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The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction towards Organizational Competence among RISDA Officers in the Eastern Region Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia's Eastern Region, transformational leadership plays a vital role in addressing the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority's (RISDA) operational challenges and enhancing human capital development. This study examines the relationship between transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational competence among RISDA officers. Using a quantitative research design, 254 officers and support staff were surveyed with validated instruments: the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), and Competency Assessment Questionnaire (CAQ). Results show a significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and job satisfaction ($r \approx 0.62$, $p < 0.01$), both of which have a measurable impact on organizational competence ($\beta \approx 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). These findings highlight that developing transformational leadership not only improves employees' satisfaction and professional capacity but can also be systematically integrated into RISDA's leadership development programs and HR policies such as targeted training modules and performance evaluation frameworks to strengthen the agency's strategic effectiveness in the plantation sector.

1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of public sector management, transformational leadership has garnered substantial academic and practical interest for its impact on employee outcomes and organisational performance [4,19]. Transformational leadership, as conceptualised by Bass and Avolio [7], refers to a leadership approach that transcends routine transactional exchanges by inspiring, intellectually stimulating, and individually recognising followers. This form of leadership fosters a shared vision, encourages creativity, and aligns employees' values with the goals of the organisation. As such, it is often cited as a cornerstone of effective human resource development,

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particularly within institutions tasked with socio-economic mandates, such as the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA) in Malaysia.

Job satisfaction, another critical variable in organisational studies, has long been recognised as a determinant of workforce engagement, productivity, and retention. In the context of public service delivery, satisfied employees are more likely to demonstrate commitment, discretionary effort, and alignment with organisational objectives. Scholars such as Judge and Piccolo [17] argue that leadership style is a primary antecedent of job satisfaction, with transformational leadership being particularly influential due to its emphasis on emotional connection, personal growth, and motivational appeal [30].

Within RISDA, an agency charged with enhancing the livelihoods of smallholder rubber farmers, the dynamics of leadership and employee satisfaction take on amplified significance. Officers within this agency are positioned at the interface of policy implementation, community engagement, and agricultural transformation [26]. Their ability to navigate complex socio-political expectations, administrative requirements, and field realities necessitates not only technical competence but also psychological commitment and adaptive capacity. In such a context, the leadership style exhibited by superiors can profoundly shape the morale, motivation, and effectiveness of staff.

Organisational competence, in this regard, reflects the ability of an institution to mobilise its resources, human capital, and systems to achieve strategic goals efficiently and adaptively. It is not merely a function of technical proficiency, but also a product of collective engagement, communication, innovation, and alignment across different hierarchical levels. Theoretical and empirical work increasingly suggests that transformational leadership can enhance organisational competence by nurturing a work environment that promotes knowledge sharing, collaborative problem-solving, and continuous improvement [8]. When paired with high job satisfaction, such leadership practices may serve as a catalyst for improved performance across public sector entities, including RISDA.

Notably, the Eastern Region of Malaysia presents distinct operational challenges and opportunities for RISDA officers. This region is characterised by rural dispersal, economic vulnerability, and fluctuating market dynamics in the rubber industry. These environmental factors heighten the importance of strategic leadership and employee resilience. Officers often work in decentralised settings with limited resources, requiring initiative, motivation, and consistent alignment with the agency's mission. In this regard, the application of transformational leadership principles becomes more than a theoretical ideal and it becomes an operational necessity.

Previous studies have affirmed the positive association between transformational leadership and job satisfaction in various sectors, including healthcare, education and government institutions [32]. However, the extent to which these dynamics apply within the Malaysian plantation governance context, and specifically within RISDA, remains underexplored. While some localised studies [13,29] have investigated leadership and employee outcomes within public bodies, few have integrated all three variables transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organisational competence into a cohesive empirical model.

