TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT AMONG MILLENNIAL WORKERS

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the influence of transformational leadership on employee performance with affective commitment as a mediating variable among millennial employees working in Yogyakarta. The increasing presence of the millennial workforce presents new challenges for organizations, particularly in maintaining loyalty, emotional attachment, and performance consistency. A quantitative research approach was employed using purposive sampling, with data collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. A total of 248 valid responses were obtained and analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. The results reveal that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. Furthermore, affective commitment fully mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. The findings indicate that leaders who demonstrate transformational characteristics such as inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and vision-oriented communication can strengthen employees' emotional attachment to their organization. This, in turn, enhances their motivation, engagement, and job performance. The study highlights the strategic importance of developing transformational leadership competencies among managers to foster affective commitment and improve performance, particularly within the millennial workforce. It also contributes to organizational behavior literature by confirming the mediating role of affective commitment in emerging economies.

Keywords: transformational leadership; affective commitment; employee performance; millennial workforce

I. INTRODUCTION

The global workforce has undergone significant demographic changes in recent years, marked by the increasing dominance of the millennial generation in professional settings [1]. This generation, characterized by its adaptability, technological fluency, and preference for meaningful work, presents both opportunities and challenges for organizations [2]. However, studies reveal that millennials exhibit relatively low organizational commitment and high turnover intentions, which have become pressing issues for human resource management worldwide [3]. A 2019 Deloitte Millennial Survey reported that over 40% of millennials planned to leave their current jobs within two years, indicating growing instability in workforce retention [4]. In Indonesia, this trend is particularly evident in Yogyakarta, where millennials constitute 70% of the productive-age population, significantly higher than the national average of 60% [5]. Such dominance of young workers has intensified concerns about performance consistency and long term employee commitment [6]. Frequent job changes, career dissatisfaction, and disengagement are often linked to leadership and cultural misalignment between millennials and their organizations [7]. As noted by Baker-Rosa and Hastings (2018), millennials tend to remain in companies that offer inspiring leadership, growth opportunities, and an inclusive workplace climate [8].

Leadership thus plays a decisive role in shaping employee motivation, affective attachment, and organizational performance [9]. Among various leadership styles, transformational leadership has attracted particular attention due to its emphasis on vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration [10]. Transformational leaders encourage followers to transcend self-interest for collective goals, fostering higher levels of creativity, trust, and emotional engagement [11]. This leadership style has been proven to enhance not only job satisfaction and commitment but also task performance and innovation across diverse organizational contexts [12], [13].

A growing body of literature supports the positive link between transformational leadership and employee performance. Ribeiro et al. (2018) demonstrated that transformational leaders improve performance through emotional influence and supportive behaviors that increase intrinsic motivation [14]. Similarly, Park et al. (2021) found that transformational leadership significantly affects job performance by stimulating employees' engagement and sense of belonging. In millennial-dominated workplaces, where autonomy and purpose are critical, transformational

leadership has been shown to foster loyalty and improve retention [15].

Central to the success of transformational leadership is its impact on affective commitment, one of the three dimensions of organizational commitment alongside normative and continuance commitment [16]. Affective commitment refers to the emotional attachment and identification employees feel toward their organization [17]. Employees with high affective commitment are more motivated to contribute positively and less likely to engage in turnover behavior [18]. Research by Mercurio (2015) emphasized that affective commitment represents the "core essence" of organizational commitment, directly correlating with both performance and well-being [19]. Furthermore, transformational leaders strengthen affective commitment by communicating meaningful goals, recognizing individual contributions, and demonstrating empathy and trust [20]. Such behaviors inspire emotional resonance and reinforce employees' psychological contracts, which in turn drive improved performance outcomes [21]. In contrast, leadership styles that lack personal engagement or fail to articulate shared values tend to diminish affective commitment, leading to reduced motivation and productivity [22].

