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The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Job Satisfaction with Job Stress as a Mediating Variable

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Abstract

Job satisfaction is an important aspect of organizational effectiveness, as leadership practices and workplace psychological conditions can shape employees' attitudes toward their work. This study examines the effect of transformational leadership style on job satisfaction, with job stress as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was employed to analyze the direct and indirect relationships among the variables. The results show that transformational leadership style has a significant effect on job satisfaction ($p = 0.010$). However, transformational leadership style does not have a significant effect on job stress ($p = 0.902$), and job stress does not significantly affect job satisfaction ($p = 0.654$). The mediation analysis further indicates that job stress does not mediate the relationship between transformational leadership style and job satisfaction ($p = 0.903$). These findings indicate that transformational leadership directly enhances job satisfaction without operating through job stress. The study offers theoretical implications about the limited role of job stress as a mediating mechanism and practical implications for organizations in developing leadership practices to enhance employee job satisfaction.

Keywords

Job Satisfaction, Job Stress, Organizational Effectiveness, Transformational Leadership.

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction is an important indicator of employee well-being and organizational effectiveness because it reflects how employees evaluate their work in relation to their needs, expectations, and values. At the global level, the CIPD Good Work Index 2024 reported that approximately 70% of respondents were satisfied with their jobs, while the 2024 Global Talent Barometer by ManpowerGroup (2024) recorded a global job satisfaction rate of 63%. In Southeast Asia, a Jobstreet (SEEK Asia) survey found that approximately 59% of respondents reported being satisfied with their jobs, while the PwC Asia Pacific Workforce Hopes and Fears (2023) survey reported that 75% of Indonesian workers were satisfied with their jobs. Although these figures indicate a generally positive level of job satisfaction, they also reveal that a substantial proportion of employees remain less than fully satisfied. This condition highlights the need for organizations to understand the factors that shape employees' satisfaction and work experiences.

Job satisfaction refers to a pleasurable emotional state resulting from an individual's evaluation of their job and the extent to which it fulfills personally valued outcomes (Locke, 1969). It develops through cognitive and affective evaluations of whether work meets employees' expectations, needs, and values. This perspective is consistent with Amin et al. (2021), who emphasize that job satisfaction is associated with the fulfillment of physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs. Similar perspectives appear in the works of Smith et al. (1969), Spector (1997), and Herzberg (2017), which frame job satisfaction as a multidimensional response to employees' work experiences. Thus, improving job satisfaction requires attention not only to job characteristics but also to organizational and psychological conditions that influence how employees perceive and experience their work.

Among organizational factors, leadership is particularly important because leaders influence employees' perceptions of their work environment, motivation, and psychological experiences. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and the development of a shared vision (Bass & Avolio, 1994). By providing support, recognition, meaningful direction, and opportunities for participation, transformational leaders can strengthen employees' sense of value and involvement, thereby increasing job satisfaction (Siswanto & Yuliana, 2022). Previous research has consistently demonstrated a positive association between transformational leadership and job satisfaction across various organizational contexts, including the public sector, private organizations, SMEs, and healthcare settings (Thompson et al., 2021; Gebreheat et al., 2023; Roy & Swargiary, 2025; Alkubati et al., 2025). Curado and Santos (2022) further demonstrated that job satisfaction can function as an important mechanism linking transformational leadership with work performance.

However, the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction may not be exclusively direct, as employees' psychological conditions, particularly job stress, may explain how leadership influences satisfaction. Job stress occurs when work demands exceed an individual's perceived coping capacity (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Parker & DeCotiis, 1983) and develops through an appraisal process involving the evaluation of work demands and available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Excessive stress can generate psychological strain, reduce perceived control, and ultimately diminish job satisfaction. Previous studies have confirmed the negative relationship between job stress and job satisfaction (Bhastary, 2020; Puspitawati & Atmaja, 2021; Xie et al., 2021; Astuti et al., 2022; Mawardi, 2022). Transformational leadership may also reduce employees' stress through support, motivation, and inspiration (Nielsen & Munir, 2009; Harms et al., 2017; Fathina & Sary, 2019; Silalahi & Marpaung, 2025). Nevertheless, previous

studies by Siswanto and Yuliana (2022) have largely examined direct relationships or alternative mediating mechanisms, such as trust and team cohesiveness. Thus, the role of job stress as a mediator between transformational leadership and job satisfaction remains underexplored, constituting the research gap addressed in this study.

