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Improving Employee Performance Through Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Transformational Leadership (TL) on Job Performance (JP), with Work Engagement (WE) as a mediating variable. The research object is employees in Karang Pilang District, Surabaya, using a quantitative explanatory approach through a closed-ended questionnaire survey. A sample of 100 respondents was obtained using the snowball sampling technique. EI was measured through self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. TL included idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. WE consisted of vigor, dedication, and full absorption. JP was measured based on task achievement, productivity, and responsibility. Data analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS with SmartPLS.

The results of this study indicate that employee performance in Karang Pilang District, Surabaya, is influenced by emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and work engagement. However, for transformational leadership not to have a negative impact on performance, a balance between innovation and stability as well as a participatory approach is required. This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to improving employee performance in the public sector.

INTRODUCTION

Public service is one of the main indicators in the implementation of modern governance, as it directly reflects the quality of interaction between the government and society. In the City of Surabaya, improvements in public service have shown a positive trend. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) Surabaya in 2023, the quality of public service increased by 15% over the past five years. This reflects a transformation of the governance system, particularly in the utilization of information technology and service digitalization.

In addition, indicators of social welfare also show a positive trend, with poverty rates decreasing from 5.23% in 2021 to 4.65% in 2023, and the Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) declining from 9.79% in 2020 to 6.76% in 2023 (SuaraSurabaya.net, 2024). On the other hand, the Surabaya City Government also achieved an "A" rating in the Government Agency Performance Accountability System (SAKIP) in 2023 (BPS Surabaya, 2025), indicating improvements in transparency and efficiency in the use of public resources.

However, the Public Satisfaction Index (IKM) survey revealed that although there was an increase from 83.10 in 2022 to 84.08 in 2023 (Kompas.com, 2024), public expectations of public

service have not yet been fully met. This indicates a need to improve the quality of human resources, particularly the performance of individual employees who serve as the frontline in delivering public services.

Employee performance is a crucial component that determines the success of public sector organizations. Various studies state that performance is not only influenced by technical and structural factors but also by psychological aspects such as emotional intelligence (EI) and transformational leadership (TL). EI—the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others—plays a significant role in conflict management, adaptation to work pressure, and the development of healthy organizational relationships (Goleman, 2004; Wong & Law, 2002 in Alhamami et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, TL is a leadership style that emphasizes vision, motivation, and employee empowerment. This type of leadership can create an inclusive and inspiring work environment, thereby encouraging employees to achieve optimal performance (Bass, 1985 in Alhamami et al., 2020). Nevertheless, most previous studies have been limited to the private sector or have not specifically examined the public sector, especially in the context of local government bureaucracy.

According to Rinfret et al. (2020) and Alotaibi et al. (2020), EI and TL significantly influence job performance (JP) in the public sector, particularly when facing complex challenges and high work pressure. Furthermore, work engagement (WE) as a mediator, as explained by Lee et al. (2023), strengthens the relationship between EI, TL, and JP. Employees with high engagement tend to demonstrate better productivity and are more capable of responding positively to workplace dynamics. Unfortunately, studies integrating EI, TL, WE, and JP into a single conceptual framework—particularly in the context of sub-district-level governance such as Karang Pilang, Surabaya—remain very limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by analyzing the influence of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership on employee performance, with work engagement as a mediating variable.

The research gap between this study and previous studies lies in the population and theoretical aspects. In terms of population, this study focuses on employees in government institutions, whereas previous research involved employees in non-governmental organizations. From a theoretical standpoint, this study uses work engagement as a mediating variable, while in earlier research work engagement often acted as an independent variable.

Furtermore, this research aims to explore the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in supporting employee performance. In a dynamic work environment, employees' ability to recognize, manage, and utilize emotions affects not only themselves but also the quality of services delivered to the public. Moreover, this study seeks to examine the extent to which transformational leadership (TL) influences employee performance. An inspiring and change-oriented leadership style is often viewed as a key factor in organizational success, but how it is perceived by employees at the sub-district level remains an important question this research focuses on the relationship between EI and work engagement (WE). Employees with higher emotional intelligence are expected to feel more connected to their work, thus becoming more enthusiastic and committed to their tasks. On the other hand, transformational leadership (TL) is also seen as having a role in fostering work engagement. Leaders who provide direction, motivation, and recognition can strengthen employees' sense of belonging. This study also examines the impact of work engagement (WE) on employee performance. Work engagement is considered a critical bridge that encourages employees to be more responsible, productive, and proactive in their work. Moreover, this research investigates the role of work engagement (WE) as a mediator, explaining how EI can enhance performance and how TL can be more effective in influencing employee performance through greater employee engagement.