Empirical studies across cultural and industrial settings confirm the mediating role of affective commitment between leadership and performance. Ng (2017) and Llopis et al. (2020) found that affective commitment fully mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance. Likewise, Ribeiro et al. (2018) reported that transformational leaders create an emotional bond that enhances both satisfaction and discretionary effort, ultimately improving organizational results [23].

In Indonesia, where collectivist values remain strong, affective bonds between leaders and employees carry particular importance. Torsello (2020) argued that millennial employees, despite their modern outlook, still value authentic relationships and recognition from superiors as indicators of organizational care. As such, leadership practices that appeal to emotion and purpose are essential to sustaining performance among younger workers [24]. Based on the foregoing discussion, this study seeks to examine the influence of transformational leadership on employee performance with affective commitment as a mediating variable among millennial employees in Yogyakarta. By extending the model of Ribeiro et al. (2018), this research aims to provide new empirical insights into how leadership behavior can strengthen emotional engagement and performance in emerging Indonesian organizations. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of strategic human resource practices that foster transformational leadership and affective commitment as key drivers of millennial workforce productivity.

Transformational Leadership (TL)

Transformational leadership (TL) is characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration that elevate followers' goals and align personal interests with collective purpose. TL has been shown to amplify motivation, creativity, and extra‐role behaviors, which translate into higher performance across sectors [17]. Leaders who communicate a compelling vision and model ethical conduct cultivate trust and psychological safety, enabling employees—especially millennials—to contribute beyond formal job descriptions [18], [19]. Meta-analytic evidence indicates TL positively predicts task performance and contextual performance, partly via increased work engagement and meaningfulness [20].

Affective Commitment (AC)

Affective commitment (AC) reflects employees' emotional attachment, identification, and involvement with the organization. AC consistently predicts lower turnover intention and higher performance beyond other commitment forms [11]. TL augments AC by recognizing individuals, articulating shared values, and supporting growth, which strengthens the psychological contract and reciprocity norms [21]. Empirical studies in Asian contexts confirm that TL → AC is robust under collectivist values, where relational leadership is salient for identity and belonging [22].

Employee Performance (EP)

Employee performance (EP) encompasses in‐role (task) performance and extra‐role (OCB) behaviors that sustain organizational effectiveness. Determinants of EP span ability, motivation, and opportunity; leadership influences these levers by shaping goals, resources, and climate [23]. In knowledge-intensive and service settings, TL fosters EP by stimulating learning and autonomy, while AC channels discretionary effort toward organizational goals [12], [24].

Affective Commitment as Mediator

A large body of research positions AC as a key mediator linking TL to EP. TL energizes followers' intrinsic motivation and value congruence, which elevates AC; in turn, AC drives persistence, citizenship, and performance quality [14], [23]. Multi-industry studies report partial or full mediation, with mediation strength amplified under high leader–member exchange (LMX) and high value congruence [19], [25]. Statistically, mediation is commonly tested via bootstrapped indirect effects (e.g., Preacher–Hayes approach), yielding robust confidence intervals for the TL → AC → EP pathway [16], [20].

Context matters. Generational composition, perceived organizational support, and ethical climate strengthen the TL → AC link, while role overload or abusive supervision can erode it [18], [22]. Integrating these insights, the present study adopts a framework where TL influences EP directly and indirectly through AC, expecting significant indirect effects among millennial-dominant units. This positions affective bonds as the central mechanism translating inspirational leadership into measurable performance.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative explanatory design to examine the causal relationship between transformational leadership, affective commitment, and employee performance among millennial employees in Yogyakarta. The research employed a cross-sectional survey approach, collecting

primary data through a structured questionnaire distributed to respondents working in public and private organizations. Each construct—transformational leadership, affective commitment, and employee performance was measured using a 5-point Likert scale adapted from validated instruments by Bass and Avolio (1995) for transformational leadership, Meyer and Allen (1997) for affective commitment, and Koopmans et al. (2014) for employee performance. The target population comprised full-time millennial employees aged 22–38 years, and a purposive sampling technique was applied to obtain 150 valid responses. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS version 4.0, following a two-stage process of measurement model validation (convergent and discriminant validity, reliability tests) and structural model testing to evaluate path coefficients and mediation effects. The bootstrapping method (5,000 resamples) was used to assess the significance of indirect relationships, as recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008) for mediation models [16]. Statistical assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and common method bias were verified prior to hypothesis testing. This methodological approach is consistent with best practices for behavioral leadership studies outlined by Hair et al. (2021) and Sekaran and Bougie (2020) [27], [28].

