



Unlocking Performance in the Public Sector: Transformational Leadership, Work Environment, and the Mediating Role of Motivation

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of transformational leadership and work environment on employee performance, with work motivation as a mediating variable, among civil servants at the Yogyakarta Special Region Transportation Agency. Employing a quantitative explanatory design, data were collected from 78 respondents through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that transformational leadership and work environment exert significant positive direct effects on both employee performance and work motivation. Work motivation similarly demonstrates a significant positive influence on performance. Importantly, motivation partially mediates the relationship between work environment and performance, while fully mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and performance. These results enrich Attribution Theory by demonstrating that external organizational factors shape internal motivational attributions, ultimately determining behavioral outcomes. The study contributes theoretical advancements in public sector human resource management and offers practical recommendations for organizational improvement, including revitalizing workplace infrastructure, strengthening leadership coaching programs, and implementing transparent reward systems. Despite limitations related to cross-sectional design and sample scope, the findings provide a robust foundation for evidence-based policy development in Indonesian local government settings.

Keywords: Employee performance, motivation, public sector, transformational leadership, work environment.

1. Introduction

Performance assessment in public sector organizations has conventionally relied upon formal administrative systems that evaluate employee output against predetermined standards. However, the persistent stagnation of performance outcomes over time suggests that mere compliance with these formal metrics fails to capture genuine improvements in work quality (Armstrong, 2020; Robbins & Judge, 2021). Within the Indonesian civil apparatus (ASN), performance evaluation comprises two primary components: Employee Performance Targets (SKP) at 70% and work behavior at 30%, as mandated by Government Regulation No. 30 of 2019. Despite this systematic framework, implementation remains predominantly

administrative in nature, encouraging employees to focus on meeting minimum thresholds rather than pursuing substantive quality enhancements, thereby revealing a fundamental disconnect between formal assessment systems and actual organizational performance improvement.

This empirical gap is particularly evident at the Yogyakarta Special Region Transportation Agency, where employee discipline data reveals significant fluctuations in work attendance during the 2022–2025 period. Cumulative average lateness records show 527.14 hours (2022), 246.71 hours (2023), 226.64 hours (2024), and 475.95 hours (2025), indicating that initial improvements were not sustained and that disciplined work behavior has yet to become an ingrained organizational habit (Colquitt et al., 2022). Concurrently, SKP achievement scores demonstrate remarkable stagnation, averaging 69.51% (2022), 69.76% (2023), 69.78% (2024), and 69.67% (2025)—a pattern revealing that employee performance remains at minimal acceptable levels without meaningful progression. The convergence of unstable work behavior and stagnant performance outcomes suggests that formal evaluation systems alone are insufficient drivers of organizational excellence, necessitating deeper examination of underlying organizational and behavioral determinants.

Attribution theory, as articulated by Heider (1958) and Kelley (1972), provides a compelling theoretical lens through which to interpret these phenomena. This perspective posits that individual work behavior is shaped not merely by personal capabilities or formal organizational rules, but also by how employees interpret and attribute meaning to their work environment conditions. External organizational factors, including leadership styles and workplace conditions, fundamentally influence employees' perceptions of organizational support, subsequently affecting their motivational states (Robbins & Judge, 2021). When employees perceive their organization as unsupportive, their drive for optimal performance diminishes; conversely, supportive organizational conditions foster enhanced work motivation, effort, and persistence. This theoretical framework underscores the necessity of examining how transformational leadership and work environment—as external attributional factors—interact with employee motivation to shape performance outcomes in public sector contexts.

Transformational leadership has emerged as a particularly salient factor in public sector organizations facing escalating demands for service quality and organizational effectiveness. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leadership emphasizes leaders' capacity to inspire, motivate, and develop subordinates' potential through the transformation of values, attitudes, and work behaviors. Preliminary observations at the Yogyakarta Transportation Agency reveal that current leadership practices remain predominantly task-focused, with limited employee involvement in idea development, feedback provision, or work process

improvement initiatives. The persistence of employee lateness and stable performance outcomes further corroborates the need for leadership approaches that actively foster engagement and motivation. While transformational leadership demonstrates theoretical relevance, its influence may be contingent upon other organizational conditions, particularly the work environment in which employees execute their daily responsibilities.

