

Improving Employee Performance Using the Moderated Effect of Compensation and Motivation by Transformational Leadership

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Abstract. *This study aims to examine the influence of compensation and motivation on employee performance, as well as the role of transformational leadership as a moderating variable in those relationships. Specifically, the objectives of this research are: (1) to determine the effect of compensation on employee performance, (2) to determine the effect of motivation on employee performance, (3) to determine whether transformational leadership moderates the relationship between compensation and performance, and (4) to determine whether transformational leadership moderates the relationship between motivation and performance. This explanatory research involved a population of 124 employees at entry, mid, and senior levels in a national private company engaged in palm oil plantation and CPO processing. The sampling technique used was saturation sampling, in which the entire population was included as respondents. Data were collected using a Likert scale from 1 to 7, and analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS). The results show that both compensation and motivation have a positive and significant effect on employee performance. Fair and equitable compensation enhances work enthusiasm and productivity, while high motivation drives optimal performance. Transformational leadership does not strengthen the effect of compensation on performance, as compensation is a direct factor not heavily influenced by leadership style. However, transformational leadership significantly strengthens the effect of motivation on performance through inspiration, role modeling, and the support provided by leaders.*

Keywords: *Compensation; Leadership; Motivation; Transformational.*

1. Introduction

The current business climate is highly dynamic and influenced by various factors, such as geopolitics, trade tariffs, and intense global competition. These conditions encourage companies to continuously improve their competitiveness to remain competitive and maintain market share. Competition is not only measured by product or service quality, but

also by the use of technology, information systems, and human resource (HR) management (Kaswati, 2018; Syahreza, 2024; Brhane & Zewdie, 2018).

In this context, adaptive human resource management is crucial because human resources are key to a company's success in achieving business goals (Mangkunegara, 2021). To create superior human resources that are difficult for competitors to imitate, companies need to design workforce planning, recruitment processes, employee development, and conduct regular monitoring and evaluation. These evaluations are crucial for assessing whether employee performance is optimal and contributing to the company's competitive advantage.

Robbin & Judge (2021) stated that compensation is the primary factor influencing individual performance. This is reinforced by Armstrong & Taylor (2020), who explain that employee performance is significantly influenced by compensation, motivation, and leadership. Fair and competitive compensation can increase job satisfaction and positively impact productivity. Meanwhile, motivation drives individuals to work beyond established targets (Hasibuan, 2020; Robbin & Judge, 2021).

Research results show that compensation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (Gaulam, 2023; Arifin et al., 2023; Dewi & Ardana, 2022). Mulyapradana et al. (2022) also found that satisfaction with compensation can increase employee morale in achieving company goals. However, other research findings differ, such as those presented by Sri & Pancasasti (2022), who found that compensation had no significant effect on performance. A similar finding was found in research by Marlius & Pebrina (2022), who stated that compensation had no direct effect on employee performance.

Besides compensation, motivation is also a crucial factor in improving human resource performance. Robbins & Judge (2021) define motivation as a process that explains the intensity, direction, and determination of a person's determination to achieve goals. Alfin Adam et al. (2023) state that motivation is the fundamental force that drives a person to focus energy on achieving goals. According to Herzberg (1959), motivation consists of two categories: motivating factors (intrinsic) such as achievement, responsibility, and recognition, and hygiene factors (extrinsic) such as working conditions and salary. Meanwhile, McClelland (1985) suggests that motivation is driven by three primary needs: the need for achievement, power, and affiliation, all of which contribute to performance improvement.

Research conducted by Sri & Pancasasti (2022) shows that work motivation has a positive and significant influence on employee performance at PT. Shingo Plantech. The higher an employee's work motivation, the higher the level of performance they can achieve. Robbins & Judge (2021) support these findings by stating that work motivation can encourage employees to work harder, set clear goals, and continue to contribute despite organizational challenges. However, other research findings indicate that motivation does not always have a significant influence on performance. For example, research by Gulo & Pohan (2024) and Ayu & Febrian (2023) revealed that motivation does not directly affect employee performance.

One relevant theory explaining the role of motivation in performance is McClelland's (1961) Theory of Needs. This theory states that individual motivation is influenced by three primary needs: achievement, affiliation, and power. However, in the context of modern organizations, employee motivation cannot be achieved solely through a system of rewards and punishments. Leadership is needed that can inspire and encourage profound positive change in employees (Bass, 1985).