The novelty of this study lies in developing an integrated model that positions job stress as a psychological mechanism through which transformational leadership influences job satisfaction. Rather than viewing leadership as merely a direct organizational determinant, this study explains how leadership may shape employees' psychological conditions, which subsequently affect their evaluation of work. Therefore, this study examines the effect of transformational leadership on job satisfaction and determines whether job stress mediates this relationship.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Transformational Leadership, Job Stress, and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a central construct in organizational psychology, reflecting employees' cognitive and affective evaluations of their work. Locke (1969) defined it as a pleasurable emotional state resulting from the assessment of whether a job fulfills personally valued outcomes. Similarly, Wright (2006) viewed job satisfaction as an overall response arising from psychological, physiological, and environmental conditions. Herzberg (2017) Two-Factor Theory further distinguishes motivator factors, such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and advancement, from hygiene factors, such as salary and working conditions, which primarily prevent dissatisfaction. From a multidimensional perspective, Smith et al. (1969) identified the work itself, pay, promotion, supervision, and coworkers as key facets, while Spector (1997) expanded these dimensions to include rewards, organizational policies, and supervision. More recently, Amin et al. (2021) emphasized competence, autonomy, and relatedness as important foundations of job satisfaction, whereas Ozsoy (2022) linked it to psychological well-being, meaningful work, and positive workplace relationships. Thus, job satisfaction reflects a complex interaction between individual needs, job characteristics, and organizational conditions.

Leadership and psychological stress are important determinants of this evaluation. Transformational leadership can enhance job satisfaction by providing inspiration, support, recognition, and meaningful work experiences, as demonstrated by Siswanto and Yuliana (2022) and Gebreheat et al. (2023). In contrast, excessive job stress may generate psychological strain, reduce perceived control, and negatively influence employees' evaluations of their work. Puspitawati and Atmaja (2021) and Xie et al. (2021) have empirically supported this negative association. Therefore, job satisfaction is an outcome shaped not only by leadership practices but also by employees' psychological experiences in the workplace.

H1: Transformational leadership has a significant effect on job satisfaction.

H2: Job stress has a significant effect on job satisfaction.

2.2. Transformational Leadership and Job Stress

Transformational leadership is a widely studied leadership approach that focuses on transforming followers' values, motivation, and goals toward higher levels of commitment and performance (Burns, 1978). Bass and Bass (1985) conceptualized transformational leadership through four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions emphasize leaders' roles as trusted models, sources of inspiration, facilitators of innovation, and supporters of individual development. Bass and Avolio (2002) and Dayanti and Nurchayati (2023) further positioned transformational

leadership within the Full Range Leadership Theory, while Kouzes and Posner (2010) emphasized practices such as modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging processes, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. Similarly, Podsakoff et al. (1990) highlighted vision articulation, role modeling, acceptance of group goals, high-performance expectations, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation as important transformational leadership behaviors.

Although transformational leadership is generally associated with positive employee outcomes, its effect on job stress may not always be direct or statistically significant. Transformational leaders can provide support, motivation, and meaningful direction, but workload, job demands, individual characteristics, and organizational conditions may also shape employees' stress. Rachmah et al. (2022) found that transformational leadership significantly affects job stress, suggesting that effective leadership can reduce employees' psychological pressure. Jaya et al. (2021) similarly reported a negative relationship between transformational leadership and job stress, although the effect was insignificant. Ahmad (2024) also identified a negative but insignificant relationship between transformational leadership and work stress. These findings suggest that transformational leadership may reduce job stress by providing motivation, support, and clear direction, helping employees manage work demands more effectively.

H3: Transformational leadership has a significant effect on job stress.

2.3. Job Stress as a Mediating Variable

Job stress is a complex psychological response arising from demands and conditions in the work environment. Cooper and Marshall (1976) defined it as an individual's reaction to stressful job aspects, including excessive workload, role conflict, and limited social support, while Beehr and Newman (1978) emphasized the mismatch between individual capabilities and job demands. Parker and DeCotiis (1983) further highlighted time pressure and anxiety as key dimensions of job stress. From a transactional perspective, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained stress through cognitive appraisal, involving the assessment of potential threats and available coping resources. Similarly, Cooper et al. (2001) emphasized the imbalance between job demands and resources, while Robbins and Judge (2019) described stress as a dynamic condition involving demands, opportunities, and uncertainty. Thus, job stress may arise from workload, role ambiguity, inadequate support, long working hours, interpersonal relationships, and individual coping characteristics.

These psychological conditions may also explain how transformational leadership affects job satisfaction. Transformational leaders provide support, inspiration, and meaningful direction that can shape employees' psychological experiences and perceptions of their work. Rachmah et al. (2022) demonstrated the interconnectedness of transformational leadership, job stress, and job satisfaction, supporting stress as a potential explanatory mechanism. Similarly, Yong and Zhang (2025) showed that transformational leadership can influence stress-related outcomes through psychological mechanisms. Therefore, job stress may serve as a mediating mechanism through which transformational leadership ultimately influences employees' job satisfaction.