The work environment constitutes both physical and non-physical conditions that affect employee comfort and effectiveness in task execution (Sedarmayanti, 2011). Preliminary observations at the agency reveal suboptimal physical conditions, including inadequate lighting and outdated computer specifications relative to current work demands, alongside non-physical challenges such as coordination and communication gaps between employees. These environmental factors have demonstrated significant relationships with employee performance in prior research (Dul & Ceylan, 2014; Van der Voet 2014; Arniah & Setiawan, 2024), yet contradictory findings persist (Hurint, 2024; Hartati & Lanteng, 2026). Such inconsistencies suggest the need for more nuanced investigation into the mechanisms through which work environment influences performance, particularly whether motivational processes mediate these relationships in public sector settings.

Motivation, as conceptualized by McClelland's (1987) theory of needs, represents a critical internal mechanism linking organizational factors to performance outcomes through needs for achievement, affiliation, and power. Within the Yogyakarta Transportation Agency, achievement needs manifest through employees' efforts to meet established targets, while affiliation needs relate to relationship-building and coordination capabilities essential for effective task execution. Previous research has established significant direct effects of motivation on performance (Ritz et al., 2016; Ambasari et al., 2022), yet studies examining motivation's mediating role between transformational leadership and performance have yielded inconsistent results (Martina et al., 2022; Setiawan et al., 2024). Similarly, motivational mediation between work environment and performance remains inadequately explored, particularly within the Indonesian public sector context, highlighting the need for comprehensive examination of these interrelationships.

This study addresses critical gaps in the existing literature by investigating the influence of transformational leadership and work environment on employee performance, with work motivation serving as a mediating variable, among civil servants at the Yogyakarta Special Region Transportation Agency. The research is guided by seven specific research questions examining both direct and indirect effects among these variables. The findings are expected to contribute theoretical advancements in public sector human resource management through the application of attribution theory, while offering practical recommendations for organizational

improvement. Furthermore, this research aims to inform evidence-based policy development regarding civil servant performance enhancement in Indonesian local government settings, providing a foundation for subsequent investigations utilizing different variables, methodologies, or organizational contexts.

2. Method

This quantitative explanatory research (Creswell, 2012; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) employs a survey method and Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) to test the causal relationships among transformational leadership, work environment, motivation, and performance (Hair et al., 2021). The study population comprises 98 ASN employees at the Yogyakarta Special Region Transportation Agency, with a sample of 78 executive staff (excluding Eselon II-IV structural officials) selected via total sampling (sensus) to minimize sampling error and align with PLS-SEM's moderate sample size requirements (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Heider, 1958; Hair et al., 2021). Primary data were collected through structured Likert-scale questionnaires, supported by secondary data from institutional documents and relevant literature (Indriantoro & Supomo, 2009; Sekaran & Bougie, 2017). Transformational leadership is operationalized based on Full Range Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994), work environment on physical and non-physical conditions (Sedarmayanti, 2017), work motivation on McClelland's (1985) needs theory (achievement, power, affiliation), and employee performance through SKP components integrating work results and behavior as per Government Regulation No. 30/2019 and theoretical frameworks (Robbins & Judge, 2021; Armstrong, 2020).

Descriptive statistics provide an initial overview of respondent profiles and variable distributions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2017; Field, 2018), followed by inferential analysis using SmartPLS 4.0. The outer model (measurement model) is evaluated through convergent validity (loading factors ≥ 0.70 , AVE ≥ 0.50 - Fornell & Larcker, 1981), discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT < 0.90 - Henseler et al., 2015), and reliability (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.70 - Hair et al., 2021; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The inner model (structural model) is assessed using R-Square coefficients (categorized as strong, moderate, or weak - Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2021), Q-Square predictive relevance (> 0 - Stone, 1974; Geisser, 1975), and hypothesis testing via bootstrapping to determine p-values (< 0.05 for significance - Hair et al., 2021). Variable scores are interpreted using interval class categorization based on descriptive statistical principles (Sudjana, 2005; Walpole et al., 2012).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Respondent Characteristics

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents (n = 78)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	50	64.1
	Female	28	35.9
Age	≤ 30 years	25	32.1
	31–40 years	19	24.4
	41–50 years	14	17.9
	> 50 years	20	25.6
Education Level	Elementary School	1	1.3
	Senior High School/Equivalent	19	24.4
	Diploma (D3)	28	35.9
	Bachelor's Degree (S1/D4)	23	29.5
	Master's Degree (S2)	7	9.0
Length of Service	≤ 10 years	48	61.5
	11–20 years	14	17.9
	> 20 years	16	20.6