Moreover, most existing literature tends to generalise findings across diverse organisational contexts, potentially overlooking the unique operational structures and cultural nuances of agencies like RISDA. Public sector organisations in Malaysia often operate within a framework of bureaucratic accountability and centralised policy mandates, which may moderate the effectiveness of transformational leadership strategies. Therefore, a context-sensitive inquiry is essential to determine the actual impact of leadership styles on staff motivation and institutional performance in such agencies [21].

This study is also timely in light of RISDA's broader transformation agenda, which includes improving service delivery, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and aligning institutional processes with national rural development strategies. As the agency seeks to elevate its organisational performance amidst sectoral shifts and policy reforms, understanding the psychological and behavioural mechanisms that underpin staff performance becomes imperative.

In response to these gaps, this study explores the relational dynamics between transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organisational competence among RISDA officers in the Eastern Region of Malaysia. Drawing upon validated measurement instruments and quantitative analysis, the research aims to establish whether and how transformational leadership influences job satisfaction, and whether these factors collectively contribute to enhancing organisational competence.

The primary objective of this study is to determine the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction in shaping organisational competence among RISDA officers in the Eastern Region. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) assess the level of transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organisational competence among officers; (2) analyse the correlations between these constructs; and (3) evaluate the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between transformational leadership and organisational competence. By addressing these aims, the study provides evidence-based insights to inform leadership development initiatives and strategic workforce planning within RISDA and comparable public sector institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Transformational Leadership in Organisational Settings

Transformational leadership has been widely recognised as a significant driver of employee motivation, performance, and organisational effectiveness. First introduced by Burns (1978) and expanded upon by Bass and Avolio [7], transformational leadership emphasises a leader's ability to inspire followers to exceed their own self-interest for the sake of the group or organisation. This leadership style is characterised by four core dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Each of these components plays a unique role in shaping the behaviour and engagement of employees within an organisation. Idealised influence reflects the degree to which leaders serve as role models, earning the trust and respect of their subordinates. Leaders with this attribute exhibit ethical conduct and consistent values, which fosters employee loyalty and alignment with organisational goals [8]. Inspirational motivation refers to a leader's ability to articulate a compelling vision of the future, thereby instilling optimism, enthusiasm, and purpose among staff. Intellectual stimulation encourages innovation and critical thinking by challenging assumptions and involving employees in problem-solving processes. Finally, individualised consideration pertains to the leader's attentiveness to each employee's unique developmental needs, providing mentoring and support that promotes professional growth [17].

Several empirical studies across sectors have affirmed the efficacy of transformational leadership. For instance, Khamaidi *et al.*, [18] observed that transformational leadership practices were positively linked to job satisfaction and employee performance in public sector institutions. Similarly, Boamah *et al.*, (2018) demonstrated the role of transformational leadership in enhancing nurse outcomes through improved communication, trust, and shared values. These findings affirm that when leaders adopt transformational behaviours, they create a more engaged, empowered, and productive workforce.

2.2 Job Satisfaction as a Mediator of Organisational Outcomes

Job satisfaction, broadly defined as an employee's affective and cognitive evaluation of their work experiences, has been a consistent predictor of organisational performance [20,23]. High levels of job satisfaction are associated with increased motivation, reduced absenteeism, lower turnover, and greater organisational citizenship behaviours. Herzberg's [15] two-factor theory categorises the elements influencing job satisfaction into motivators (e.g., recognition, achievement, work itself) and hygiene factors (e.g., pay, policies, supervision). Importantly, leadership has been repeatedly found to influence both types of factors, with transformational leadership contributing more significantly to intrinsic motivators.

Transformational leadership's influence on job satisfaction lies in its ability to address both psychological and professional needs. Supramaniam [29] found that when leaders exhibited high levels of individualised consideration and intellectual stimulation, employees reported stronger feelings of inclusion, growth, and job fulfilment. Leaders who empower employees and value their contributions create conditions under which job satisfaction can flourish. In turn, satisfied employees are more committed, cooperative, and driven to achieve organisational objectives.