H4: Job stress mediates the effect between transformational leadership and job satisfaction.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study. Transformational leadership is the independent variable, job stress is the mediating variable, and job satisfaction is the dependent variable. The framework presents both direct and

indirect relationships among the variables. Job stress is proposed to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction.

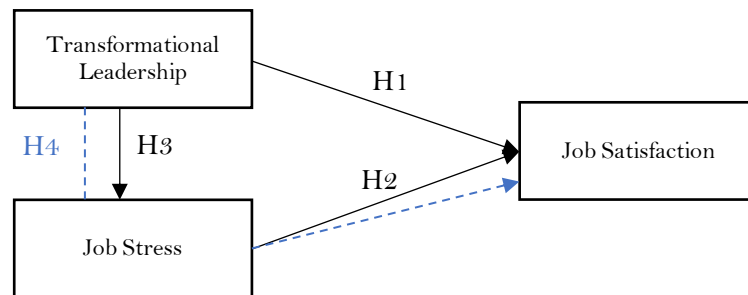


Figure 1. Research Framework

3. Methods

A quantitative approach was adopted because it enables systematic measurement of variables and objective statistical analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. A correlational research design was employed to determine the strength and direction of relationships among the variables and to examine the mediation mechanism. The study population comprised all employees of the Regional Personnel Agency (*Badan Kepegawaian Daerah/BKD*) of East Java Province, totaling 193 employees based on internal data from 2024. Total sampling was used, of which all population members were included as research participants. The use of total sampling was based on the relatively small population size and the aim of obtaining comprehensive representation without sampling error. The inclusion criterion for participants was permanent employees who had worked at the institution for at least one year.

The independent variable in this study was transformational leadership style, the dependent variable was job satisfaction, and the mediator variable was job stress. Job satisfaction was operationally defined as the extent to which individuals hold positive evaluations of their work, reflected in affective and cognitive responses to various aspects of the work environment. The measurement instrument used was the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), adapted from Spector (1997) and modified to suit the Indonesian context. The instrument consisted of 36 items covering nine dimensions and employed a six-point Likert scale. Transformational leadership style was operationally defined as the leader's ability to influence and motivate subordinates, encompassing idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The measurement instrument was developed based on the concept proposed by Bass and Avolio (2002) and consisted of 34 items, validated using a five-point Likert scale. Job stress was operationally defined as an individual's emotional response to work-related pressures, characterized by time pressure and anxiety. The measurement instrument was adapted from Parker and DeCotiis (1983) and consisted of 13 items using a four-point Likert scale.

Data were collected by distributing questionnaires directly to all employees. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their data. Participation was voluntary, and completing the questionnaire took approximately 15–20 minutes. Data were analyzed using JASP software. The analytical procedures included validity and reliability tests to assess the quality and consistency of the measurement instruments, classical assumption tests for normality and linearity, and descriptive analysis to examine the distribution and categories of the variables, direct relationship testing using regression analysis, and mediation analysis using the bootstrapping method to determine the significance of the indirect effect. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

4. Results

This section presents the empirical findings of the study concerning job satisfaction, transformational leadership, and job stress among the respondents. The analysis begins with the distribution of each research variable to provide an overview of respondents' conditions, followed by the results of the validity and reliability tests and the classical assumption tests. Next, hypothesis testing examines the direct relationships among the variables and the mediating role of job stress in the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction. The results are presented systematically in the following tables to provide a clear basis for interpreting the proposed research model.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test

Variable	Validity Test Result	Cronbach Alpha
Job Satisfaction	0.444–0.863	0.870
Transformational Leadership	0.348–0.738	0.924
Job Stress	0.483–0.809	0.887

Table 1 presents the validity and reliability test results are presented in Table 1. The job satisfaction variable showed corrected item–total correlations ranging from 0.444 to 0.863, while transformational leadership ranged from 0.348 to 0.738. Since all correlation values exceeded the minimum criterion of 0.30, the items measuring both variables were considered valid, and in terms of reliability, job satisfaction and transformational leadership obtained Cronbach's alpha values of 0.870 and 0.924, respectively, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 and indicating good internal consistency. Job stress was assessed using indicators with item correlation values ranging from 0.483 to 0.809, yielding an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.887, which indicates good internal consistency. The variation in item correlations suggests that the indicators contributed to the measurement of job stress to varying degrees.

