Studi Ilmu Manajemen dan Organisasi (SIMO)
ISSN: 2745-7826, Vol 7, No 2, 2026, 205-219 https://doi.org/10.61401/simo.v7.n3.p205-219.2026

Work Motivation as a Mediator between Transformational Leadership, Organizational Culture and Employee Performance

Didik Sugiyantoro[1*], Teguh Widodo[2], Rifki Hanif[3]
Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Asia Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia[1,2,3]
didiks381@gmail.com[1*], teguhwidodo@asia.ac.id[2], rifki.hanif@asia.ac.id[3]

Article History
Received on 07 August 2026
1st Revision on 10 August 2026
2nd Revision on 11 August 2026
3rd Revision on 12 August 2026
Accepted on 14 August 2026

Abstract

Purpose: This study compares the direct and motivation-mediated effects of transformational leadership and organizational culture on employee performance among dispersed Sales Representatives in an Indonesian publisher.

Research methodology: A cross-sectional survey was conducted using purposive sampling. Responses from 150 permanent Sales Representatives with over one year of tenure were analyzed using PLS-SEM.

Results: Transformational leadership increased work motivation ($\beta = 0.203$; $p = 0.014$) but did not directly affect performance ($\beta = -0.021$; $p = 0.741$). Organizational culture increased motivation ($\beta = 0.574$, $p < 0.001$) and performance ($\beta = 0.516$, $p < 0.001$). Motivation increased performance ($\beta = 0.379$; $p < 0.001$) and mediated the effects of leadership ($\beta = 0.077$; $p = 0.017$) and culture ($\beta = 0.217$; $p < 0.001$) on performance.

Conclusions: Culture is the strongest direct performance predictor, whereas leadership affects performance only after being translated into motivation.

Limitations: The cross-sectional, single-company, purposive, and self-reported designs limited causal and external inferences.

Contribution: This study advances leadership–culture theory by introducing Asymmetric Motivational Mediation, showing that motivation fully transmits transformational leadership effects but only partially transmits organizational culture effects on employee performance.

Keywords: *Employee Performance, Organizational Culture, PLS-SEM, Transformational Leadership, Work Motivation*

How to Cite: Sugiyantoro, D., Widodo, T., & Hanif, R. (2026). Work Motivation as a Mediator between Transformational Leadership, Organizational Culture and Employee Performance. *Studi Ilmu Manajemen dan Organisasi*, 7(2), 205-219.

1. Introduction

Digital transformation, regulatory changes, and intensifying competition have reshaped the Indonesian education industry. The implementation of the School Procurement Information System (SIPLah), changes in the management of School Operational Assistance funding, and growing expectations for transparent digital transactions have required educational publishers and distributors to adjust their products, services, and market approaches. Such changes place human resources at the center of organizational adaptation because strategy is executed through employees who maintain customer relationships, respond to schools' needs, and achieve sales targets.

At PT Intan Pariwara, Sales Representatives are the company's frontline employees. Their work requires extensive mobility, product knowledge, consultative communication, territory management, and the ability to respond to changing school demands. Therefore, employee performance is reflected not only in sales volume but also in service continuity, market coverage, customer retention, timely execution, and independent problem solving. The stability and effectiveness of this workforce are strategically important for organizational competitiveness.

Nevertheless, the company faces persistent human resource challenges. Internal records show that Sales Representative turnover reached 141 employees in 2023, 131 in 2024, and 220 in 2025; a further 42 employees had left by April 20, 2026. Repeated turnover can disrupt customer relationships, increase the workload of remaining employees, raise recruitment and adaptation costs, and delay the achievement of targets. These conditions suggest that employee performance cannot be understood solely through technical capabilities or target setting. Leadership, shared organizational values, and psychological willingness to exert effort must also be considered.

Transformational leadership is frequently associated with higher performance because leaders provide an ideal example, articulate an inspiring vision, stimulate new ways of thinking, and attend to individual development (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Podsakoff et al., 1990). However, direct leadership effects may be weaker in organizations with geographically dispersed employees and standardized work systems. Sales Representatives often work independently in their territories; consequently, managerial influence may first need to be internalized as motivation before it changes observable performance.

Organizational culture is another mechanism. Shared values, norms, attention to detail, result orientation, teamwork, competitiveness, and stability can guide decisions even when supervisors are not physically present (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hartnell et al., 2011; Robbins & Judg 2022). A strong culture may affect performance directly by clarifying expected behavior and indirectly by strengthening employees' willingness to pursue the organization's goals. Prior research generally reports positive associations among leadership, culture, motivation, and performance; however, the magnitude and mechanism of these relationships vary across contexts (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Wang et al., 2011; Xenikou & Simosi, 2006).

Recent studies do not support the existence of a single universal pathway. Indonesian evidence links culture and motivation to performance (Baranti et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2024), whereas Khan et al. (2020) found that transformational leadership affects work performance partly through intrinsic motivation. Peña and Caruajulca (2024) further reported that culture fully transmits the effect of transformational leadership on organizational performance in SMEs. These contrasting direct and mediated patterns indicate that leadership and culture may operate via different mechanisms. They have not been compared within a geographically dispersed educational sales workforce, where supervisors are intermittently present, but cultural rules remain continuously available.