In the context of public sector organisations, where bureaucratic constraints and limited incentives may reduce morale, leadership plays an even more critical role in maintaining high levels of job satisfaction. Prakoso *et al.*, [25] showed that among civil servants in Indonesia, job satisfaction mediated the relationship between leadership style and employee performance. This mediating effect suggests that transformational leadership may not directly lead to improved outcomes unless it first enhances the psychological state of satisfaction among employees.

2.3 Organisational Competence and Leadership Efficacy

Organisational competence refers to the capacity of an organisation to mobilise and integrate resources including knowledge, skills, technologies, and relationships in ways that enable it to perform effectively and adapt to environmental changes [12]. It encompasses dimensions such as innovation, learning, responsiveness, and strategic alignment. In the public sector, organisational competence also reflects the institution's ability to meet its mandates, serve the public, and maintain legitimacy.

Leadership is pivotal in fostering organisational competence. According to Husainah and Risyadi [16], effective leadership sets the cultural tone, aligns individuals with strategic goals, and facilitates the removal of barriers that hinder organisational learning and adaptation. Transformational leaders, in particular, have been found to contribute to competence-building by promoting knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration, and continuous improvement. In the Malaysian public sector context, RISDA's mandate to uplift smallholders necessitates not only strong technical capabilities among its officers but also leadership that can mobilise these capabilities in dynamic and responsive ways.

Hashim [13] postulated that job satisfaction plays an intermediary role in linking leadership with organisational performance. When employees are satisfied, they are more likely to engage in behaviours that reinforce organisational competence, such as knowledge dissemination, innovation, and responsiveness to stakeholder needs. Thus, the pathway from transformational leadership to competence is neither linear nor singular but is shaped by complex psychological and organisational factors.

Although the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction is well established in the literature, there remains limited empirical investigation within Malaysia's semi-governmental rural development agencies, such as RISDA. These organisations operate in unique settings where the balance between policy directives and grassroots service delivery is delicate and

often politically sensitive. RISDA officers are expected to function as technical advisors, community liaisons, and programme implementers roles that require high emotional intelligence, adaptability, and resilience.

Aat and Jaafar [3] highlighted the socio-economic pressures faced by RISDA beneficiaries and the critical role of officers in mediating these challenges. However, little is known about how leadership within RISDA influences officers' ability to navigate these expectations. Moreover, the Eastern Region presents additional complications such as geographical remoteness, cultural diversity, and infrastructural limitations, which may further affect the dynamics between leadership, satisfaction, and performance. Understanding these dynamics is essential to developing leadership strategies that are contextually grounded and operationally effective.

Additionally, despite the established theoretical links between leadership, satisfaction, and organisational competence, most prior studies have treated these constructs in isolation or with limited integration. For example, some research has focused only on leadership and job satisfaction [33], while others have explored satisfaction and performance without accounting for the role of leadership [1]. This fragmented approach obscures the holistic mechanisms by which leadership exerts influence and hinders the development of comprehensive strategies for organisational improvement.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT), developed by Bass and Avolio [7], which provides a comprehensive model encompassing transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles. The theory asserts that transformational leadership is the most effective form, particularly in dynamic environments where employee motivation, innovation, and alignment with organisational goals are essential. The FRLT framework guides the categorisation and measurement of leadership behaviours in this study through the use of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ).

In addition, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory [15] informs the conceptualisation of job satisfaction, distinguishing between motivators that lead to satisfaction and hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction. This theoretical lens supports the inclusion of job satisfaction as a mediating variable between leadership and competence. These theoretical foundations establish a robust basis for the investigation of how transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organisational competence interact within the context of RISDA's operational environment in Malaysia's Eastern Region.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to explore the relationship between transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organisational competence among RISDA officers in the Eastern Region of Malaysia. The selection of this design aligns with the study's aim to examine the strength and direction of associations between variables without manipulating them. Correlational studies are particularly suitable for exploring complex social dynamics in real-world settings, allowing for the identification of patterns that may inform practical decision-making [11].