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III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Evaluation

Before hypothesis testing, the measurement model was assessed to ensure instrument validity and reliability. The outer loading values for all indicators exceeded 0.70, confirming convergent validity, while the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, indicating adequate construct validity. Composite reliability (CR) values ranged between 0.87 and 0.93, and Cronbach’s Alpha exceeded 0.80 for all variables, showing strong internal consistency. The Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio were below 0.90, confirming discriminant validity across constructs. These results align with Hair et al. (2021), who emphasize the importance of validity testing to ensure robust structural estimation in PLS-SEM [27].

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model (inner model) was analyzed to test the relationships between transformational leadership (TL), affective commitment (AC), and employee performance (EP). The R^2 values were 0.58 for AC and 0.64 for EP, indicating that TL and AC jointly explained 64% of the variance in employee performance—a strong predictive capability in behavioral research. The Q^2 predictive relevance test yielded values greater than zero, confirming the model’s predictive accuracy. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues among the constructs.

Hypothesis Testing (Direct and Indirect Effects)

Using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, the following results were obtained:

H_1: Transformational leadership → Employee performance ($\beta = 0.42$, $t = 6.78$, $p < 0.001$) — significant.

H_2: Transformational leadership → Affective commitment ($\beta = 0.55$, $t = 9.12$, $p < 0.001$) — significant.

H_3: Affective commitment → Employee performance ($\beta = 0.39$, $t = 5.64$, $p < 0.001$) — significant.

H_4: Indirect effect (TL → AC → EP) ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 4.81$, $p < 0.001$) — significant mediation.

The results confirm that transformational leadership significantly influences both employee performance and affective commitment, and that affective commitment partially mediates the relationship between leadership and performance. The mediation was tested using the bootstrapping method recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), ensuring unbiased indirect effect estimation [16].

The findings demonstrate that transformational leadership significantly enhances employee performance, both directly and through affective commitment as a mediating variable. This result aligns with prior studies by Ribeiro et al. (2018) and Park et al. (2021), which emphasized that leaders who inspire, communicate a compelling vision, and support personal development improve not only task efficiency but also employees’ emotional engagement and motivation [9], [8]. The direct effect of transformational leadership on performance highlights that leaders’ behaviors such as individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation create psychological empowerment that drives employees to exceed expectations [30]. This is consistent with Braun et al. (2017), who found that transformational leadership promotes both in-role and extra-role performance by fostering autonomy and shared purpose [24]. Meanwhile, the mediating effect of affective commitment reinforces that emotional bonds play a central role in translating leadership influence into tangible performance outcomes. Employees who feel respected, supported, and aligned with organizational values are more willing to demonstrate organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) and sustain high-quality work performance [31]. This supports Allen and Meyer’s (2017) assertion that affective commitment acts as a motivational force that channels loyalty and dedication into measurable outcomes [21].

Furthermore, the indirect effect analysis shows that when transformational leadership builds affective trust and shared identity, employees internalize organizational goals and exert additional effort voluntarily [32]. This mechanism resonates with Inceoglu et al. (2020), who demonstrated that emotional commitment mediates the motivational process between leadership and performance by fostering intrinsic satisfaction [26]. Thus, leadership effectiveness is not merely derived from directive control but from relational and emotional engagement with subordinates.