This study, therefore, addresses three gaps: limited evidence from educational publishing and distribution, insufficient comparison of leadership and culture as simultaneous antecedents, and limited classification of whether motivation produces indirect-only or complementary mediation. This study aimed to estimate the direct effects of transformational leadership and organizational culture on motivation and performance and to determine the distinct mediating role of work motivation.

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that organizational culture is a more proximal and dominant predictor of Sales Representative performance, whereas transformational leadership operates through an indirect-only motivational pathway. Practically, the findings help management prioritize cultural reinforcement, fair motivational systems, and leadership development that translate inspiration into sustained employee effort.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership describes a process through which leaders elevate followers' values, aspirations, and willingness to contribute beyond their routine expectations. The four established behaviors are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Meta-analytic and multilevel evidence shows that such leadership can shape motivation, trust, creativity, innovation, and performance, although the strength of the direct performance relationship depends on the task and organizational conditions (Afsar et al., 2014; Bass et al., 2003; Gong et al., 2009; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2011).

Social and motivational processes explain why transformational leadership may affect employee outcomes. Leaders provide meaningful goals, strengthen employees' confidence, link individual roles to a collective purpose, and encourage employees to reconsider established approaches. These behaviors can increase intrinsic motivation and employees' willingness to persist in difficult tasks (Shamir et al., 1993). Transformational leadership also enriches core job characteristics and creates a climate that supports experimentation, which helps translate leadership into job behavior and innovation (Bass et al., 2003; Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006).

Research at the organizational and day-to-day levels further indicates that transformational behavior can support learning, engagement, and organizational performance when employees experience the leader's behavior as relevant to their immediate work (Breevaart et al., 2014; García-Morales et al., 2012). Leadership may also influence employee well-being through meaningful work characteristics, providing another route through which supportive behaviors sustain effort (Nielsen et al., 2008).

However, in geographically dispersed field sales work, contact between employees and managers is intermittent. Leadership messages must be internalized before they can affect daily customer visits, territory planning, follow-ups, and problem solving. This reasoning implies a motivational pathway: transformational leadership first strengthens the direction and intensity of effort, and motivation subsequently influences performance. Prior findings that motivation and readiness mechanisms transmit leadership effects reinforce the need to test both direct and mediated paths rather than assuming that leadership automatically produces performance (Anjastari & Gorda, 2025; Zhu et al., 2005).

Transformational leadership research cautions against treating all effects as universal. Outcomes depend on follower identification, power distance, team context, and the extent to which leaders create empowerment rather than dependency (Kark et al., 2003; Kirkman & Rosen, 2009). Critical reviews similarly recommend specifying mediators and contextual conditions rather than relying on an undifferentiated leadership label (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). These concerns are directly relevant to the mediation model.

However, recent empirical evidence remains inconsistent. Khan et al. (2020) reported positive leadership–performance and motivation-mediated relationships; however, the magnitude and significance of the direct effects depend on work design, employee autonomy, and the mediator included in the model. Therefore, this study does not assume that inspiration directly becomes output; it tests whether motivation is the necessary translation mechanism in dispersed field sales.

H_1: Transformational leadership positively affects work motivation

H_3: Transformational leadership positively affects employee performance

2.2 Organizational culture

Organizational culture is a pattern of shared assumptions, values, and behavioral expectations that help members interpret organizational life. In this study, culture is represented by innovation and risk-taking, attention to detail, result orientation, team orientation, aggressiveness, and stability, consistent with the dimensions described by Robbins and Judge (2022). Culture differs from formal rules

because it influences what employees consider appropriate, even when a situation is not explicitly regulated(Sulistyawati, Setyadi, & Nawir, 2022).

Culture can become a strategic organizational resource when it coordinates behavior, creates consistency across dispersed units, and is difficult for competitors to replicate (Barney, 1991). Research links cultural traits and alignment to organizational effectiveness, while meta-analytic evidence indicates that different cultural profiles support different effectiveness criteria (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hartnell et al., 2011; Sackmann, 2011). Culture also interacts with leadership: leaders influence the values that are emphasized, while established values condition how employees interpret leadership behavior (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Xenikou & Simosi, 2006).

For Sales Representatives, a coherent culture can reduce ambiguity concerning customer service, target accountability, collaboration, integrity, and adaptability. It may directly improve performance by establishing consistent decision standards and indirectly improve it by making efforts feel purposeful and socially supported. Indonesian studies similarly associate culture and motivation with performance and retention-related outcomes (Baranti et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2024). Because the present workforce is geographically distributed, culture may be more continuously accessible than direct managerial supervision and may, therefore, become a comparatively proximal performance mechanism.

Culture operates at multiple levels through artifacts, espoused values, and shared interpretations of organizational practices. Reviews emphasize that culture and climate should be conceptually distinguished but jointly considered when explaining how employees perceive strategic priorities (Schneider et al., 2013). Evidence also links adaptable cultural norms and executive behavior to organizational effectiveness, suggesting that leaders and culture form a mutually reinforcing social system (Chatman and O'Reilly, 2016; O'Reilly et al., 2014).

