

Regular article

Transformational Leadership and Turnover Intention in the Context of SMEs: Mediating Role of Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction

Kepemimpinan Transformasional dan Niat Turnover dalam Konteks UKM: Peran Mediasi Keterlibatan Kerja dan Kepuasan Kerja

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ABSTRACT

Employee turnover has become a problem for many business owners because it affects the sustainability of the business. This research was intended to explore the role of transformational leadership in determining SME employee turnover intention with job satisfaction and work engagement as mediators. Using purposive sampling, two hundred twenty-seven responses were obtained by distributing questionnaires to SME employees. The PLS-SEM application was used to analyze the collected data. The results revealed that transformational leadership positively affects work engagement and job satisfaction. On the other hand, transformational leadership negatively affects turnover intention. In addition, the results also reveal that work engagement and job satisfaction negatively affect turnover intention. Furthermore, work engagement and job satisfaction also intercede with the impact of transformational leadership on turnover intention. This research provides essential implications for managing human resources owned by SMEs.

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Introduction

The current world business development has led to a scarcity of talented and quality resources caused by aging employees and a decreasing supply of qualified workers (Ganji et al., 2021). DiPietro et al. (2020) noted that high turnover is believed to be a source of costs because organizations have to incur additional costs both for training and recruiting new employees. Therefore, maintaining qualified employees not leaving the organization has become a priority (Bright, 2021). In this regard, existing studies

indicated that leadership is the main factor that can ensure the availability of quality human resources in organizations and minimize turnover rates (Quek et al., 2021; Bregenzner et al., 2020).

Transformational leadership (TL) has been the focus of many researchers because it is associated with the moral values of subordinates and is one of the approaches often used in an organization (Sobaih et al., 2022). In addition, TL is an important aspect in improving organizational performance (Rohman et al., 2023), team performance (Prabhu et al., 2022), and also individual

performance in an organization (Park et al., 2022). Furthermore, Manoppo (2020) suggested that TL is a very effective leadership approach because it may significantly impact followers; this leadership approach is very concerned about self-development, awareness of problems, and inspiring subordinates to achieve collective goals.

In response to the importance of TL, several studies have revealed the critical role of TL in inducing positive outcomes such as innovative behavior (Kaymakçı et al., 2022), organizational citizenship behavior (Yuwono et al., 2023), performance (Yücel, 2021), engagement (Thanh et al., 2022), and job crafting (Wojtczuk-Turek, 2022). Nevertheless, only a few studies have discussed the prominent role of TL in determining turnover intention (TI). In addition, previous studies have focused more on large organizations with clear and mature management and organizational structures (Jiatong et al., 2022; Oh & Chhinzer, 2021; Saira et al., 2021). As a result, there is a shortage of awareness regarding the impact of TL in determining TI in small-scale organizations, such as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Thus far, Mittal (2016) is the only research exploring TL's role in determining SME employee turnover behavior.

Thus, this research is intended to fill the gap by exploring the role of TL in determining SME employee TI. Furthermore, this research also considers job satisfaction (JS) and work engagement (WE) as mediators between TL and TI. This is because several researchers have believed WE and JS to be factors that may reduce turnover rates (Caesens et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2020). For example, Cao and Chen (2021) and Mathieu and Babiak (2016) reported that WE and JS are negatively associated with employee TI. Based on this explanation, the current study intends to evaluate the effect of TL on TI through WE and JS.

Literature Review

Turnover Intention (TI)

Turnover intention (TI) is an employee's tendency to quit an organization (Lu et al., 2016). The TI may also be understood as an employee's conscious eagerness to quit an organization (Mustafa et al., 2020). According to Ganji et al. (2021), TI is a phase that begins with the tendency of employees to look for other jobs and ends with a decision to quit the organization. Specifically, Chavadi et al. (2022) suggested three important elements in TI: the eagerness to quit the current job, the eagerness to look for another job, and the intention to quit the organization.

Transformational Leadership (TL)

Transformational leadership (TL) is a leadership approach in

which a leader motivates his followers to be better and go beyond self-interest through changes in morals, ideals, values, and interests (Amankwaa et al., 2022). Su et al. (2020) stated that transformational leaders motivate and inspire subordinates to place common interests above personal ones. Following this argument, Gom et al. (2021) argued that transformational leaders may increase and expand subordinates' awareness and acceptance of collective goals beyond self-interest.