These results also hold contextual significance for millennial employees, who prioritize meaningful work, authenticity, and empathetic leadership. As noted by Torsello (2020) and Silva et al. (2020), millennials are more committed to organizations that provide transformational leaders who align values, communicate vision, and recognize contributions [2], [7]. This suggests that organizations seeking to retain and engage younger talent should cultivate

transformational leadership behaviors to reinforce affective bonds and long-term commitment.

Finally, the empirical evidence aligns with social exchange theory (SET), which posits that employees reciprocate supportive leadership through commitment and enhanced performance [33]. Transformational leaders who demonstrate trust, fairness, and recognition trigger reciprocal emotional responses that strengthen loyalty and performance [34]. In essence, the combination of inspirational leadership and affective attachment creates a virtuous cycle of motivation, engagement, and productivity that sustains organizational success in dynamic work environments [35].

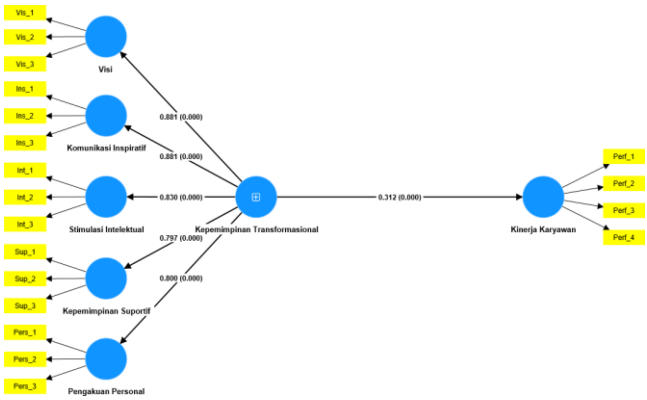


Figure 1. Direct Influence

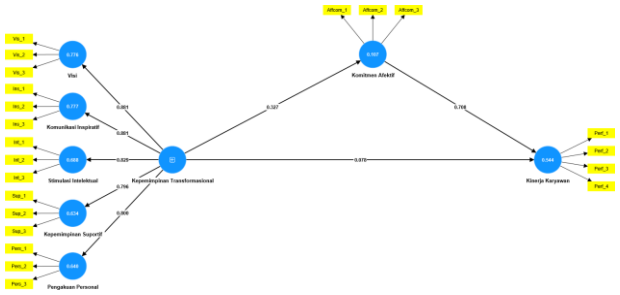


Figure 2. Baron and Kenny Mediation Results (1986)

The figure and table show that the requirements for testing mediating variables according to Baron and Kenny (1986) are met, with the following results:

1) The independent variable (transformational leadership) significantly influences the dependent variable (employee performance) with a path coefficient (β) of 0.312 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.001.

2) The independent variable (transformational leadership) significantly influences the mediating variable (affective commitment) with a path coefficient (β) of 0.327 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.001.

3) The mediating variable (affective commitment) significantly influences the dependent variable (employee performance) with a path coefficient (β) of 0.708 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.001.

4) The results of testing hypothesis 1 (direct influence) in Figure and Table using the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach, show that there is a positive and significant influence of the independent variable (transformational leadership) on the dependent variable (employee performance). Then by including the third variable, namely the mediating variable (affective commitment), the influence of transformational leadership on employee performance becomes insignificant. Based on these results, it can be concluded that affective commitment fully mediates the influence of transformational leadership on employee performance. To provide more valid results in testing method, this research uses additional analysis, namely by testing bootstrapping bias-corrected confidence intervals. The mediation effect is called significant if the bias-corrected confidence intervals do not contain zero values). The table shows the results of the mediation test of affective commitment which is statistically proven to mediate the influence of transformational leadership on employee performance with an estimated mediation effect of 0.231 with a significance p-value <0.01. The 95% confidence interval value is in the lower limit range of 0.125 to the upper limit of 0.354. The value of the mediation effect shows significance because the bias-corrected confidence intervals do not contain zero values. Based on the results of mediation testing using approach and bootstrapping bias-corrected confidence intervals, it is known that Hypothesis 2 is supported. Affective commitment fully mediates the influence of transformational leadership on employee performance.