METHODS

This research employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory method, aiming to examine the causal relationships between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Transformational Leadership (TL) on Job Performance (JP), with Work Engagement (WE) serving as a mediating variable. This

approach has been selected due to its capacity to systematically and measurably elucidate both direct and indirect influences among the variables. The data collection technique utilised is a survey, employing a closed questionnaire instrument constructed based on indicators that have been validated in existing literature and prior research. Prior to its application in the main analysis, the questionnaire underwent a validity and reliability testing process through a preliminary study to ensure the quality of the data collected.

The population for this study encompasses all employees working within the Karang Pilang District, Surabaya City. The sampling technique employed is non-probability sampling with a snowball sampling approach, selected to facilitate the researcher in identifying respondents that align with the characteristics of the target population. The sample size for this study comprises 100 respondents, in accordance with Roscoe's (1975) guidelines, which stipulate that an appropriate sample size for quantitative research ranges from 30 to 500 respondents. The data utilised are primary data collected directly from respondents via the distribution of questionnaires, both in printed and digital formats, with a limited cross-check process to mitigate response bias.

The operational definitions of the variables in this study are delineated as follows: Emotional Intelligence (EI) is measured through dimensions of self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management; Transformational Leadership (TL) encompasses idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration; Work Engagement (WE) is assessed based on vigor, dedication, and absorption; while Job Performance (JP) is measured through indicators of task achievement, productivity, and work responsibility. The data analysis technique employed is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, using SmartPLS software. This approach is deemed appropriate for reflective models and can be applied to non-normally distributed data as well as relatively small sample sizes.

The analysis is conducted in two primary phases: the outer model and inner model testing. The outer model testing aims to evaluate the validity and reliability of constructs through indicators such as Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's Alpha, and Composite Reliability (CR). Conversely, the inner model testing is employed to analyse the relationships among latent variables, test hypotheses, and measure both direct and indirect influences, including mediating effects, through path coefficients, t-statistics from bootstrapping, R-square values, effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). The results of this analysis are utilised to test the conceptual model and address the research questions that have been formulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1 Results of Validity and Reliability Testing

The validity test in this research was conducted through several steps, encompassing Convergent Validity measured by Outer Loadings (Loading Factor) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), as well as Discriminant Validity evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Cross Loading. The results of the Convergent Validity test indicate that several Outer Loading and AVE values did not meet the established criteria, specifically those below 0.5. The initial AVE values obtained are as follows:

Table 1. AVE Values in the Research

Variabel	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
EI	0,735
JP	0,874
TL	0,848
WE	0,789

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

Based on Table 1 above, it is evident that all variables have met the stipulated Average Variance

Extracted (AVE) criteria, with a minimum value of 0.5. This demonstrates that the Convergent Validity test has been accepted. Subsequently, the validity of the research will continue with the Discriminant Validity testing through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Cross Loading.

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Processing Values

	EI	JP	TL	WE
EI	0,857			
JP	0,509	0,935		
TL	0,452	0,470	0,921	
WE	0,783	0,482	0,481	0,888

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

Table 2 above indicates that the √AVE value for the EI variable related to EI itself is 0.857. This shows that the √AVE value of EI for itself is higher compared to other variables. The same applies to the √AVE value of JP, recorded at 0.935, √AVE of TL at 0.921, and √AVE of WE at 0.888.

The next step in testing Discriminant Validity is conducting a Cross Loading test. The Cross Loading test is an evaluation of the Outer Loading value of a construct variable, in which the value must be higher compared to that of other variables. The following are the Cross Loading values obtained in this study

Table 3. Cross Loading Processing Values

	EI	JP	TL	WE
M1	0,745	0,446	0,432	0,926
M2	0,658	0,417	0,372	0,889
M3	0,678	0,420	0,474	0,848
X1.1	0,856	0,362	0,356	0,588
X1.2	0,831	0,364	0,433	0,602
X1.3	0,856	0,425	0,318	0,728
X1.4	0,857	0,501	0,439	0,672
X1.5	0,884	0,504	0,396	0,737
X2.1	0,351	0,415	0,915	0,390
X2.2	0,335	0,305	0,920	0,407
X2.3	0,465	0,526	0,930	0,490
X2.4	0,485	0,445	0,919	0,466
Y1	0,457	0,928	0,416	0,405
Y2	0,493	0,942	0,461	0,492

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

Table 3 above demonstrates that the Outer Loading values for each indicator in relation to their respective variables have reached figures that are higher when compared to their relationships with other variable constructs. The analysis results using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Cross Loading presented earlier affirm that the validity of the research, pertaining to Discriminant Validity, has been verified. Findings from the previous analysis also indicate that this research has confirmed its validity through the testing of Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity.