Some studies reported that TL is central to building employee WE (Jiatong et al., 2022; Wojtczuk-Turek, 2022). According to Chen & Cuervo (2022), transformational leaders have a far-reaching vision and always provide enlightenment for their subordinates. It will form strong employee engagement reflected in employees' enthusiasm for their work. Furthermore, Juyumaya & Torres (2023) stated that TL plays a prominent role in building WE. Transformational leaders will provide work resources to employees through feedback, support, growth opportunities, and autonomy, shaping WE.

H1: Transformational leadership positively influences work engagement

TL is an important element in organizations, especially in building employee JS, where transformational leaders, through certain behaviors (such as motivation and intellectual stimulation), will strengthen employee recognition and expectations of their work (Yuwono et al., 2023). According to Alwali & Alwali (2022), TL is an approach that may be used to increase JS by providing inspiration, stimulating intelligence, and sharing a sacred mission with employees. Furthermore, some studies reported that TL is an important determinant of JS (Abolnasser et al., 2023; Al Draj & Al Saed, 2023; Fareed et al., 2022).

H2: Transformational leadership positively influences job satisfaction

TL is one of the most effective approaches in directing employee behavior to achieve optimal performance. TL strengthens employees' self-concept, values, and eagerness to continue to be part of the organization's collective performance improvement process (Donkor et al., 2022). Furthermore, Oh & Chhinzer (2021) stated that transformational leaders always maintain and provide support to employees so that strong bonds are built between leaders and employees, which will ultimately reduce the tendency of employees to quit the organization. In this regard, some research also reported that TL is a predictor of TI (Alkarabsheh et al., 2022; Yücel, 2021).

H3: Transformational leadership negatively influences turnover intention

Work Engagement (WE)

Work engagement (WE) is a satisfying and good state of mind related to employee work, reflected in employees' high dedication and enthusiasm in doing their jobs (Osei et al., 2022). WE may also be understood as the tendency of employees to dedicate emotional, cognitive, and energy abilities at work (Sarwar et al., 2020). According to Sharma and Sharma (2015), WE is the determining factor in long-term success due to employees with strong WE tend to be more enthusiastic, energized, and enthusiastic about their work. Following this, Rahmaandi et al. (2022) argued that WE provide great positive benefits for both the organization and employees because employees with strong WE will generate all of their best abilities to achieve good performance.

WE are an important factor in an organization because it may explain employee turnover behavior. Employees with strong engagement will show positive behaviors, such as being more energetic and enthusiastic in performing work and having low intentions of quitting the organization (Ntseke et al., 2022). Pattnaik & Panda (2020) suggest that employees with strong WE tend to have strong ties with the organization to reduce employees' negative thoughts, such as the willingness to quit the organization where they work. Some studies reported that WE is a predictor of TI (Cao and Chen, 2021; Wang et al., 2020).

H4: Work engagement negatively influences turnover intention

WE is a central aspect of achieving organizational goals because it relates to employee dedication to their work (Sarwar et al., 2020). Previous studies have widely supported that WE is a consequence of TL (Jiatong et al., 2022; Park et al., 2022). When transformational leaders provide motivation and intellectual stimulation to employees, employees will be more enthusiastic and dedicated to performing their work (Thanh et al., 2022). In addition, various previous studies have also revealed that WE is an antecedent of TI (Pattnaik and Panda, 2020; Cao and Chen, 2021). Strong WE will reduce the indication of employees quitting their jobs (Caesens et al., 2016). Thus, we suspect that WE will intercede with the influence of TL on TI.

H5: Work engagement mediates the effect of transformational leadership on turnover intention

Job Satisfaction (JS)

Job satisfaction (JS) is a good emotional condition of employees as an implication of evaluating employee work experience (Zhang et al., 2020). JS may also be understood as the emotional pleasure felt by employees as a result of their job evaluation (Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, Wang et al. (2022) suggested that JS is related

to employees' feelings (likes or dislikes) about various aspects of their work. According to Chavadi et al. (2022), JS may be characterized as acknowledging employee work values that are not always related to the money factor.