Transformational leadership is a leadership style capable of bringing about significant change both individually and in organizations. According to Oktaviani et al. (2022), transformational leaders have the power to shape change within team members and the organization as a whole. Jufrizen (2020) adds that transformational leaders not only clarify the direction and objectives of tasks but also transform followers' personal values to align with the organization's vision and mission. Bass & Riggio (2006) state that transformational leadership creates an environment that supports strong relationships, builds trust, and encourages followers to optimally realize a shared vision.

The theory of transformational leadership was first introduced by Burns (1978) in his book, *Leadership*, using the term "transforming leadership." This concept was further developed by Bass & Riggio (2006), who emphasized that transformational leaders tap into the values and aspirations of their followers and are able to create a compelling and inspiring vision of the future.

Given the inconsistency of research findings regarding the influence of compensation and motivation on performance, as well as the importance of leaders in shaping employee work behavior, transformational leadership is suspected to act as a moderating variable in this context. This means that transformational leadership is expected to strengthen the relationship between compensation and motivation on employee performance. Therefore, transformational leadership has the potential to increase work effectiveness and productivity, aligning with organizational goals.

One of the national private companies engaged in oil palm plantations and crude palm oil (CPO) processing, located in Lamandau Regency, Central Kalimantan Province, has main activities in the form of providing fresh fruit bunches (FFB), producing crude palm oil (CPO), as well as managing transportation and waste from production.

In 2024, the company established a workforce expansion policy with the aim of improving productivity and operational performance. Based on the employee composition in Table 1.1, the workforce in 2023 was recorded at 1,262 people, then increased to 1,328 people in 2024. This workforce expansion is expected to support the achievement of strategic goals, especially in improving productivity, quality, and operational effectiveness (Deseler, 2020; Warther & Devis, 1996; Armstrong & Taylor; Mathis & Jackson, 2011; Gomes-Mejia, Balkin, Cardy, 2016). Armstrong and Taylor (2020) emphasize that proper workforce planning is crucial to ensuring the achievement of a company's strategic goals. Mathis and Jackson (2011) also state that aligning the number and quality of employees with organizational needs can improve

productivity and work quality. Meanwhile, Gomez-Mejia et al. (2016) emphasized that a competent and well-managed workforce is a key factor in achieving competitive advantage and organizational success.

2. Research Methods

The type of research used in this study is explanatory research. According to (Sugiyono, 2017), explanatory research is a research method that aims to explain the causal relationship between two or more variables and to determine the effect of one variable on another. This research focuses on testing hypotheses and causal relationships between variables, using a quantitative approach. A quantitative approach is used because it allows researchers to measure data in numerical form and analyze it using statistical tools. Similarly, Sugiyono (2015) states that quantitative research uses numerical data and analyzes it using statistics to test hypotheses formulated based on conceptual theory. The data used in this study is primary data, collected directly from the research subjects. In this case, primary data was obtained through respondents' answers, namely employees, as measured using a questionnaire.

3. Results and Discussion

The respondents of this study were employees at entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level positions in national private companies engaged in palm oil plantations and CPO processing, with a total of 124 people. The research was conducted by distributing research questionnaires on June 10-23, 2025. The results of the distribution of the research questionnaires obtained a total of 124 questionnaires that were completely filled out and could be processed. The description of the respondents can be presented according to their characteristics which are presented as follows:

Table Description of Respondent Characteristics

No	Characteristics	Total Sample n = 124	
		Amount	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender		
	Man	72	58.1
	Woman	52	41.9
2.	Age		
	< 30 years	41	33.1
	30 - 40 years	49	39.5
	41 - 50 years old	25	20.2
	> 50 years	9	7.3
3.	Last education		
	High School/Vocational School	33	26.6
	Diploma	11	8.9
	Bachelor degree)	72	58.1
	Postgraduate (S2)	8	6.5
4.	Years of service		
	0 - 10 years	23	18.5

11 - 20 years	57	46.0
21 - 30 years old	31	25.0
> 30 years	13	10.5

Source: Results of research data processing (2025).

The descriptive data from respondents in Table 4.1 above shows that 72 employees (58.1%) were male, while 52 employees (41.9%) were female. The majority of respondents were male, indicating that the employee composition is dominated by men.

In terms of age, the largest number of respondents were aged 30-40, with 49 employees (39.5%). Employees at this age group generally have high work ethic and strive to gain extensive work experience. This indicates that the majority of employees are in the productive age range, which typically has the combination of work experience and energy to support organizational performance.