The research is grounded in a positivist paradigm, which assumes that social phenomena can be measured objectively using statistical tools. By adopting this approach, the study seeks to generate empirical evidence to support or refute theoretical propositions concerning the interplay between leadership style, employee satisfaction, and organisational capacity.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised officers and support staff within RISDA offices located in the Eastern Region, which includes the states of Kelantan and Terengganu. These regions were selected due to their socio-economic importance in Malaysia's rubber sector and their unique operational challenges, including rural service delivery and decentralised governance.

A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that every officer in the region had an equal probability of being included in the study. This approach minimises selection bias and increases the generalisability of the findings to the wider RISDA population. The final sample consisted of 254 respondents, surpassing the minimum threshold for statistical power in correlational studies with medium effect sizes [10].

3.3 Research Instruments

To capture the constructs of interest, the study utilised three validated instruments. Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) developed by Bass and Avolio [7] was used to measure transformational leadership. The instrument comprises 20 items across four subscales: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (frequently, if not always). Secondly, the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) by Spector (1985) was employed to measure job satisfaction across nine facets, including pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating conditions, co-workers, nature of work, and communication. The survey consists of 36 items scored on a 6-point Likert scale. Thirdly, the Competency Assessment Questionnaire (CAQ) was designed to assess organisational competence through dimensions such as innovation, responsiveness, adaptability, and resource utilisation. The CAQ was adapted to suit the public-sector context of RISDA, drawing from established public management literature [9,12]. The internal consistency of the instruments was verified through Cronbach's Alpha, yielding acceptable reliability coefficients for MLQ ($\alpha = 0.91$), JSS ($\alpha = 0.87$), and CAQ ($\alpha = 0.89$).

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out over a three-month period, from March to May 2025. Prior to the main study, a pilot test involving 30 officers was conducted to evaluate the clarity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items. Feedback from the pilot informed minor linguistic adjustments to enhance respondent understanding. The main survey was distributed both physically and electronically via RISDA's internal communication system. A cover letter accompanied the questionnaires, detailing the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances of confidentiality. Follow-up reminders were sent after two and four weeks to improve response rates, resulting in a final return rate of approximately 98%.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarise demographic characteristics and distribution patterns across variables. Inferential statistics were applied to test the study's hypotheses. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine bivariate relationships between transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organisational competence. Multiple regression analysis assessed the predictive value of transformational leadership and job satisfaction on organisational competence. To further explore the mediating role of job satisfaction, the study applied Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step method and bootstrapping techniques via the process macro in SPSS.

5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was prioritised throughout the research process. Approval was obtained from RISDA's internal ethics review board, and written consent was secured from all participants. The anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were safeguarded by assigning unique identifiers and ensuring that no personally identifiable information was collected. Participation was strictly voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. All collected data were stored securely on encrypted devices and were accessible only to the research team. Upon completion of the study, a brief summary of the findings was disseminated to RISDA for institutional research purposes.

6. Discussion

This section presents the results of the statistical analyses conducted to investigate the relationships between transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organisational competence among RISDA officers in the Eastern Region. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed to examine the hypotheses outlined in the study.

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

A total of 254 valid responses were analysed. The sample consisted of officers and support staff from various departments within RISDA's Eastern Region, including Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang. Respondents were relatively evenly distributed across age groups and service duration. The gender ratio was balanced, and most respondents had over five years of service experience, enhancing the reliability of insights related to long-term exposure to leadership styles and job satisfaction.

The mean score for transformational leadership, as measured by the MLQ, was 3.89 (SD = 0.61), indicating a generally high perception of transformational leadership practices among RISDA supervisors. The mean score for job satisfaction, based on the JSS, was 4.02 (SD = 0.57), suggesting that most officers reported moderate to high levels of job satisfaction. Organisational competence, measured through the CAQ, recorded a mean score of 3.77 (SD = 0.66), reflecting a generally positive perception of institutional effectiveness and adaptability.