Culture may also substitute for immediate supervision by embedding expectations into routines. Peña and Caruajulca (2024) found that culture fully mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance, whereas Indonesian studies reported direct culture–performance relationships (Baranti et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2024). This inconsistency justifies testing both direct and indirect cultural paths in the same model.

H_2: Organizational culture positively affects work motivation

H_4: Organizational culture positively affects employee performance

2.3 Work motivation and employee performance

Work motivation refers to the internal and external forces that determine the direction, intensity, and persistence of one's work behavior. Need-based measurement recognizes employees' physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-development needs (Maslow, 1954), whereas self-determination theory distinguishes autonomous from controlled reasons for acting (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Goal-setting and expectancy processes further suggest that effort is sustained when goals are clear, progress is credible, and valued outcomes are perceived as attainable (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Motivation is not a single reward response. Employees can be energized by achievement, recognition, learning, meaningful service, social belonging, job security and fair material outcomes. Evidence indicates that intrinsic motivation is strongly related to performance quality, whereas incentives can be useful for performance quantity when they are designed without undermining autonomy (Cerasoli et al., 2014). Supportive work systems and need satisfaction can consequently produce more durable performance than reliance on short-term pressure alone (Deci et al., 2017; Kuvaas, 2006).

Employee performance refers to observable behaviors and results that contribute to organizational goals. In the present study, it comprises work quality, quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, and independence of the employee. Motivation predicts whether employees initiate efforts, maintain attention, and persist when obstacles arise. Meta-analytic evidence also shows that motivation and

learning processes contribute to performance in work and training settings (Colquitt et al., 2000). Motivated Sales Representatives should therefore be more consistent in planning territories, serving schools, following up on opportunities, and completing administrative responsibilities (Jumani & Rianto, 2023).

Work motivation may also explain how organizational conditions lead to individual actions. Leadership supplies meaning and support, while culture provides norms and collective expectations; however, neither condition guarantees performance unless employees choose to invest effort. Thus, motivation can function as an intervening mechanism connecting leadership and culture to performance. Simultaneously, organizational culture may retain a direct effect because its norms guide behavior independently of momentary motivational states. These distinctions justify the testing of direct and indirect effects and the resulting type of mediation (Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003).

Contemporary motivation research increasingly integrates needs, goals, self-regulation, and organizational context rather than seeking a universal incentive. The central managerial question is how work conditions influence employees' choices to begin, direct, and sustain goal-oriented actions (Steers et al., 2004). This integrative view supports the positioning of work motivation as a mediator while retaining direct organizational paths in the structural model.

H_5: Work motivation positively affects employee performance

H_6: Work motivation mediates the effect of transformational leadership on employee performance

H_7: Work motivation mediates the effect of organizational culture on employee performance

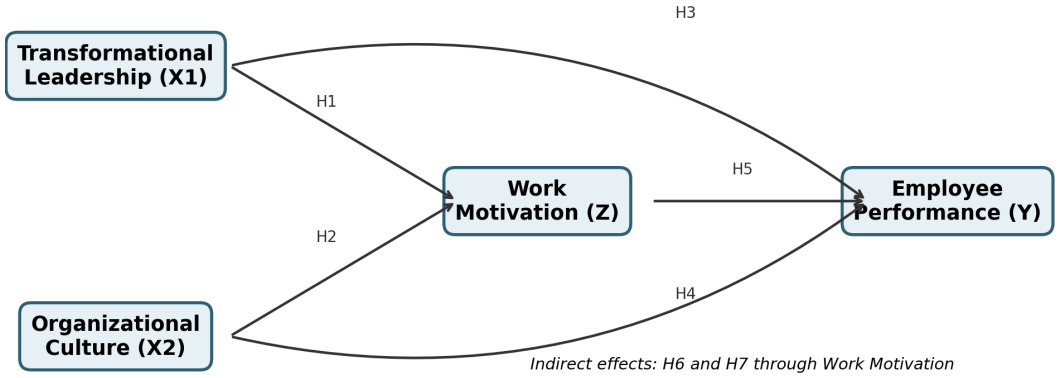


Figure 1. Research model

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed structural relationships among transformational leadership, organizational culture, work motivation, and employee performance and summarizes H_1–H_7.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research design, population, and sample

This study used an explanatory quantitative cross-sectional survey design. This study was conducted at PT Intan Pariwara in 2026. The population comprised 800 active Sales Representatives. Purposive sampling was applied because respondents needed sufficient organizational experience to assess leadership practices, culture, motivation, and their performance.

The unit of analysis was the individual Sales Representative. A cross-sectional design was selected because the study sought to evaluate the pattern and relative strength of the relationships among latent constructs at a defined point in the company's transformation. Participation was voluntary, responses were used only for research purposes, and questionnaire administration emphasized confidentiality to reduce evaluation anxiety and socially desirable responses.