The highest level of education attained by most respondents was a bachelor's degree (S1), representing 72 employees (58.1%). This higher level of education provides employees with greater knowledge and skills across various aspects of their work, significantly supporting their work and thus playing a significant role in improving employee performance. This finding reflects that employees generally possess higher educational qualifications, which are relevant to the demands of professionalism within the company.

The table also shows that more respondents, 57 employees (46.0%), had 11-20 years of service. This indicates that most respondents were relatively new employees or in the early to mid-career stages of their organization.

In this section, a descriptive analysis is conducted to obtain an overview of respondents' responses to the research variables. This analysis is conducted to obtain perceptions about respondents' tendencies to respond to the indicator items used to measure these variables and to determine the status of the variables studied based on field conditions.

The research instrument used seven alternative answers (scale 1-7). The data will then be categorized into three groups. To determine the scoring criteria for each group, the following calculations can be made (Sugiyono, 2017):

- a. Highest score = 7
- b. Lowest score = 1
- c. Range = Highest score – lowest score = 7 - 1 = 6
- d. Class interval = Range / number of categories = 6/3 = 2.00

The variable descriptions are grouped into 3 categories, namely: low category, score = 1.00 – 3.00, medium category, score = 3.01 – 5.00 and high/good category, with score = 5.01 – 7.00. A detailed description of each research variable can be described in the following section:

The description of respondents' responses in the form of descriptive statistics of the Compensation variable data can be presented as follows:

Table Descriptive Statistics of Compensation Variables

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation
Compensation	5.68	
1. Basic salary	5.65	1.06
2. Incentives and Bonuses	5.63	0.93
3. Allowances and Facilities	5.62	0.91
4. Compensatory Justice	5.83	0.93

The data presented in Table shows that the overall average value of the Compensation variable, 5.68, falls within the high/good category (5.01–7.00). This means that respondents believe they receive compensation commensurate with their work performance. The data description of the compensation variable shows that the highest mean value is for the fairness indicator (5.83) and the lowest is for the allowances and facilities indicator (5.62).

In this study, data analysis was conducted using a simultaneous model with the PLS approach. The fundamental evaluation conducted was the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) with the aim of determining the validity and reliability of the indicators measuring the latent variables. Validity criteria were measured using convergent and discriminant validity, while construct reliability criteria were measured using composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's Alpha.

Evaluation of the latent variable measurement model with reflective indicators is analyzed by examining the convergent validity of each indicator. Convergent validity testing in PLS can be seen from the magnitude of the outer loading of each indicator on the latent variable. According to Ghazali (2011), an outer loading value above 0.70 is highly recommended.

Reliability measurement can be done using 3 (three) methods, namely:

a. *Cronbach's alpha*

If the Cronbach alpha value > 0.70 then the construct can be said to have good reliability.

b. *Composite Reliability.*

Composite reliability shows the degree that indicates common latent (unobserved), so that it can show block indicators that measure the internal consistency of the indicators that form the construct, the accepted limit value for the Composite reliability level is 0.7 (Ghozali & Latan, 2015)

c. *Average Variance Extracted(AVE)*

If the AVE value is > 0.5 , then the indicator used in the study is reliable and can be used for research. Ideally, the AVE measurement value should be greater than 0.50 (Ghozali & Latan, 2015).

Multicollinearity is a condition in which there is a correlation between independent variables or between independent variables that are not mutually independent. Before conducting a hypothesis test, a multicollinearity test is necessary. The multicollinearity test can be performed by examining the Collinearity Statistics (VIF) values in the inner VIF Values. If the inner VIF is < 5 , it indicates no multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019).

PLS analysis is a variance-based SEM analysis aimed at testing model theory, emphasizing predictive studies. Several measures of model acceptance are used, including R-square and Q-square (Hair et al., 2019).

R square indicates the extent to which the variation of an endogenous variable can be explained by other exogenous or endogenous variables in the model. The interpretation of R square according to Chin (1998) as quoted (Abdillah, W., & Hartono, 2015) is 0.19 (low influence), 0.33 (moderate influence), and 0.67 (high influence).

In Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), the f^2 value (f square) is used to measure the effect size of an exogenous latent construct on the endogenous latent construct in the structural model. The f^2 value provides information on the extent to which the independent variable contributes to the R^2 value of the dependent variable. The interpretation of the f square value is that the effect size (f^2) value of 0.02 is interpreted to indicate a small effect, 0.15 is interpreted as a medium effect and 0.35 is a large effect (Ghozali & Latan, 2015).