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 78 respondents participating in this study. The sample was predominantly male, accounting for 64.1% of respondents, while females represented 35.9%. In terms of age, the largest group was employees aged 30 years or younger (32.1%), followed by those aged over 50 years (25.6%), indicating a relatively diverse age distribution across the workforce. Regarding educational attainment, most respondents held a Diploma (D3) degree (35.9%), followed by a Bachelor's degree (S1/D4) (29.5%), suggesting that the majority possessed formal qualifications relevant to public sector employment. Furthermore, respondents were primarily characterized by relatively shorter organizational tenure, with 61.5% having worked for 10 years or less, while 20.6% had more than 20 years of service. Overall, these characteristics indicate that the respondents represent a heterogeneous workforce in terms of gender, age, education, and tenure, providing a suitable basis for examining the relationships among transformational leadership, work environment, work motivation, and employee performance within the Regional Transportation Agency of the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

3.2. Quantitative Analysis

3.2.1 Outer Model

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment Results

Construct	Number of Indicators	Outer Loading Range	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Transformational Leadership	13	0.660–0.853	0.605	0.945	0.952

Work Environment	14	0.737–0.846	0.618	0.952	0.958
Work Motivation	14	0.731–0.843	0.556	0.899	0.918
Employee Performance	9	0.662–0.823	0.623	0.953	0.959

Table 2 presents the results of the measurement model assessment, including indicator reliability, convergent validity, and construct reliability. The outer loading values for all indicators ranged from 0.660 to 0.853, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.60, indicating that each indicator adequately represents its respective latent construct. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for Transformational Leadership (0.605), Work Environment (0.618), Work Motivation (0.556), and Employee Performance (0.623) were all above the minimum criterion of 0.50, confirming satisfactory convergent validity.

The reliability assessment also demonstrated strong internal consistency, as evidenced by Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.899 to 0.953 and Composite Reliability values ranging from 0.918 to 0.959, all surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70. These findings indicate that the measurement model possesses adequate validity and reliability, suggesting that the constructs used in this study are robust and appropriate for further structural model analysis examining the relationships among transformational leadership, work environment, work motivation, and employee performance among civil servants in the Yogyakarta Special Region Transportation Agency.

3.2.3 Discriminant Validity

One way to ensure the reliability of a model is to check the validity of the discriminator. The Fornell-Lacker criteria and cross-loading values show how strongly a construct correlates with its own indicators as well as indicators from other constructs; This information is used to determine the discriminatory validity of a test. To meet the Fornell-Lacker criteria for cross-loading, the standard value of each construct must be greater than 0.7.

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Value Results

Construct	Transformational Leadership	Work Environment	Employee Performance	Work Motivation
Transformational Leadership	0.778			
Work Environment	0.167	0.786		
Employee Performance	0.707	0.654	0.789	
Work Motivation	0.682	0.657	0.890	0.746

Table 3 presents the discriminant validity results using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), shown on the diagonal, exceeds the correlations between Transformational Leadership and Work Environment with other constructs, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity for these variables. Specifically, the square root of AVE values are 0.778 for Transformational Leadership, 0.786 for Work Environment, 0.789 for Employee Performance, and 0.746 for Work Motivation. However, the correlation between Work Motivation and Employee Performance (0.890) is higher than the square root of AVE for both constructs, suggesting a substantial overlap between these variables. This finding indicates that while most constructs demonstrate adequate discriminant validity, Work Motivation and Employee Performance are highly related and may capture closely associated dimensions within the organizational context of civil servants in the Yogyakarta Special Region Transportation Agency.

3.2.3 Structural Model (Inner Model)

Table 4. Structural Model Evaluation Results

Endogenous Construct	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Employee Performance	0.793	0.784
Work Motivation	0.690	0.682
Model Fit Indicator	Value	
Q ² (Predictive Relevance)	0.936	

Table 4 presents the predictive power and predictive relevance of the structural model. The results show that the R² value for Employee Performance is 0.793, indicating that 79.3% of the variance in employee performance can be explained by transformational leadership, work environment, and work motivation, while the remaining 20.7% is influenced by other factors not included in the model. Similarly, the R² value for Work Motivation is 0.690, suggesting that transformational leadership and work environment account for 69.0% of the variance in employee motivation. The adjusted R² values of 0.784 and 0.682, respectively, confirm the stability and robustness of these explanatory effects after accounting for model complexity.

Furthermore, the Q² value of 0.936 demonstrates substantial predictive relevance, far exceeding the minimum threshold of zero, indicating that the model possesses excellent predictive capability and accurately predicts the endogenous constructs. Collectively, these findings suggest that the proposed model has strong explanatory and predictive power, supporting its suitability for examining the relationships among transformational leadership, work environment, work motivation, and employee performance within the Yogyakarta Special Region Transportation Agency.