Respondents were required to be active permanent Sales Representatives, have more than one year of tenure, be directly involved in marketing, sales, and target achievement, and provide voluntary informed consent. Human Resources distributed the questionnaire only to employees meeting these criteria; no supervisor selected the responses or viewed individual answers. Of the eligible invitations, 150 complete and usable questionnaires were returned to the researcher. The minimum sample size was initially estimated using the Slovin formula with a 7.5% tolerance (n = 146). The achieved sample exceeded this threshold and was adequate for the PLS-SEM model with three predictors of the endogenous performance construct.

Table 1. Respondent profile

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	145	96.7
	Female	5	3.3
Age	<25 years	7	4.7
	25-35 years	70	46.7
	36-45 years	43	28.7
	>45 years	30	20.0
Tenure	1-3 years	24	16.0
	4-6 years	33	22.0
	>6 years	93	62.0
Education	Senior high school	89	59.3
	Diploma	7	4.7
	Bachelor degree	51	34.0
	Master degree	3	2.0

As shown in Table 1, most respondents were male (96.7%), 46.7% were 25–35 years old, and 62.0% had worked for more than six years in the field. This profile was appropriate for evaluating established leadership practices and organizational culture because the respondents had sufficient exposure to branch operations, performance systems, and organizational expectations.

3.2 Measures and data analysis

All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Transformational leadership was initially measured using eight items Bass and Riggio (2006). Organizational culture was measured using 12 items(Robbins & Judge, 2022). Work motivation was measured using ten items representing Maslow (1954) hierarchy of needs, and employee performance was measured using ten items covering quality, quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, and independence.

The questionnaire items were adapted from established measurement sources to the educational-sales context. Adaptation involved wording changes for occupational relevance, review of construct meaning, and a readability check before distribution; no item was intentionally changed to represent a different construct. Participants received an explanation of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right not to respond. No names or employee identification numbers were included in the analyses. This study used anonymized, non-clinical organizational survey data and followed institutional academic-research and informed-consent requirements.

Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 4, following the established PLS-SEM assessment recommendations (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). The measurement model was assessed using indicator loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker criterion, Cronbach alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability. HTMT is a sensitive assessment of discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Six low-loading items were removed iteratively (X1.1.1, X1.2.1, X2.3.2, X2.4.1, Y1.5.1, and Z1.3.1), while the conceptual coverage was retained.

The structural model was evaluated using R^2, adjusted R^2, f^2, and PLS-predict. Hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping; a relationship was considered significant when $t > 1.96$, and $p < 0.05$. The direct and indirect effects were evaluated jointly to classify the mediation. Procedural confidentiality and construct separation were used to reduce common method concerns, recognizing that self-report designs should explicitly address potential method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Measurement model

After refinement, all constructs achieved Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50. Several retained loadings were between 0.60 and 0.70, which remained acceptable because the constructs met the AVE and reliability requirements, and the items preserved theoretical coverage. All Cronbach alphas, rho_A, and composite reliability values exceeded 0.70. The HTMT values ranged from 0.617 to 0.846, which was below the 0.90 threshold. Cross-loadings also showed that each item was most strongly loaded on its intended construct. Although the Fornell-Larcker comparison indicated close empirical proximity between organizational culture and employee performance, the more sensitive HTMT assessment supported discriminant validity.

Table 2 presents the retained indicators, loading ranges, AVE, and internal consistency statistics for each construct. Taken together, these results indicate satisfactory convergent validity and reliability after the indicator refinement process.

Table 2. Measurement model summary

Construct	Retained items	Loading range	AVE	Alpha	rho_A	CR
Transformational leadership	6	0.657-0.791	0.535	0.827	0.835	0.873
Organizational culture	10	0.648-0.773	0.501	0.889	0.894	0.909
Work motivation	9	0.680-0.817	0.566	0.904	0.906	0.921
Employee performance	9	0.651-0.804	0.545	0.895	0.900	0.915

Note: CR = composite reliability.

Table 3 reports the HTMT values for each construct pair. All ratios remained below 0.90, supporting the empirical distinction among transformational leadership, organizational culture, work motivation, and employee performance.

Table 3. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Construct	OC	TL	EP	WM
Organizational Culture (OC)	-			
Transformational Leadership (TL)	0.774	-		
Employee Performance (EP)	0.846	0.617	-	
Work Motivation (WM)	0.776	0.660	0.808	-

4.2 Structural model and hypothesis testing

The model explained 52.5% of the variance in work motivation ($R^2 = 0.525$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.518$), and 66.4% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.664$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.657$). Organizational culture had the largest effect on work motivation ($f^2 = 0.386$) and a moderate effect on the employee

performance (f^2 = 0.320). Work motivation had a moderate effect on performance (f^2 = 0.203), transformational leadership had a small effect on motivation (f^2 = 0.048), and its direct effect on performance was negligible (f^2 = 0.001). All Q^2predict values were positive (0.185-0.443), and the PLS-SEM prediction errors were lower than the linear model benchmarks for the endogenous indicators.

Table 4. Structural model quality

Endogenous construct / relationship	R^2	Adjusted R^2	f^2	Interpretation
Work motivation	0.525	0.518		Moderate explanatory power
Employee performance	0.664	0.657		Relatively strong explanatory power
TL → Work motivation			0.048	Small
OC→ Work motivation			0.386	Large
TL → Employee performance			0.001	Negligible
OC → Employee performance			0.320	Moderate
Work motivation → Employee performance			0.203	Moderate

Table 4 summarizes the explanatory power and effect sizes of the structural models. The results show that organizational culture has a large effect on work motivation and the largest direct effect on performance, whereas transformational leadership has a small motivational effect and virtually no direct performance effect.