Q-Square (Q²) describes the measure of predictive accuracy, namely how well each change in exogenous/endogenous variables is able to predict endogenous variables. Q-Square predictive relevance for structural models is a measure of how well the observation values are generated by the model and also its parameter estimates. Size. Q square above 0 indicates the model has good predictive relevance or model prediction suitability. The criteria for the strength of the model is measured based on Q-Square Predictive Relevance (Q²) according to Ghozali & Latan (2015, p. 80) are as follows: 0.35 (strong model), 0.15 (moderate model), and 0.02 (weak model).

Structural model testing (inner model) examines the relationship between latent constructs by estimating the path parameter coefficients and their significance levels (Ghozali, 2011). This procedure is carried out as a step in testing the proposed research hypothesis. The test yields output from the structural model of the construct loading factor, which will explain the influence of the Compensation construct on employee performance through Motivation and the moderation of Transformational Leadership.

In this case, data processing was performed using the Smart PLS v4.1.0 software tool. The results of this data processing are shown in the following image:

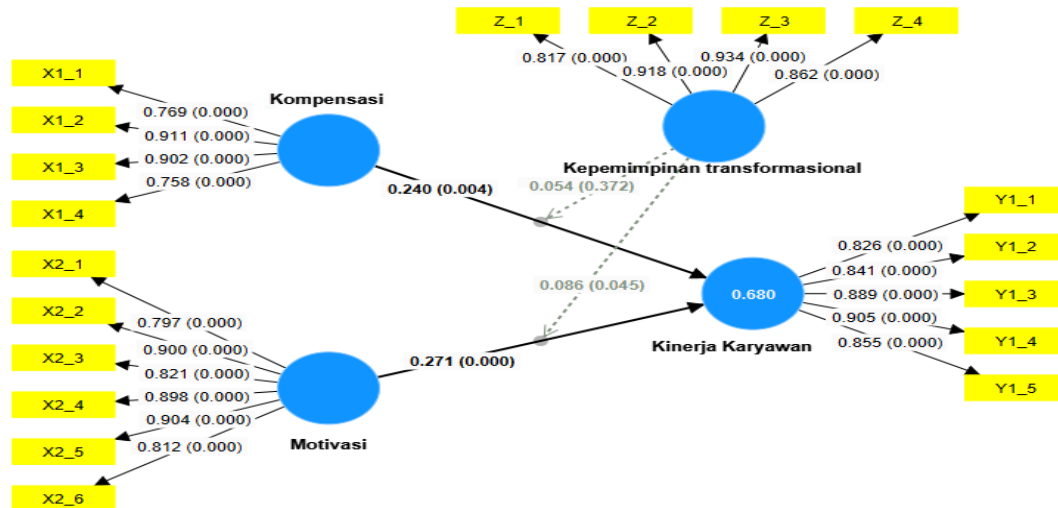


Figure Full SEM-PLS Moderation Model

Source: Results of research data processing with Smart PLS 4.1.0 (2025)

Research hypothesis testing is conducted to determine whether a hypothesis is accepted or not by comparing the calculated t with the t table with the condition that if the calculated $t > t$ table, then the hypothesis is accepted. The critical value used when the sample size is greater than 30 and the two-tailed test is 1.65 for a significance level of 10%, 1.96 for a significance level of 5% and 2.57 for a significance level of 1% (Marliana, 2019). In this case, to test the hypothesis used a significance level of 5% where the t table value is 1.96 (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). The results of testing the influence of each variable in this study can be presented in the following table:

Table Hypothesis Test Results

No	Hypothesis	Original sample	T statistics	P values	Information
1	Compensation -> Employee Performance	0.240	2,918	0.004	Accepted
2	Motivation -> Employee Performance	0.271	3,783	0.000	Accepted
3	(Transformational Leadership x Compensation) -> Employee Performance	0.054	0.892	0.372	Rejected
4	(Transformational Leadership x Motivation) -> Employee Performance	0.086	2,014	0.045	Accepted

Source: Primary data processing with Smart PLS 4.1.0 (2025)

Decisions are made based on the calculated statistical test values and predetermined significance levels. Hypothesis testing is performed by comparing the predetermined t -table with the calculated t -value generated from the PLS calculation. Based on the data processing results table above, the results of each proposed hypothesis test can be identified as follows:

1) Hypothesis Testing 1:

H1: Compensation provided fairly can affect employee performance.