To provide a more meaningful interpretation of participants' scores for each research variable, the scores were categorized based on the Mean $\pm$ 1 SD range. The categories were divided into three levels: low, moderate, and high. This approach examined the distribution of participants' scores across the psychological well-being, basic psychological needs, and self-regulation dimensions and identified general patterns.

Table 2. Distribution of Job Satisfaction Categories

Variable	Category	Number of Participants	Criteria	Percentage
Job Satisfaction	Low	51	$(X < \mu - 1\sigma)$ $X < 76$	26%
	Moderate	89	$(\mu - 1\sigma \leq X < \mu + 1\sigma)$ $76 < 146$	47%
	High	53	$(X \geq \mu + 1\sigma)$ $X \geq 146$	27%
Transformational Leadership	Low	56	$(X < \mu - 1\sigma)$ $X < 149$	29%
	Moderate	64	$(\mu - 1\sigma \leq X < \mu + 1\sigma)$ $149 < 235$	33%
	High	73	$(X \geq \mu + 1\sigma)$ $X \geq 235$	38%
Job Stress	Low	81	$(X < \mu - 1\sigma)$ $X < 26$	42%
	Moderate	60	$(\mu - 1\sigma \leq X < \mu + 1\sigma)$ $26 < 39$	31%
	High	52	$(X \geq \mu + 1\sigma)$ $X \geq 39$	27%
Total		193		100%

As shown in Table 2, most participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of job satisfaction. A total of 53 participants (27%) had high job satisfaction, 51 participants (26%) had low job satisfaction, and 89 participants (47%) had moderate job satisfaction. These findings indicate that the majority of employees in the study had moderate to high levels of job satisfaction. Most participants reported moderate to high levels of transformational leadership. A total of 73 participants (38%) were classified in the high category, 56 participants (29%) in the low category, and 64 participants (33%) in the moderate category. These findings indicate that although the largest proportion of employees reported low transformational leadership, a substantial proportion experienced moderate to high levels of transformational leadership in their workplace. The distribution of job stress indicates that 81 participants (42%) had low job stress, 60 participants (31%) had moderate job stress, and 52 participants (27%) had high job stress. These results show that the largest proportion of employees experienced low levels of job stress. Nevertheless, 112 participants (58%) fell into the moderate-to-high categories, indicating that more than half of the respondents experienced some degree of work-related stress. This finding suggests that although severe job stress was not dominant, psychological pressure remained relevant among a substantial proportion of employees.

Table 3. Normality Test

Test Statistic	Value
N (Sample Size)	193
Mean	0.000
Std. Deviation	7.883
Most Extreme Differences (Absolute)	0.077
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.062

The normality test used the One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test on the residual values. As presented in Table 3, the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.062, exceeding the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that the residuals do not significantly differ from a normal distribution. Therefore, the residuals are normally distributed, confirming that the data meet the normality assumption and are suitable for parametric statistical analysis.

Table 4. Linearity Test

Variables	Sig. Deviation from Linearity
Transformational Leadership → Job Satisfaction	0.264
Job Stress → Job Satisfaction	0.337
Transformational Leadership → Job Stress	0.211

As shown in Table 4, the linearity tests indicate that all variable relationships meet the linearity assumption. The Sig. deviation from linearity values were 0.264 for transformational leadership-job satisfaction, 0.337 for job stress-job satisfaction, and 0.211 for transformational leadership-job stress. Since all values exceed 0.05, no significant deviation from linearity was identified. Therefore, all relationships are considered linear and suitable for further regression analysis.

Table 5. Hypothesis Results

Variable	p-value	Information
Transformational Leadership → Job Satisfaction	0.010	Accepted
Job Stress → Job Satisfaction	0.654	Rejected
Transformational Leadership → Job Stress	0.902	Rejected
Transformational Leadership → Job Stress → Job Satisfaction	0.903	Rejected

As presented in Table 5, transformational leadership has a significant direct effect on job satisfaction, with a coefficient of -0.178 and $p = 0.010$ (< 0.05). Thus, H1 is accepted, indicating that transformational leadership significantly influences job satisfaction. The negative coefficient indicates that the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction is negative in the present sample, while the significance level confirms that the effect is statistically significant. Since the hypothesis was formulated as a two-tailed hypothesis, the significant result supports the existence of an effect regardless of its direction.

In contrast, job stress does not significantly affect job satisfaction, as indicated by a coefficient of -0.192 and $p = 0.654$ (> 0.05). H2 is rejected, suggesting that variations in employees' job stress are not sufficiently associated with changes in job satisfaction in this sample. Transformational leadership has no significant effect on job stress, with a coefficient of 0.001 and $p = 0.902$ (> 0.05), leading to the rejection of H3. This result indicates that transformational leadership does not appear to directly influence employees' levels of job stress.