Table 5 presents the path coefficients, bootstrap statistics, significance levels, and decisions for all seven hypotheses tested. Five direct hypotheses and both mediation hypotheses were supported, whereas the direct transformational leadership effect on performance was not supported.

Table 5. Hypotheses testing results

Hypotheses	Path	β	t	p	Decision
H_1	TL → WM	0.203	2.451	0.014	Supported
H_2	OC → WM	0.574	7.393	<0.001	Supported
H_3	TL → EP	-0.021	0.331	0.741	Not supported
H_4	OC → EP	0.516	6.579	<0.001	Supported
H_5	WM → EP	0.379	5.545	<0.001	Supported
H_6	TL → WM → EP	0.077	2.394	0.017	Supported
H_7	OC → WM → EP	0.217	4.002	<0.001	Supported

Note: TL = transformational leadership; OC = organizational culture; WM = work motivation; EP = employee performance.

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Transformational leadership and work motivation (H1)

Transformational leadership positively influenced work motivation (β = 0.203; p = 0.014), thus supporting H1. Leaders who demonstrate integrity, communicate direction, encourage new ideas, and provide individual guidance strengthen employees' willingness to invest in effort. For geographically dispersed Sales Representatives, inspirational communication and developmental support help maintain a psychological connection with the organization. The effect was statistically significant but smaller than the cultural effect, suggesting that employees' motivation is shaped by leadership and embedded in broader organizational systems. This result is consistent with transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and evidence that such leadership builds positive employee attitudes and behaviors (Afsar et al., 2014).

This result is consistent with the motivational accounts of transformational leadership: a credible vision and individualized support increase the perceived meaning and attainability of work goals (Shamir et al., 1993). This finding also aligns with evidence that transformational leadership strengthens employee performance-related mechanisms, including job characteristics, creativity, and readiness for change (Anjastari & Gorda, 2025; Gong et al., 2009; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). For field employees, leadership is valuable when it becomes an internal reason to sustain effort between direct supervisory interactions.

4.3.2 Organizational culture and work motivation (H2)

Organizational culture had the strongest effect on work motivation ($\beta = 0.574$; $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H2. Clear work rules, result orientation, teamwork, service values, competitiveness, and stability provide employees with a consistent frame of reference. Culture reduces ambiguity and makes organizational expectations meaningful, even when field employees work away from direct supervision. This result is consistent with evidence that shared values and a coherent organizational climate shape employee attitudes and effectiveness (Baranti et al., 2024; Denison and Mishra, 1995; Schneider et al., 2013).

The magnitude of the coefficient suggests that employees' everyday motivational climate is embedded in repeated cultural signals, including which outcomes are valued, how colleagues cooperate, and whether initiatives are recognized. This interpretation is consistent with research connecting culture to effectiveness and with Goodwood studies reporting positive links between organizational culture, motivation, and employee outcomes (Baranti et al., 2024; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hartnell et al., 2011; Nugraha et al., 2024).

4.3.3 Transformational leadership and employee performance (H3)

The direct effect of transformational leadership on employee performance was not significant ($\beta = -0.021$; $p = 0.741$); therefore, H3 was not supported. The coefficient was close to zero and should not be interpreted as evidence that transformational leadership reduces performance. Rather, after organizational culture and work motivation were simultaneously considered, leadership added almost no direct explanatory power to the model. Sales performance is strongly affected by territory conditions, customer relationships, product mastery, market timing, standardized procedures, and employee persistence. Thus, leadership behaviors do not automatically create results unless employees internalize them as work motivation. This contextual result complements the meta-analytic evidence of leadership-performance links (Wang et al., 2011) by identifying a boundary condition in a dispersed, relatively autonomous sales system.

This finding does not contradict the broader leadership literature; rather, it identifies a boundary condition. Meta-analytic evidence generally supports transformational leadership, but its effects vary across criteria and levels (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2011). In this organization, standardized targets, operating procedures, geographic distance, and employee autonomy may weaken the immediate leader-to-performance relationship. Leadership must first shape motivation before it becomes observable field behavior, which explains why the indirect path is significant, despite the nonsignificant direct path.

A suppression-like interpretation was considered but was not supported by the near-zero direct coefficient. A more defensible explanation is mechanism specificity: branch targets and procedures standardize what must be achieved, geographic dispersion reduces continuous leader contact, and employee performance depends on self-regulated follow-through. Leadership can still provide meaning and confidence, but these resources affect output only when employees convert them into motivation. This interpretation is consistent with Khan et al. (2020), who identified intrinsic motivation as a pathway from transformational leadership to work performance, while the present result extends that evidence by showing indirect-only rather than partial mediation effect.