In testing hypothesis 1, the original sample estimate value of the influence of compensation on employee performance was obtained at 0.240. This value proves that compensation has a positive effect on employee performance where the results are supported by the results of the t-test obtained by the calculated t value ($2.918 > t \text{ table } (1.96)$ and $p (0.004) < 0.05$, so it can be said that there is a positive and significant influence of compensation on employee performance. Thus, the first hypothesis which states that "Compensation is given fairly can affect employee performance." can be accepted.

2) Hypothesis Testing 2:

H2: Motivation can influence employee performance in achieving goals.

In testing hypothesis 2, the original sample estimate value of the influence of Motivation on employee performance was obtained at 0.271. This value proves that Motivation has a positive effect on employee performance, the results of which are also strengthened by the results of the t-test obtained with a calculated t value ($3.783 > t \text{ table } (1.96)$ and $p (0.000) < 0.05$, so it can be said that there is a positive and significant influence of Motivation on employee performance. Thus, the second hypothesis which states that 'Motivation can influence employee performance in achieving goals' can be accepted.

3) Hypothesis Testing 3:

H3: Transformational Leadership as a moderating variable is thought to strengthen the influence of compensation on employee performance in achieving organizational goals.

In testing hypothesis 3, the original sample estimate value of the influence of the moderating variable (Transformational Leadership x Compensation) on employee performance was 0.054. This value indicates that the moderating factor has a positive influence, but when viewed through the t-test, the t-value ($0.892 < t \text{-table } (1.96)$ and $p (0.372) < 0.05$ were obtained, so it can be said that Transformational Leadership does not have a significant influence on the relationship between Compensation and Employee Performance. Thus, the third hypothesis which states that "Transformational Leadership as a moderating variable is thought to strengthen the influence of compensation on employee performance in achieving organizational goals" can be rejected.

4) Hypothesis Testing 4:

H4: Transformational Leadership as a moderating variable is thought to strengthen the influence of motivation on employee performance in achieving organizational goals.

In testing hypothesis 4, the original sample estimate value of the influence of the moderating variable (Transformational leadership x motivation) on employee performance was 0.086.

This finding was reinforced by the results of the t-test which obtained a calculated t value ($2.014 > t_{table} (1.96)$ and $p (0.045) < 0.05$, so it can be said that transformational leadership has a significant influence on the relationship between motivation and employee performance. Thus, the fourth hypothesis which states that 'Transformational Leadership as a moderating variable is thought to be able to strengthen the influence of motivation on employee performance in achieving organizational goals' can be accepted.

Discussion:

1) The Influence of Compensation on Employee Performance.

This study proves that compensation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, meaning that fair compensation can influence employee performance. These results are supported by previous research by Nuruzzaman et al. (2021), which states that employee performance increases if compensation and motivation also increase.

Compensation reflected through four indicators, namely the indicators Basic Salary, Incentives and Bonuses, Allowances and Facilities, and Compensation Fairness. Whereas Employee performance in this study was measured from the reflection of five indicators, namely indicators Quantity, Quality, Efficiency, Initiative, Responsibility and Initiative.

Nevertheless, these results also suggest a positive relationship between compensation equity and work output quantity. This means that when employees perceive that their compensation is distributed fairly and commensurate with their contributions, they are more likely to be motivated to increase the volume or amount of work completed. In an organizational context, perceptions of equity significantly influence motivation and ultimately impact employee productivity. Therefore, it is crucial for management to ensure that the compensation system is not only competitive but also perceived as fair by all employees to encourage quantitative performance improvements.

So it is concluded that This study demonstrates that compensation has a positive and significant impact on employee performance, meaning that the better and fairer the compensation, the higher the employee's performance. This suggests that compensation is a crucial factor in increasing employee morale, loyalty, and productivity in achieving organizational goals.

2) The Influence of Motivation on Employee Performance.

This study proves that motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, meaning that motivation can influence employee performance in achieving goals. These results are supported by previous research, such as that by Gaulam (2023), which states that motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

Motivation in this study was measured by six indicators namely indicators Achievement or Performance, Recognition, Work Itself, Responsibility, Progress, and Development of Individual Potential. These six indicators have been proven to be able to improve employee performance, which in this study was measured from the reflection of five indicators. namely indicators Quantity, Quality, Efficiency, Initiative, Responsibility and Initiative.