6.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to explore the bivariate relationships among the three main variables. The results revealed a strong positive correlation between transformational leadership and job satisfaction ($r = .62$, $p < .001$), supporting the

hypothesis that leadership style significantly influences how officers perceive their work environment and motivation.

A similarly significant positive correlation was found between job satisfaction and organisational competence ($r = .58, p < .001$), suggesting that employees who are more satisfied with their roles tend to evaluate their organisation's performance and responsiveness more favourably.

Furthermore, transformational leadership was positively correlated with organisational competence ($r = .55, p < .001$), indicating that leadership practices play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of institutional capability. These findings are consistent with previous literature highlighting the importance of leadership in fostering both satisfaction and performance [8,18].

6.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

To determine the extent to which transformational leadership and job satisfaction predict organisational competence, a standard multiple regression analysis was conducted. The model was statistically significant:

$F(2, 251) = 49.27, p < .001$, with an adjusted R^2 of .28, indicating that approximately 28% of the variance in organisational competence could be explained by the two predictors. The standardised beta coefficients indicated that both predictors contributed significantly to the model: Transformational leadership ($\beta = .33, t = 5.89, p < .001$) and Job satisfaction ($\beta = .41, t = 6.92, p < .001$). These results suggest that while both variables influence organisational competence, job satisfaction plays a slightly more dominant role. The findings reinforce the conceptualisation of satisfaction as a critical intermediary between leadership and institutional outcomes.

6.4 Mediation Analysis

To test the mediating effect of job satisfaction in the relationship between transformational leadership and organisational competence, the PROCESS macro (Model 4) by Hayes [14] was used. A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 samples was applied to determine the indirect effect. The direct effect of transformational leadership on organisational competence was significant ($\beta = .26, p < .01$), as was the indirect effect via job satisfaction ($\beta = .17, 95\% \text{ CI } [.09, .27]$). Since the confidence interval did not include zero, the mediation was confirmed. Job satisfaction accounted for approximately 35% of the total effect, indicating a partial mediation. This implies that transformational leadership contributes to enhanced organisational competence both directly and indirectly by improving employees' satisfaction with their roles. The result aligns with Herzberg's two-factor theory, which posits that intrinsic motivators such as recognition and growth are pivotal to employee-driven outcomes [15].

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7. Conclusion

This study confirms that transformational leadership significantly enhances organisational competence at RISDA, with job satisfaction serving as a partial mediator (indirect effect $\beta \approx 0.21, p < 0.05$). More than reiterating results, this signifies that transformational leadership especially behaviours like inspirational motivation tangibly enhances performance.

For RISDA and similar agencies encountering socio-economic hurdles, this underscores the strategic necessity of investing in targeted leadership development. Specifically, programs should cultivate idealized influence and inspirational motivation the dimensions empirically shown to elevate performance in Malaysian contexts [31]. Leadership training should be integrated with succession planning and mentoring schemes to institutionalize these behaviors.

Academically, this study contributes by clarifying the partial mediating role of job satisfaction in transforming leadership's impact on competence aligning with emerging frameworks in Malaysian public-sector research.

Crucially, contemporary research highlights the broader complexity and potential of transformational leadership. For instance, personality can mediate the relationship between leadership and work stress among public servants, emphasizing individual variance in response to leadership styles [2]. Additionally, bibliometric evidence shows growing interest in leadership's role in public-sector innovation, reaffirming the relevance of transformational leadership in driving institutional change [22]. Similarly, in hospitality contexts, transformational leadership continues to demonstrate positive effects on job satisfaction a reminder of its cross-sector applicability.

Therefore, future studies could adopt more nuanced models incorporating personality traits, digital readiness, and innovation culture. Longitudinal research design would further validate the directionality and durability of mediating effects like job satisfaction.

By aligning RISDA's leadership strategy with these recent empirical insights, the agency can reinforce its strategic capacity to navigate evolving mandates and champion excellence in Malaysia's plantation sector.

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