This result is also compatible with studies of organizational change showing that transformational leadership becomes consequential when it helps employees accept new goals and navigate uncertainty

(Nemanich & Keller, 2007). Broader comparisons of leadership approaches suggest that transformational behavior has meaningful value but shares variance with other positive leadership forms, reinforcing the importance of examining specific mechanisms rather than labels alone (Banks et al., 2016; Hoch et al., 2018).

4.3.4 Organizational culture and employee performance (H4)
Organizational culture positively influenced employee performance ($\beta = 0.516$; $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H4. This was the strongest direct path to the performance. Culture creates behavioral consistency across branches by defining acceptable standards, customer orientation, target disciplines, coordination, and accountability. For Sales Representatives, these values can guide daily decisions without continuous managerial presence. This result supports the resource-based perspective that embedded organizational routines can become valuable organizational resources (Barney, 1991) and is consistent with evidence linking culture to effectiveness (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hartnell et al., 2011).

This direct relationship supports the resource-based view that a coordinated and difficult-to-imitate behavioral system can create performance value (Barney, 1991). This finding also aligns with studies indicating that culture and leadership jointly shape organizational outcomes and that cultural alignment is related to effectiveness (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Sackmann, 2011; Xenikou & Simosi, 2006). For PT Intan Pariwara, consistent service and target norms can guide decisions, even when employees work far from supervisors.

4.3.5 Work motivation and employee performance (H5)
Work motivation positively influenced employee performance ($\beta = 0.379$; $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H_5. Employees who perceive adequate security, social support, appreciation, and development opportunities are more likely to sustain their efforts and remain persistent in demanding sales territories. Motivation is especially relevant when employees must independently manage customer visits, targets, and local obstacles. The result reinforces need and expectancy perspectives and confirms motivation as a proximal determinant of work behavior (Maslow, 1954).

This result is theoretically plausible because motivation determines how strongly and how long employees direct their capabilities toward work goals. Autonomous motivation, clear goals, and valued outcomes are associated with persistence and performance quality (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Deci et al., 2017; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Locke & Latham, 2002). This finding is also compatible with Goodwood evidence that motivation contributes to performance in different Indonesian organizational settings (Anjastari & Gorda, 2025; Nugraha et al., 2024).

4.3.6 Mediation through work motivation (H6 and H7)
The indirect effect of transformational leadership on performance through work motivation was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.077$; $p = 0.017$), whereas the direct effect was not significant. Therefore, work motivation represents indirect-only mediation. Transformational leadership contributes to performance when role modeling, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support create greater willingness and persistence. This explains why leadership remains strategically important, despite its nonsignificant direct coefficient.

Indirect-only mediation means that leadership initiatives should not be evaluated merely based on the presence of communication, coaching, or inspiration. Their effectiveness depends on whether employees experience a greater sense of purpose, confidence, recognition, and willingness to act. This result strengthens the motivational explanation of transformational leadership and is consistent with research showing that employee mechanisms transmit leadership effects (Bass et al., 2003; Zhu et al., 2005).

The indirect effect of organizational culture on work motivation was also significant ($\beta = 0.217$; $p < 0.001$), whereas the direct effect remained positive and significant. Therefore, work motivation provides complementary partial mediation. Culture improves performance through two routes:

directly by establishing standards and routines and indirectly by encouraging employees to expend effort and persist. The distinct mediation patterns are the study's central theoretical contribution. They showed that leadership and culture should not be treated as interchangeable organizational antecedents: leadership requires motivational translation, whereas culture shapes performance both behaviorally and psychologically.

This pattern also differs from Peña and Caruajulca's (2024) finding of full cultural mediation between leadership and organizational performance. Here, culture remains directly consequential after motivation is included, indicating that stable norms influence both psychological willingness and day-to-day behavioral coordination. This comparison explains why leadership and culture should not be treated as interchangeable predictors.

Complementary mediation indicates that culture operates through two simultaneous routes. First, norms directly clarify the expected work behavior. Second, these norms reinforce the psychological energy required to enact behavior. Therefore, management should avoid treating culture as slogans or motivation as an isolated reward program; the two systems should be designed to reinforce each other.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

Evidence shows two different mechanisms. Transformational leadership increases performance only through employee motivation, whereas organizational culture affects performance both directly and indirectly through motivation. This asymmetric mediation extends existing knowledge by showing that leadership inspiration requires psychological translation, whereas culture simultaneously coordinates behavior and energizes effort. In a dispersed sales workforce, culture is the more proximal performance mechanism, and motivation is the pathway that makes leadership consequential.

Motivation systems should integrate fair rewards, objective performance evaluation, recognition, career paths, capability development, job security, and access to coaching. Because motivation directly improves performance and transmits the effects of leadership and culture, management should monitor motivational conditions as leading indicators rather than waiting for sales outcomes or turnover to decline.