JS is an important factor that organizations must consider because dissatisfied employees will have negative impacts on the organization, such as the tendency for employees to quit and quit their jobs (Bregenzer et al., 2020). Following this, Wan and Duffy (2022) state that JS is closely related to the eagerness of employees to survive or quit an organization where satisfied employees tend to stay in an organization. Conversely, employees will quit an organization if they are not satisfied with their jobs. Several previous studies disclosed that JS plays a prominent role in decreasing TI (Bright, 2021; Ganji et al., 2021).

H6: Job satisfaction negatively influences turnover intention

JS is an important factor in an organization because it may affect individual and organizational performance (Lu et al., 2016). In addition, various studies have agreed that JS is a consequence of TL (Sahan & Terzioglu, 2022; Abolnasser et al., 2023). In other words, employee JS may be realized through transformational leader behaviors such as providing motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention (Yuwono et al., 2023). On the other hand, several studies also disclosed that JS is a determinant of TI where employees who are content with their positions have an emotional connection to the organization, thereby minimizing the eagerness of employees to quit their current job and look for another (Zhang et al., 2019; Bregenzer et al., 2020). Thus, we suspect that JS will intercede with the impact of TL on TI.

H7: Job satisfaction mediates the effect of transformational leadership on turnover intention

The conceptual model of this study is shown in Figure 1.

Research Method

This causality research investigated the causal relationship between TL, WE, JS, and TI variables. The population in this research is all SME employees in Ternate City, whose total number is not identified. The number of samples in this research was obtained based on the rule of ten times the number of reflective indicators (Hair et al., 2019). As the total number of indicators in this research was 22, the minimum sample was 220 respondents.

The measurement items in this research were derived from prior investigations, which included seven criteria for transformative leadership (Abolnasser et al., 2023), nine items for WE (Pattnaik and Panda, 2020), three items for JS (Zhang et al.,

2019), and three items for TI (Wang et al., 2020). The purposive sampling method was applied in data collection by distributing questionnaires directly to respondents who had worked in SMEs for at least one year using a 5-point Likert scale and obtaining 227

responses. The acquired data was then evaluated using a partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) which includes two evaluation models, i.e., a measurement model and a structural model (Hair et al., 2019).

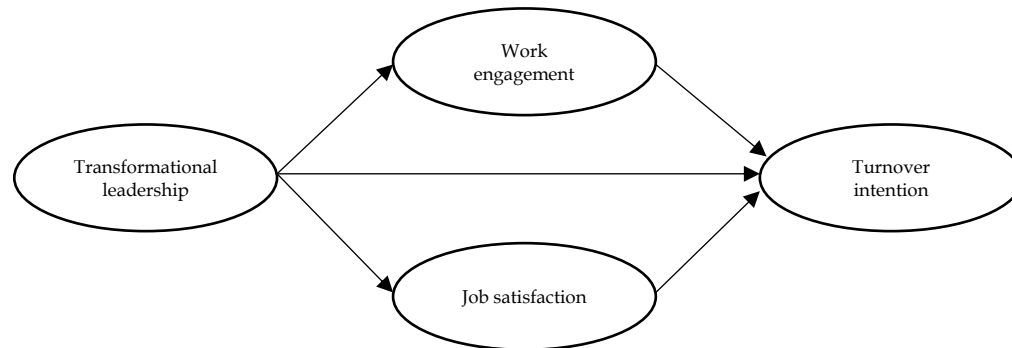


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Result

Characteristic of Respondents

A total of 227 responses were obtained and may be used from the questionnaire distribution process to SME employees in Ternate City from February to April 2023. As shown in Table 1,

most respondents were women, i.e., 123 respondents (54.2%). Furthermore, most respondents were aged 17-25, i.e., 124 (54.6%). In addition, it was also known that most respondents had a high school education background, i.e., as many as 98 respondents (43.2%). Finally, most respondents were employees with one to less than three years of service, i.e., 133 respondents (58.6%).