Subsequently, an assessment of the reliability of the research was conducted utilising the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values, both of which exceeded 0.6. The following are the reliability values obtained from this research:

Table 4. Composite Reliability Processing Values

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)
EI	0,910	0,916
JP	0,856	0,863
TL	0,941	0,956
WE	0,866	0,869

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

Table 4 above indicates that the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for each variable have met the established criteria, being above the threshold of 0.60. This signifies that the reliability level in this research is acceptable. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability values are also recorded as being higher compared to the Cronbach's Alpha values, indicating that all variables in this research have fulfilled the criteria set for reliability, which is a crucial requirement in SEM research that can be analysed through SmartPLS. The measurement of validity and reliability using the aforementioned Measurement Model confirms that the data collection instruments employed in this research are valid and reliable. This finding suggests that the measuring tools used in the research possess a level of consistency that can be justified

2 Structural Model

In order to evaluate the degree to which the selected independent latent variables exert influence or concurrently elucidate the dependent latent variable, Ghozali (2021) delineates that within the framework of the SEM PLS methodology, three criteria warrant consideration: 1. An R-Square value exceeding 0.67 is deemed indicative of a strong relationship. Should the R-Square value surpass 0.33, the findings may be regarded as moderate. Conversely, an R-Square value falling below 0.19 categorises the results as weak. The data derived from the conducted tests are as follows:

Table 5. R-Square processing value

	R-square	**R-square adjusted**
JP (Y)	**0,337**	**0,316**
WE (Z)	**0,632**	**0,625**

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

The data presented in the table indicates that the R-Square value for the variable WE is classified as moderate, attaining a value of 0.632, which exceeds 0.33. This suggests that, overall, the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variables EI, TL, and JP is 63.2%. Conversely, the remaining 36.8% is attributable to other variables not analysed in this study.

The analysis of the R-Square for the variable JP reveals a moderate category with a value of 0.337, indicating it is greater than 0.33 but less than 0.67. Collectively, the independent variables account for an impact of 33.7% through the factors EI, TL, and the mediation of WE. The remaining 66.3% is influenced by other variables not included in this research and remains untested.

3. Description of Research Subjects

Through a systematic data collection process employing a structured questionnaire disseminated via Google Forms, a total of 100 respondents were secured. Prior to the analysis of the data, a

verification process was conducted to eliminate any invalid information that could potentially distort the research findings. The profiles of the respondents in this study were meticulously analysed to furnish a comprehensive overview of the characteristics of the sample under consideration. Respondents were categorised into several groups based on gender, age, length of service, and educational background.

4. Respondent Profile

The profiles of the respondents in this study were classified according to the following criteria:

1. Gender

The analysis of gender revealed that there were 38 female respondents, constituting 38% of the total, in contrast to 62 male respondents, representing 62%. This data indicates a higher participation rate of male respondents in this study, with a difference of 24%, or approximately 24%.

2. Age

An analysis of the respondents' ages reveals that 29 individuals, constituting 29% of the total, fall within the 25-34 age bracket. A further 27 respondents, representing 27% of the total, are aged between 35 and 44 years. Additionally, 31 respondents, accounting for 31% of the total, belong to the 45-54 age group. Twelve respondents, making up 12% of the total, are aged 55 and above, while one respondent, representing 1% of the total, is aged under 25.

3. Education

An analysis of the educational backgrounds of the respondents reveals that there are four individuals holding diplomas, representing 4% of the total sample. Additionally, four respondents possess postgraduate degrees, also accounting for 4% of the total. Similarly, four individuals have undergraduate degrees, contributing a further 4%. Furthermore, one respondent has completed elementary education, which constitutes 1% of the total. A significant portion of the respondents, numbering 40, hold high school or vocational high school qualifications, making up 40% of the total. Lastly, two respondents have attained junior high school education, representing 2% of the total.

4. Length of Service

An analysis of the respondents' length of service reveals that there are 23 individuals with 1 to 3 years of service, accounting for 23% of the total; 43 individuals with 4 to 6 years of service, representing 43% of the total; 13 individuals with 7 to 10 years of service, comprising 13% of the total; 2 individuals with less than 1 year of service, contributing 2% of the total; and 19 individuals with more than 10 years of service, making up 19% of the total

5. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping method. The data used in the bootstrapping process were those that had already passed the measurement stage. This hypothesis testing is included in the Structural Model and demonstrates the hypothesized relationships through simulation. The purpose of the bootstrapping test is to identify the direction and significance of the relationships between latent variables. The hypothesis testing process involves comparing predetermined t-statistics or calculated t-values. The calculated t-value obtained from the bootstrapping test must be greater than the one-tailed t-table, which is 1.65, at a 5% standard error level or a p-value below 0.05 (Hair et al. 2017: 320).