Leadership development for branch and area managers should emphasize inspirational communication, coaching, constructive feedback, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support. The purpose of this study is to convert leadership behavior into meaningful employee motivation. Consequently, leadership, culture, and motivation should be integrated into recruitment, orientation, training, promotion, performance appraisal, and reward policies.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at one point and cannot establish a temporal causality. Second, the research was conducted in a single educational publishing and distribution company, limiting its generalization to other industries and employment systems. Third, purposive sampling and the predominantly male respondent profile may have restricted population representation. Fourth, leadership, culture, motivation, and performance were measured using self-reported questionnaires, creating potential common method and social desirability bias. Finally, the model examines only four constructs and leaves 33.6% of the employee performance variance unexplained.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future research should use longitudinal designs to establish the temporal order of leadership, motivation, and performance, and should combine employee responses with supervisor ratings, objective sales indicators, or customer service measures. Multigroup studies can compare regions, tenure categories, gender groups, and types of sales territories. Replication across publishing, distribution, financial services, public services, and technology-enabled sales organizations would strengthen the external validity. Future models may incorporate job satisfaction, employee

engagement, organizational commitment, competence, reward fairness, psychological empowerment, work environment, work-life balance, and organizational citizenship behavior. Qualitative interviews could also explain why leadership is motivationally effective for some field employees but not for others. These extensions would clarify the boundary conditions and support more precise human resource interventions.

Acknowledgement

The authors thank the participating Sales Representatives and PT Intan Pariwara for supporting data collection. This research did not receive any specific grants from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author Contributions

DS contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, visualization, and writing original draft. TW contributed to supervision, validation, methodology, and writing review and editing. RH contributed to supervision, validation, and writing review and editing. All authors approved the final manuscript and accepted responsibility for its content.

References

Afsar, B., Badir, Y. F., & Saeed, B. B. (2014). Transformational leadership and innovative work behavior. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, *114*(8), 1270-1300. https://doi.org/10.1108/IMDS-05-2014-0152

Anjastari, N. N. Y., & Gorda, A. A. N. O. S. (2025). Pengaruh kepemimpinan, disiplin, dan motivasi terhadap kinerja karyawan LPD Kedonganan. *Studi Ilmu Manajemen dan Organisasi*, *6*(2), 423-435. https://doi.org/10.35912/simo.v6i2.4631

Banks, G. C., McCauley, K. D., Gardner, W. L., & Guler, C. E. (2016). A meta-analytic review of authentic and transformational leadership: A test for redundancy. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *27*(4), 634-652. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.006

Baranti, A., Anwar, S. M., & Qamaruddin, M. Y. (2024). Pengaruh budaya organisasi dan motivasi kerja terhadap kinerja karyawan pada PT Boma Tirta Prima Makassar. *Studi Ilmu Manajemen dan Organisasi*, *5*(2), 379-388. https://doi.org/10.35912/simo.v5i2.3390

Barney, J. B. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, *17*(1), 99-120. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700108

Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., Jung, D. I., & Berson, Y. (2003). Predicting unit performance by assessing transformational and transactional leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *88*(2), 207-218. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.2.207

Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.).

Breevaart, K., Bakker, A. B., Hetland, J., Demerouti, E., Olsen, O. K., & Espevik, R. (2014). Daily transactional and transformational leadership and daily employee engagement. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *87*(1), 138-157. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12041

Cerasoli, C. P., Nicklin, J. M., & Ford, M. T. (2014). Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives jointly predict performance: A 40-year meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *140*(4), 980-1008. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035661

Chatman, J. A., & O'Reilly, C. A. (2016). Paradigm lost: Reinvigorating the study of organizational culture. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *36*, 199–224. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2016.11.004

Colquitt, J. A., LePine, J. A., & Noe, R. A. (2000). Toward an integrative theory of training motivation: A meta-analytic path analysis of 20 years of research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *85*(5), 678-707. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.85.5.678

Deci, E. L., Olafsen, A. H., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory in work organizations: The state of a science. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, *4*, 19–43. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113108

Denison, D. R., & Mishra, A. K. (1995). Toward a theory of organizational culture and effectiveness. *Organization Science*, *6*(2), 204-223. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.6.2.204

Gagné, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *26*(4), 331-362. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.322

García-Morales, V. J., Jiménez-Barrionuevo, M. M., & Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, L. (2012). Transformational leadership influence on organizational performance through organizational learning and innovation. *Journal of Business Research*, *65*(7), 1040-1050. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.03.005

Gong, Y., Huang, J. C., & Farh, J. L. (2009). Employee learning orientation, transformational leadership, and employee creativity: The mediating role of employee creative self-efficacy. *Academy of Management Journal*, *52*(4), 765-778. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.43670890

Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review*, *31*(1), 2-24. https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-11-2018-0203

Hartnell, C. A., Ou, A. Y., & Kinicki, A. (2011). Organizational culture and organizational effectiveness: A meta-analytic investigation of the competing values framework's theoretical suppositions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *96*(4), 677-694. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021987

Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *43*(1), 115-135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8

Hoch, J. E., Bommer, W. H., Dulebohn, J. H., & Wu, D. (2018). Do ethical, authentic, and servant leadership explain variance above and beyond transformational leadership? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Management*, *44*(2), 501-529. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316665461

Judge, T. A., & Piccolo, R. F. (2004). Transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic test of their relative validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *89*(5), 755-768. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.5.755

Jumani, A., & Rianto, M. R. (2023). Literatur review: Pengaruh lingkungan kerja, pelatihan dan motivasi terhadap kepuasan kerja karyawan CV Kita Sukses Mandiri. *Studi Ilmu Manajemen dan Organisasi*, *4*(1), 39-50. https://doi.org/10.35912/simo.v4i1.1779