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	104	45.8
Female	123	54.2
Age		
17-25 years old	124	54.6
26-35 years old	52	22.9
36-45 years old	35	15.4
>45 years old	16	7.0
Education		
High school	98	43.2
Diploma	26	11.5
Bachelor	73	32.2
Others	30	13.2
Length of Work		
1 to less than 3 years	133	58.6
3 to less than 5 years	63	27.8
More than 5 years	31	13.7

Measurements Model Assessment

For convergent validity, as shown in Table 2, all reflective indicators showed loading values above 0.70 and average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.50, indicating acceptable convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). In addition, Table 2 also showed that each construct had a Cronbach’s alpha value and

composite reliability above 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

For discriminant validity, as shown in Table 3, each construct had a heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) value below 0.85, indicating acceptable discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2. Results of Convergent Validity and Reliability

Items	Loadings	AVE	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability
Turnover Intention				
INT1	0.880			
INT2	0.904	0.780	0.859	0.914
INT3	0.865			
Job Satisfaction				
JS1	0.865			
JS2	0.831	0.690	0.778	0.870
JS3	0.795			
Transformation Leadership				
TL1	0.805			
TL2	0.814			
TL3	0.839			
TL4	0.895	0.652	0.910	0.929
TL5	0.846			
TL6	0.725			
TL7	0.714			
Work Engagement				
WE1	0.726			
WE2	0.714			
WE3	0.819			
WE4	0.706			
WE5	0.752	0.536	0.892	0.912
WE6	0.737			
WE7	0.706			
WE8	0.707			
WE9	0.716			

Table 3. Results of Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Constructs	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Job Satisfaction				
(2) Transformational Leadership	0.502			
(3) Turnover Intention	0.575	0.772		
(4) Work Engagement	0.520	0.689	0.639	

Structural Model Assessment

For the structural model evaluation, as shown in Table 4, the R^2 value for the WE variable was 0.401, indicating moderate predictive power. An R^2 value of 0.182 was obtained for the JS variable, indicating a weak predictive power. An R^2 value of 0.527 was obtained for the TI, indicating moderate predictive power (Hair et al., 2019).

For the direct effect hypothesis, as shown in Table 4, it was known that TL positively influences WE ($\beta=0.633$, $p=0.000$), JS

($\beta=0.426$, $p=0.000$), and TI ($\beta=-0.487$, $p=0.000$), so that H1, H2, and H3 are accepted. In addition, it was also known that WE ($\beta=-0.176$, $p=0.016$) and JS ($\beta=-0.195$, $p=0.000$) positively influence TI, so H4 and H6 are accepted.

For the indirect effect hypothesis, as shown in Table 5, it was known that WE ($\beta=-0.112$, $p=0.027$) and JS ($\beta=-0.083$, $p=0.001$) intercede the relationship between TL and TI so that H5 and H7 are accepted.

Table 4. Direct Effect Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficients	P Values	Result	R^2
Transformational Leadership -> Work Engagement	0.633	0.000	Supported	0.401
Transformational Leadership -> Job Satisfaction	0.426	0.000	Supported	0.182
Transformational Leadership -> Turnover Intention	-0.487	0.000	Supported	
Work Engagement -> Turnover Intention	-0.176	0.016	Supported	0.527
Job Satisfaction -> Turnover Intention	-0.195	0.000	Supported	

Table 5. Indirect Effect Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficients	P values	Result
Transformational Leadership -> Work Engagement -> Turnover Intention	-0.112	0.027	Supported
Transformational Leadership -> Job Satisfaction -> Turnover Intention	-0.083	0.001	Supported

Discussion

The H1 test reveals that TL is a predictor of WE. This result was following prior previous research, which also reported the prominent role of TL in determining WE (Thanh et al., 2022; Wojtczuk-Turek, 2022; Jiatong et al., 2022). The inventions of this research show that the practice of TL will positively impact strengthening WE. In other words, employees will be more engaged if the organization adopts a TL approach in which leaders enlighten and motivate employees to go beyond self-interest. Furthermore, with transformational leaders, employees will get more autonomy and growth opportunities so that employees will be more involved in their work (Juyumaya and Torres, 2023).

The H2 test reveals that TL is a predictor of JS. This result aligns with several prior studies, which also revealed that TL would determine JS (Al Draj and Al Saed, 2023; Fareed et al., 2022; Abolnasser et al., 2023). The inventions of this research show that the application of a TL style will lead to the formation of employee JS. Employees will feel satisfied with their jobs if leaders increase and expand employee awareness of the importance of collective goals over personal interests. Furthermore, this research's findings align with the arguments advanced by Alwali and Alwali (2022) that employee JS may be shaped through transformational leader behaviors such as motivation and intellectual stimulation.

