the subordinates is crucial factor. When leaders can apply this well, then human resources will be more engaged with work and their performance will also increase.

Other factor influencing human resource performance is structural empowerment. The result of this study also showed that structural empowerment has influence on work engagement. Empowering work conditions may enhance engagement by stimulating employees' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Armor et al., 2021). The existence of support becomes the highest indicator of structural empowerment which indicates that employees demand support from organization when they face difficulties in any work-related issues. Such support can be shown by organization through establishing policies and procedures that empower employees to achieve a high level of sustainable performance (Reed, 2019). Other support can be implemented by providing enough resources for employees to do their job. Furthermore, organization can count on its leaders to provide necessary support for its subordinates. The support can be in tangible forms related to job resources and intangible forms such as access to information since leaders are in higher positions that have more privilege than subordinates. This is in line with answer from open-ended question by respondents related to what kind of support from organization that really matters to them. Most of respondents said that provision of adequate tools, equipment and other relevant facilities were important.

The last finding of this study was that work engagement had influence on human resource performance and also mediated influence between transformational leadership and structural empowerment towards human resource performance. Human resource which was fully concentrated on work became the highest indicator of work engagement. It means that engaged employees are more focus in doing their tasks. It is shown by finishing target according to deadline with minimum mistake because they are doing it carefully. This was confirmed by the answer of open-ended questions from respondents saying that they felt responsible to finish

their jobs on time and achieve the target in terms of quality and quantity. As for enthusiastic feeling about work, it was dominantly influenced by work engagement towards human resource performance. It shows that engaged employees are happy while doing their job, feel motivated and ready to take new challenges (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

5.0 CONCLUSION

The result of this study provides empirical evidence for human resource and management practices which can be used as a reference on enhancing human resource performance. The important finding of this study is that work engagement has the highest influence in enhancing human resource performance compared to other variables namely transformational leadership and structural empowerment. Based on this result, organization needs to ensure that human resources' engagement to their work is properly maintained by recognizing other factors influencing it. Another important finding is that structural empowerment has a higher influence in improving work engagement compared to transformational leadership. It means organization need to focus on providing access to information, establishing system support for employees to any work-related issues, provide adequate job resources and give employees opportunities to learn and develop their skills and competencies. Employees will reciprocate by showing high level of engagement to their work which eventually will foster their performance, if organizations are consistent in doing these.

The results of this study enrich previous research which discuss the relationship of transformational, structural empowerment and work engagement toward employees. The research model that is developed in this study is able to strengthen theoretical concepts and provides theoretical contribution towards transformational leadership (the social exchange theory) and structural empowerment (the social support theory), as well as provides empirical support for the previous research. This study has a limitation in term of respondents as it only used employees from a certain department (operational) in organization instead of all the employees. Future research can be conducted with more respondents and a variety of organizations to get a more generalized result.

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