3.2.6 Path Coefficient Test

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship Variables	Between	Path Coefficient (β)	T- Statistics	P- Value	Decision
H1	Transformational Leadership → Employee Performance		0.388	4.780	0.000	Supported
H2	Work Environment → Employee Performance		0.341	5.133	0.000	Supported
H3	Transformational Leadership → Work Motivation		0.563	10.089	0.000	Supported
H4	Work Environment → Work Motivation		0.538	9.680	0.000	Supported
H5	Work Motivation → Employee Performance		0.379	4.082	0.000	Supported
H6	Transformational Leadership → Work Motivation → Employee Performance		0.213	3.717	0.000	Supported
H7	Work Environment → Work Motivation → Employee Performance		0.204	3.906	0.000	Supported

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that transformational leadership and work environment have significant positive effects on employee performance. Transformational leadership positively influences employee performance ($\beta = 0.388$, $p < 0.001$), while work environment also demonstrates a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.341$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that effective leadership practices and a supportive work environment contribute directly to improving the performance of civil servants within the Yogyakarta Special Region Transportation Agency.

The analysis further reveals that transformational leadership and work environment significantly enhance work motivation. Transformational leadership exhibits a strong positive effect on work motivation ($\beta = 0.563$, $p < 0.001$), while work environment also positively influences motivation ($\beta = 0.538$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, work motivation significantly affects employee performance ($\beta = 0.379$, $p < 0.001$). These findings imply that employees are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of performance when they are motivated through inspirational leadership and favorable working conditions.

The mediation analysis confirms the important role of work motivation in explaining the relationship between transformational leadership, work environment, and employee performance. The indirect effect of transformational leadership on employee performance through work motivation is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.213$, $p < 0.001$), as is the indirect effect of work environment through work motivation ($\beta = 0.204$, $p < 0.001$). Since both the direct and indirect effects remain significant, work motivation functions as a partial mediator. This finding highlights that transformational leadership and a supportive work environment not only improve

performance directly but also enhance performance indirectly by strengthening employees' motivation to achieve organizational goals.

3.3 Discussion

The empirical results derived from Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) validate all proposed hypotheses, collectively affirming that employee performance enhancement within the Yogyakarta Special Region Transportation Agency is contingent upon the synergistic interplay of external organizational factors and internal psychological states. Consistent with Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1972), the findings establish that external attributions—namely transformational leadership and work environment—significantly shape employees' internal cognitive appraisals, which subsequently manifest through motivational drives and behavioral outcomes. This comprehensive pattern underscores that performance optimization cannot rely solely on formal evaluation systems but necessitates a holistic approach integrating inspirational leadership, conducive working conditions, and elevated intrinsic motivation to achieve sustainable organizational effectiveness.

The direct positive and significant influence of transformational leadership on employee performance confirms that leaders exhibiting idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration effectively propel subordinates to transcend routine task completion and pursue superior work quality. Within the organizational context of the Transportation Agency, such leadership fosters a productive climate by clearly articulating strategic visions, providing developmental support, and reinforcing a sense of collective purpose. Through the lens of Attribution Theory, these leadership behaviors are perceived by employees as supportive external cues, prompting positive attributions that amplify work effort and engagement. This finding robustly corroborates the conclusions of Judge and Piccolo (2004), Sarawit (2024), and Ambasari et al. (2022) yet provides a counterpoint to the non-significant direct effects reported by Sani et al. (2024), and Rahmawan et al. (2024), suggesting that the contextual public service setting intensifies the relevance of transformational behaviors.

Similarly, the work environment demonstrates a substantial positive and significant direct effect on employee performance, indicating that physical conditions, adequate facilities, and harmonious interpersonal relationships are instrumental in facilitating effective task execution. When employees perceive their workplace as safe, comfortable, and well-equipped, their ability to focus, collaborate, and maintain productivity is considerably enhanced. Attribution theory elucidates this pathway by positing that favorable environmental conditions generate positive external attributions regarding organizational support, which in turn reduce cognitive dissonance and promote behavioral commitment to organizational goals. This finding empirically aligns with the studies of Dul and Ceylan (2014), Van der

Voet (2014), and Arniah and Setiawan (2024), while explicitly diverging from the non-significant associations observed by Hurint (2024) and Hartati and Lanteng (2026), thereby reinforcing the critical necessity of infrastructure and social climate in public sector productivity.