Jung, D. I., Chow, C., & Wu, A. (2003). The role of transformational leadership in enhancing organizational innovation: Hypotheses and some preliminary findings. *The Leadership Quarterly, 14(4–5), 525–544*. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(03)00050-X

Kark, R., Shamir, B., & Chen, G. (2003). The two faces of transformational leadership: Empowerment and dependency. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *88*(2), 246-255. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.2.246

Khan, H., Rehmat, M., Butt, T. H., Farooqi, S., & Asim, J. (2020). Impact of transformational leadership on work performance, burnout and social loafing: A mediation model. *Future Business Journal, 6, 40*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-020-00043-8

Kirkman, B. L., Chen, G., Farh, J. L., Chen, Z. X., & Lowe, K. B. (2009). Individual power distance orientation and follower reactions to transformational leaders: A cross-level, cross-cultural examination. *Academy of Management Journal*, *52*(4), 744-764. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.43669971

Kuvaas, B. (2006). Work performance, affective commitment, and work motivation: The roles of pay administration and pay level. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *17*(3), 504-522. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190500521573

Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey. *American Psychologist*, *57*(9), 705-717. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.57.9.705

Maslow, A. H. (1954). Motivation and personality. *Harper & Row*.

Nemanich, L. A., & Keller, R. T. (2007). Transformational leadership in an acquisition: A field study of employees. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *18*(1), 49-68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.11.003

Nielsen, K., Randall, R., Yarker, J., & Brenner, S. O. (2008). The effects of transformational leadership on followers' perceived work characteristics and psychological well-being: A longitudinal study. *Work & Stress*, *22*(1), 16-32. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370801979430

Nugraha, H., Hamid, R. S., & Qamaruddin, M. Y. (2024). Pengaruh keadilan kompensasi dan motivasi kerja terhadap kinerja karyawan. *Studi Ilmu Manajemen dan Organisasi*, *5*(1), 105-114. https://doi.org/10.35912/simo.v5i1.3229

Ogbonna, E., & Harris, L. C. (2000). Leadership style, organizational culture and performance: Empirical evidence from UK companies. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *11*(4), 766-788. https://doi.org/10.1080/095851900500751114

O'Reilly, C. A., Caldwell, D. F., Chatman, J. A., & Doerr, B. (2014). The promise and problems of organizational culture: CEO personality, culture, and firm performance. *Group & Organization Management*, *39*(6), 595-625. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601114550713

Peña, J., & Caruajulca, P. (2024). The mediating role of organizational culture between transformational leadership and organizational performance in SMEs. *Academia Revista Latinoamericana de Administración*, *37*(2), 301-314. https://doi.org/10.1108/ARLA-10-2023-0172

Piccolo, R. F., & Colquitt, J. A. (2006). Transformational leadership and job behaviors: The mediating role of core job characteristics. *Academy of Management Journal*, *49*(2), 327-340. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2006.20786079

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *88*(5), 879-903. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Moorman, R. H., & Fetter, R. (1990). Transformational leader behaviors and their effects on followers' trust in leader, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *1*(2), 107-142. https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(90)90009-7

Robbins, S. P., & Judge, T. A. (2022). *Organizational behavior* (19th ed.).

Sackmann, S. A. (2011). Culture and performance. In N. M. Ashkanasy, C. P. M. Wilderom, & M. F. Peterson (Eds.), *In N. M. Ashkanasy, C. P. M. Wilderom, & M. F. Peterson (Eds.), The handbook of organizational culture and climate (2nd ed., pp. 188–224). Sage Publications*.

Schneider, B., Ehrhart, M. G., & Macey, W. H. (2013). Organizational climate and culture. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *64*, 361–388. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143809

Shamir, B., House, R. J., & Arthur, M. B. (1993). The motivational effects of charismatic leadership: A self-concept based theory. *Organization Science*, *4*(4), 577-594. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.4.4.577

Steers, R. M., Mowday, R. T., & Shapiro, D. L. (2004). The future of work motivation theory. *Academy of Management Review*, *29*(3), 379-387. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2004.13670978

Sulistyawati, N., Setyadi, I. K., & Nawir, J. (2022). Pengaruh lingkungan kerja, budaya organisasi dan kepemimpinan transformasional terhadap kepuasan kerja karyawan milenial. *Studi Ilmu Manajemen dan Organisasi*, *3*(1), 183-197. https://doi.org/10.35912/simo.v3i1.680

Wang, G., Oh, I. S., Courtright, S. H., & Colbert, A. E. (2011). Transformational leadership and performance across criteria and levels: A meta-analytic review. *Personnel Psychology*, *64*(1), 223-270. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2010.01207.x

Xenikou, A., & Simosi, M. (2006). Organizational culture and transformational leadership as predictors of business unit performance. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *21*(6), 566-579. https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940610684409

Zhu, W., Chew, I. K. H., & Spangler, W. D. (2005). CEO transformational leadership and organizational outcomes: The mediating role of human-capital-enhancing human resource management. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *16*(1), 39-52. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.06.001