The mediation analysis further demonstrates that job stress does not mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction. As shown in Table 3, the indirect pathway from transformational leadership through job stress to job satisfaction produces $p = 0.903$ (> 0.05), with a confidence interval that includes zero. Therefore, H4 is rejected, indicating that the indirect effect is statistically insignificant. Taken together, the findings suggest that the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction in this study is primarily direct rather than mediated through job stress. The non-significant paths involving job stress also indicate that other psychological or organizational mechanisms may better explain how transformational leadership influences employees' job satisfaction.

5. Discussion

The findings show that transformational leadership has a significant direct effect on job satisfaction ($p = 0.010$). This finding aligns with Boamah (2022), Siswanto and Yuliana (2022), and Curado and Santos (2022), who show that transformational leadership can enhance employee job satisfaction through inspiration, motivation, and individualized consideration. Leaders who adopt a transformational leadership style create a supportive work environment, provide a clear vision, and encourage employee participation, thereby fostering a sense of appreciation and meaningfulness in their work. This finding is consistent with Bass and Avolio's (1994) theory, which states that transformational leadership not only directs behavior but also builds employees' emotional commitment and identification with the organization. In the context of this study, the significant direct effect indicates that transformational leadership is a strategic factor in enhancing job satisfaction among employees in government institutions.

However, the findings indicate that transformational leadership does not significantly affect job stress ($p = 0.902$). Compared with Fathina and Sary (2019) and Silalahi and Marpaung (2025), who found that transformational leadership could reduce job stress, the present finding suggests that its effect may depend on organizational context. In government institutions, bureaucratic procedures, administrative demands, and standardized work systems may influence employees' stress more than leadership style. Similarly, job stress does not significantly affect job satisfaction ($p = 0.654$). This finding differs from Puspitawati and Atmaja (2021), Xie et al. (2021), and Mawardi (2022), who reported a negative relationship between job stress and job satisfaction. The discrepancy may be attributed to the relatively low level of job stress among respondents, which may have been insufficient to substantially influence their overall job evaluations. Adequate coping strategies,

coworker support, and employment stability may also buffer the effects of job stress on job satisfaction.

The main finding of this study is that the mediating role of job stress in the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction is not supported ($p = 0.903$). This indicates that the effect of transformational leadership on job satisfaction occurs directly rather than through a reduction in job stress. This finding contributes to the literature by demonstrating that not all negative psychological variables necessarily function as mediators. In this context, transformational leadership appears to play a greater role in enhancing positive factors, such as motivation, a sense of appreciation, and meaningfulness at work, rather than merely reducing stress. This finding is consistent with Chi et al. (2023) and Gebreheat et al. (2023), who showed that indirect pathways involving employees' psychological conditions are not always significant, particularly when organizational structures and work demands reduce the influence of such mechanisms. Similarly, the present study indicates that job stress does not significantly mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction.

This study highlights the importance of transformational leadership as a direct factor in enhancing employee job satisfaction. These findings by Rachmah et al. (2022) suggest the need to expand leadership models by considering other mediators that may be more relevant, such as work engagement, perceived organizational support, or psychological empowerment. Leaders in government institutions are encouraged to strengthen transformational leadership training that emphasizes vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration of employees. Although managing job stress remains important, efforts to enhance job satisfaction should place greater emphasis on strengthening leadership quality.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings, transformational leadership has a significant effect on job satisfaction, indicating that leadership quality is an important factor in shaping employees' positive attitudes toward their work. Job stress does not significantly affect job satisfaction, suggesting that work-related pressure does not directly determine employees' job satisfaction. In addition, transformational leadership does not significantly affect job stress, indicating that this leadership style is not a primary determinant of employees' stress levels. The mediation analysis further shows that job stress does not mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction. These findings indicate that the effect of transformational leadership on job satisfaction occurs directly rather than through job stress.

These findings have practical implications for public-sector organizations. Leaders should strengthen transformational leadership practices through a clear vision, recognition, individual support, and employee involvement to directly enhance job satisfaction. At the same time, organizations should address stress management through broader interventions, such as workload management, supportive work environments, and adequate resources, rather than relying solely on leadership style. This study has several limitations, including its cross-sectional design, which cannot establish causal relationships over time, and the use of self-reported measures, which may be subject to response bias. Future research should use longitudinal designs and incorporate additional moderating or mediating variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics and employee well-being in the public sector.

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Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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