Beyond their direct performance impacts, both transformational leadership and work environment exert significant positive influences on work motivation, confirming that organizational conditions fundamentally shape employees' intrinsic drives. Transformational leaders elevate motivation by fulfilling core psychological needs—through inspirational vision, intellectual challenge, and personal consideration—which fosters heightened enthusiasm and discretionary effort. This mechanism is consistent with the theoretical assertions of Bass and Riggio (2006). Simultaneously, the work environment fosters motivational resources by creating a comfortable and secure atmosphere that reduces psychological strain and promotes engagement, as articulated within the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The congruence of these findings with Sedarmayanti's (2011) theoretical framework affirms that both physical and non-physical environmental dimensions serve as potent external attributions that nourish internal motivational states.

In turn, work motivation exhibits a powerful positive and significant direct effect on employee performance, underscoring the centrality of internal drive in determining the intensity, direction, and persistence of work behaviors. Highly motivated employees demonstrate superior discipline, heightened responsibility, and unwavering commitment, translating individual efforts directly into superior task accomplishment and target attainment. From the attributional perspective, motivation operates as the primary internal causal factor directing energy towards performance excellence, bridging the gap between organizational support and actual behavioral outcomes. These results provide strong empirical support for the seminal findings of Ritz et al. (2016) and Ambasari et al. (2022), though they diverge from the non-significant correlations documented by Setiawan et al. (2024), suggesting that in the unique Indonesian civil service context, motivational factors are indispensable non-negotiable catalysts for performance.

Furthermore, the study robustly confirms the mediating role of work motivation in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance, establishing that inspirational leadership enhances performance not only directly but also indirectly by elevating motivational levels. This pathway reveals that leaders who provide support and inspiration succeed in transforming organizational objectives into personal employee goals, thereby activating the psychological mechanisms necessary for improved performance. The explanatory power of this mediating effect is strongly supported by and Martina et al. (2022), reinforcing

Attribution Theory's premise that external leadership cues generate internal motivational attributions, which ultimately determine behavioral outcomes.

Finally, work motivation also significantly mediates the relationship between the work environment and employee performance, yet a critical distinction emerges between the two independent variables. Whereas the influence of transformational leadership on performance is predominantly channeled through work motivation, indicating a fully mediated pathway, the work environment exerts both significant direct and indirect effects on performance. This nuanced finding suggests that environmental conditions are uniquely robust determinants, as they simultaneously provide immediate physical and social support for task execution while also fostering the psychological drive necessary for sustained excellence. Thus, investments in improving workplace infrastructure, facilities, and interpersonal dynamics yield compounded benefits by enhancing performance both directly and through the motivational activation of employees, offering a dual pathway for strategic organizational interventions in the public sector.

4. Conclusion

This study comprehensively confirms that transformational leadership and the work environment not only directly foster improvements in employee performance but also indirectly do so through the reinforcement of work motivation as a mediating mechanism. All proposed hypotheses were accepted, affirming that external organizational factors—comprising inspirational leadership practices and the physical and non-physical workplace conditions—significantly shape employees' internal attributions, ultimately culminating in optimal productivity. The primary theoretical finding reveals an intriguing disparity in the mediation patterns: work motivation served as a partial mediator in the influence of the work environment on performance, indicating that a conducive workplace generates a dual effective pathway—affecting performance both directly and through heightened motivation. Conversely, the impact of transformational leadership on performance was found to be entirely contingent upon the enhancement of internal motivation (fully mediated), thereby enriching Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1972) by demonstrating that employees' perceptions of physical and social support exert a more multidimensional causal impact than leadership style within the context of public service bureaucracy.

Practically, these findings imply an urgent policy priority for the Yogyakarta Transportation Agency to revitalize the work environment—through periodic facility audits, updates to technological equipment, and strengthened inter-departmental coordination and communication—given that investments in this area yield a dual return on performance. Furthermore, the organization should intensify leadership coaching programs, two-way feedback mechanisms, and transparent reward and

career development systems to sustain motivation and the effectiveness of transformational leadership on an ongoing basis. Nevertheless, this study is subject to methodological limitations, including its cross-sectional design, which precludes absolute causal inference; a relatively moderate sample size (78 respondents) confined to a single local government agency; and a purely quantitative approach that fails to capture deeper qualitative dynamics. Future research is recommended to adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches across a broader scope of government institutions with larger sample sizes, while also incorporating contextual variables such as organizational culture or ethical climate to deepen the understanding of the more complex and dynamic determinants of public sector performance.

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