The H3 test reveals that TL is a predictor of TI. These outcomes followed some prior studies, which also revealed the prominent role of TL in decreasing TI (Alkarabsheh et al., 2022; Yücel, 2021;

Gom et al., 2021). The inventions of this research show that a leadership transformation approach may reduce the tendency of employees to quit the organization. In other words, the eagerness of employees to quit the organization and find another job may be minimized by applying a TL approach. Through certain behaviors (motivating and providing support), TL may build strong bonds between leaders and employees, which in turn may minimize the tendency of employees to quit the organization (Oh and Chhinzer, 2021).

The H4 test reveals that WE is a predictor of TI. These outcomes are following several prior studies, which also explained the prominent role of WE in decreasing TI (Wang et al., 2020; Cao and Chen, 2021). The inventions of this research show that employee TI is primarily determined by how strong employee involvement with their work; the stronger the WE, the weaker the employee's tendency to quit the organization. Simply, employees with solid WE tend to have low TI. Employees who are engaged relatively have a solid bond, which ultimately reduces employee turnover tendencies (Pattnaik and Panda, 2020).

The H5 test reveals that WE intercedes the relationship between TL and TI. These results expand on several previous studies where WE plays a prominent role as a mediator in the relationship between TL and TI (Jiatong et al., 2022; Pattnaik and Panda, 2020). The inventions of this research show that the stronger the effect of TL on WE, the stronger the effect of WE on TI. Specifically, transformational leaders will make employees more engaged with their jobs which further reduces employee intentions to quit their current jobs.

The H6 test reveals that JS is a predictor of TI. This result follows several prior studies, which also revealed that JS is a determinant that may reduce employee TI (Bright, 2021; Ganji et al., 2021). The inventions of this research show that TI is significantly dependent on JS. The more satisfied employees are with their jobs, the lower the tendency of employees to quit the organization. Furthermore, the inventions of this research follow the argument from Wan and Duffy (2022), where JS is the main reason employees want to stay or quit. Employees will leave the organization and look for work elsewhere if they feel dissatisfied.

The H7 test reveals that JS intercedes the relationship between TL and TI. These results expand on the inventions of several previous research where JS is a prominent factor in mediating the effect of TL on TI (Sahan and Terzioglu, 2022; Zhang et al., 2019). The inventions of this research show that the stronger the effect of TL on JS, the stronger the effect of JS on TI. Specifically, transformational leaders, through their behaviors, will make

employees more satisfied with their jobs which further reduces employee intentions to quit the organization.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to hypothesis testing, it may be concluded that TL is a prominent determinant of WE, JS, and employee TI. A TL style will strengthen WE and JS and decrease employee TI. In addition, WE and JS also play a prominent role as mediators in the relationship between TL and TI. Furthermore, the inventions of this research provide several important implications for SMEs in managing their human resources. Firstly, SMEs need to ensure that every employee gets attention, motivation, and intellectual stimulation through the application of a TL style considering the inventions of the current study reveal that WE and JS may be built through TL behaviors. In addition, transformational leader behaviors may also decrease the tendency of employees to quit the organization and look for new jobs in other organizations. Secondly, it is prominent for SMEs to prioritize employee involvement and JS, considering that this research reveals that these two factors, apart from directly impacting TI, also act as mediators in the relationship between TL and TI. Things such as creating an exclusive work environment, being open to suggestions from employees, providing responsibilities according to employees' abilities, providing enthusiasm and motivation to employees, and providing work support facilities may be considered by SMEs to strengthen WE and employee JS.

Some limitations were identified in this research. Firstly, this research has limitations regarding generalization where this research uses SME employees in Ternate City, so there is a possibility that the inventions of this research may not be implemented in other cities. Thus, further studies are suggested to validate this research model in other contexts and regions. Secondly, this research treats respondents with the assumption that each respondent has the same characteristics. Thus, future studies may consider the factors of the generation group where there is a high probability that each generation group has different levels of WE, JS, and TI.

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