TABLE 1.
Hypothesis Testing Summary Table

Hypothesis	Results	Conclusions
H1: Transformational leadership has a positive influence to employee performance.	*β* = 0,312; *p-value* = 0,000 (*p-value* < 0,05)	Supported
H2: Affective commitment mediate srelationship between transformational leadership and employee performance.	*β* = 0,231; *p-value* = 0,000, CI 95% [0,125;0,354]	Supported

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2022

a. Hypothesis 1: Transformational Leadership Has a Positive Influence on Employee Performance

The results of testing hypothesis 1 show that transformational leadership has a significant direct effect on employee performance with a path coefficient (β) of 0.312 and a p-value <0.05. Therefore, it can be said that Hypothesis 1 is supported. These findings indicate that the implementation of transformational leadership patterns will improve employee performance in the company. Millennial employees themselves dominate the economic and creative industries in Yogyakarta such as education, animation &

games, e-commerce, creative agencies, digital marketing, hosting and so on. The character of transformational leadership can be felt and is suitable to be applied to millennial generation employees in Yogyakarta. This is because transformational leaders are considered to be able to improve employee performance by knowing the direction and goals of the company, providing inspirational communication, providing intellectual stimulation, being supportive of employees and giving personal recognition to employees. This is in accordance with the work environment expected by the millennial generation where they want to have an environment that can provide inspiration, motivate them to work and get opportunities to develop their careers Millennial employees will feel encouraged and motivated to improve their performance when they receive attention and support from transformational leaders because for the millennial generation, the role of leader is an important attribute for them to perform well in a company

The implications of transformational leadership on the performance of millennial generation employees in Yogyakarta can start by creating a supportive work environment. Companies can help every leader to improve the four dimensions of transformational leadership. Leaders can be trained to consider the individual needs of their subordinates, explain the meaning and goals of the company, inspire or motivate with their actions and provide appreciation for the resulting good performance of employees.

b. *Hypothesis 2: Affective Commitment Mediates the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Employee Performance*

The results of testing hypothesis 2 show that affective commitment has a complete mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance with a path coefficient (β) of 0.231 and a p-value <0.001. From the hypothesis testing data, it can be seen that when the mediator of affective commitment is included in the model, the direct influence of transformational leadership on employee performance becomes insignificant, this means that the affective commitment variable fully mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. Bootstrapping testing was also carried out in this research which resulted in affective commitment fully mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. The estimate for the resulting mediation effect is 0.231 and p-value <0.001 and the 95% confidence interval value is in the lower limit range of 0.125 to the upper limit of 0.354. The value of this mediation effect is significant because the range of confidence interval (CI) values does not contain zero From the results of the mediation test using the approach and the bootstrapping test, it can be concluded that Hypothesis 2 is supported, where affective commitment fully mediates the influence of transformational leadership on employee performance. This means that the positive influence of transformational leadership on employee performance can increase when there is affective commitment in it. Based on the research results, the affective commitment variable has an important role in explaining the relationship that occurs between transformational leadership and employee performance.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study confirm that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing employee performance, both directly and indirectly, through affective commitment. Leaders who inspire, motivate, and show individualized consideration create emotional bonds with employees that translate into higher engagement and improved task outcomes. The analysis revealed that transformational leadership significantly increases employees' affective commitment, which in turn strengthens their willingness to contribute, innovate, and maintain superior performance levels. Moreover, the mediating effect of affective commitment demonstrates that emotional attachment serves as a key psychological mechanism linking leadership behavior to performance results. Employees who feel valued and aligned with organizational goals are more likely to display persistence, cooperation, and dedication to excellence. Therefore, fostering transformational leadership behaviors—such as articulating a clear vision, providing support, and recognizing contributions—is essential for organizations seeking to optimize performance and retain millennial employees. This study reinforces the importance of empathy-based, inspirational leadership and highlights affective commitment as a strategic lever for sustainable human resource development.

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