The motivation variable with the highest outer loading value is the progress indicator, while the most prominent indicator in the employee performance variable is initiative. This finding indicates that the higher employees' perception of progress in their work, the greater their tendency to demonstrate initiative. This means that when employees feel that their work has a real impact and is recognized, they are motivated to be more proactive, seek solutions, and take actions beyond their core duties.

So it is concluded that This study proves that motivation has a positive and significant influence on employee performance, meaning that the higher the level of motivation an employee possesses, the better their performance will be. Strong motivation encourages employees to work harder, be more responsible, and strive to achieve set targets, thus directly impacting increased productivity and achieving organizational goals.

3) Moderation of Transformational Leadership in the Influence of Compensation on Employee Performance.

This study proves that transformational leadership does not moderate the effect of compensation on employee performance, so it can be said that transformational leadership does not have a significant effect on the relationship between compensation and employee performance. Transformational leadership does not strengthen the effect of compensation on employee performance in achieving organizational goals.

The results of this study indicate that transformational leadership does not moderate the effect of compensation on employee performance, possibly due to several factors. One possibility is that the compensation employees receive is sufficiently clear and direct, making its effect on performance stronger than the influence of leadership style.

The majority of employees are of productive age (30–40 years old) and have a higher education (mostly Bachelor's/S1) and have worked between 11–20 years. At this stage, employees generally focus more on direct rewards for their performance, such as fair and competitive compensation, compared to the influence of leadership style. In addition, the majority of respondents are male employees and hold positions from entry to senior level in palm oil plantation and CPO processing companies, where the work structure tends to emphasize the achievement of concrete targets and a clear reward system, making compensation a more dominant factor in influencing performance.

Transformational leadership in this study is measured from the reflection of four indicators. namely indicators Ideal influence, Inspiring motivation, Intellectual stimulation, and Adaptive consideration, then Compensation reflected through four indicators, namely the

indicators Basic Salary, Incentives and Bonuses, Allowances and Facilities, and Compensation Fairness. Whereas Employee performance in this study was measured from the reflection of five indicators, namely indicators Quantity, Quality, Efficiency, Initiative, Responsibility and Initiative.

Based on the analysis, the indicator with the highest outer loading value for the transformational leadership variable is intellectual stimulation, reflecting a leader's ability to encourage employees to think creatively and seek innovative solutions. For the compensation variable, incentives and bonuses were the most dominant, indicating that financial rewards are a key aspect in motivating employees. Meanwhile, for the employee performance variable, the initiative indicator received the highest score, indicating that the drive to act proactively and contribute more is a crucial component of performance.

However, these results also show that even if leaders provide high levels of intellectual stimulation, this is not enough to strengthen the effect of incentives and bonuses on increasing employee initiative. This means that leadership involvement in encouraging critical thinking does not necessarily increase the effectiveness of compensation in encouraging employee initiative, so the relationship between financial motivation and performance is not automatically strengthened by a transformational leadership style.

4) Moderation of Transformational Leadership in the Influence of Motivation on Employee Performance.

This study proves that transformational leadership moderates the influence of motivation on employee performance, thus it can be said that transformational leadership has a significant influence on the relationship between motivation and employee performance. Good implementation of transformational leadership can strengthen the influence of motivation on employee performance in achieving organizational goals.

The effective implementation of transformational leadership can strengthen the influence of motivation on employee performance because transformational leaders focus not only on achieving targets but also on individual development and improving work morale. Leaders with this style tend to provide inspiration, a clear vision, and emotional support that can increase employee confidence and commitment to their work. When employee motivation is supported by leaders who are able to inspire enthusiasm, reward contributions, and encourage innovation and active participation, the motivation will be more effective in driving performance. Thus, transformational leadership plays a crucial role in strengthening the relationship between motivation and performance in order to achieve organizational goals more optimally.

4. Conclusion

The answer to the research question of how to improve employee performance by leveraging the moderated influence of compensation and motivation through transformational leadership is to ensure that compensation is provided fairly, transparently, and

commensurate with employee contributions. Fair compensation has been shown to increase job satisfaction and morale, thus positively impacting performance. Furthermore, strong motivation plays a crucial role in driving employees to achieve work targets and organizational goals. The results of this study also show that transformational leadership acts as a reinforcement, increasing the influence of motivation on performance. Transformational leaders who are able to provide inspiration, support, and clear direction will help build employee morale, thereby directing their motivation and having a stronger impact on achieving optimal performance. Therefore, the synergy between compensation, motivation, and transformational leadership is a strategic key to sustainably improving employee performance.

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