Table 6. Hypothesized Path Coefficients

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
EI -> JP	0,530	0,541	0,112	4,727	0,000
EI -> WE	0,535	0,542	0,076	7,085	0,000
TL -> JP	-0,228	-0,223	0,098	2,318	0,020
TL -> WE	0,491	0,484	0,080	6,159	0,000
WE -> JP	0,490	0,477	0,158	3,094	0,002

Source: processed data 2025

Table 7. Specific Indirect Effects Hipotesis Path Coefficients Scores

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
EI -> WE -> JP	0,262	0,257	0,088	2,964	0,003
TL -> WE -> JP	0,241	0,234	0,094	2,554	0,011

Based on Table 6 above, the results of the hypothesis testing conducted using the Bootstrapping method are presented. Among the seven hypotheses tested, one significant negative relationship was identified, namely between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Job Performance (JP). This is reflected in the negative value of the Original Sample, which is -0.228. According to Hair et al. (2017:172), the Original Sample value illustrates the direction of the relationship between variables within the overall sample examined. Thus, the results obtained for the relationship between TL and JP indicate a rejection of the previously proposed hypothesis, or the occurrence of a Suppressor Effect in this study, whereby another variable in the model, namely Emotional Intelligence (EI), may block the positive influence of TL due to overlap, resulting in a statistically negative relationship between TL and JP, despite the conceptual understanding being otherwise. This implies that if employees possess high or good EI, this EI may mitigate or diminish the maximum effect of TL compared to employees lacking adequate or high EI.

To assess significance, this research applies a one-tail hypothesis, wherein the significance value is evaluated based on the t-statistic, which must exceed 1.65 for a significance level of 0.05. In this study, it was found that the t-statistic exceeded 1.65, with the significance level below 0.05. Furthermore, to gain a deeper understanding of the mediating role, the researcher employed the bootstrapping method on the indirect effects table, the results of which can be observed in Table 7. Here, Work Engagement (WE) (Z) serves as a mediator in the relationship between EI (X1) and JP (Y), with a value of 0.262, and the t-statistic indicating a figure of 2.964 (> 1.66) or a p-value of 0.003 (< 0.05). This indicates that any changes occurring in EI (X1) will significantly impact JP (Y) through WE (Z) by 0.262. Subsequently, WE (Z) also acts as a mediator in the relationship between TL (X2) and JP (Y), with a value of 0.241, and a t-statistic of 2.554 (> 1.66) or a p-value of 0.011 (< 0.05). This signifies that any changes in TL (X2) will significantly affect JP (Y) through WE (Z) by 0.241.

Based on the analysis results, all hypotheses in this study are accepted. The H1 test indicates a positive and significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Job Performance (JP), with an Original Sample value of 0.530, a t-statistic of 4.727, and a p-value of 0.000. Meanwhile, H2 demonstrates a negative yet significant relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and JP, with an Original Sample of -0.228, a t-statistic of 2.318, and a p-value of 0.020. This negative relationship is suspected to be influenced by the dominance of the EI variable, which may overlap in its effect on JP. Furthermore, the results of H3 and H4 indicate that both

EI and TL have a positive and significant impact on Work Engagement (WE), with Original Sample values of 0.535 and 0.491, t-statistics of 7.085 and 6.159, and p-values of 0.000. The H5 test also reveals that WE positively and significantly influences JP, with an Original Sample of 0.490, a t-statistic of 3.094, and a p-value of 0.002

CONCLUSION

Based on the data processing results obtained, this study produced several conclusions. First, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has a positive and significant influence and relationship with Job Performance (JP) of employees in Karang Pilang District, Surabaya. Second, Transformational Leadership (TL) shows a negative but significant influence and relationship with JP in the same area. Third, EI also has a positive and significant influence on Work Engagement (WE), likewise, fourth, TL has a positive and significant influence on WE. Fifth, WE is proven to have a positive and significant influence on JP. Furthermore, sixth, WE significantly mediates the relationship between EI and JP. Finally, seventh, WE also mediates the influence between TL and JP in Karang Pilang District, Surabaya. These findings confirm the important role of EI and TL, both directly and through increased work engagement (WE), in driving employee performance.

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