



Exploring the Effects of Transformational Leadership on Employee Outcomes and Regional Financial Growth in Gunung Kidul Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of transformational leadership style on employee performance in the tourism sector of Gunung Kidul Regency, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey design, where data is collected through questionnaires distributed to 100 respondents working in the tourism sector in the area. The variables tested include four dimensions of transformational leadership style, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The results show that transformational leadership style has a significant influence on employee performance. The dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration scored very well, while intellectual stimulation, although showing good scores, still needs further strengthening. This study suggests that leaders in the tourism sector should increase intellectual stimulation to encourage creativity and problem-solving among employees. These findings are expected to be a reference for tourism sector managers in improving service quality and employee performance through the application of transformational leadership style.



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INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is a vital contributor to regional economic development, particularly in Gunung Kidul Regency, Yogyakarta. Renowned for its captivating natural attractions such as pristine beaches, intricate caves, and distinctive karst landscapes Gunung Kidul possesses substantial potential to attract both domestic and international tourists. According to data from the Gunung Kidul Regency Tourism Office, the number of tourist visits to the area's destinations has shown a consistent and significant increase each year. This upward trend underscores the region's promising tourism potential. However, to sustain this growth and maintain the competitiveness of the sector, it is essential to focus on the quality of human resources especially the performance of tourism employees. Enhancing human resource capacity is a key factor in ensuring long-term success and sustainability in the tourism industry.

Tourism has become a significant driver of regional economic growth (Jakopin, 2015; Zha & Li, 2017), contributing to employment, income generation, and local government revenue. In regions such as Gunung Kidul, known for its natural attractions and cultural heritage, the tourism sector plays a vital role in strengthening the local economy. As tourism-related activities expand, effective human resource management becomes essential not only to improve service quality but also to stimulate broader economic and financial outcomes (Santoso, et al., 2020). One leadership model that has shown considerable impact in enhancing employee capabilities and economic productivity is transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership emphasizes visionary thinking, motivation, innovation, and personal development (Givens, 2008; Stewart, 2006). In the tourism industry, leaders who apply this approach can inspire employees to perform at higher levels, which directly contributes to business success and, indirectly, to regional financial growth. Productive and motivated employees improve

service quality, attract more visitors, and boost tourism revenues factors that can enhance the local government's financial capacity through increased taxes, retribution, and business licensing.

Despite this potential, few studies have explicitly examined how transformational leadership within local tourism enterprises translates into measurable employee outcomes and regional economic benefits, particularly in under-researched areas like Gunung Kidul. Given the region's strategic focus on tourism as a key sector for development (Motsa et al., 2021; Laut et al., 2021), understanding this leadership-performance-economic growth nexus is critical. This research seeks to explore the influence of transformational leadership not only on employee behavior and productivity but also on its indirect role in stimulating financial gains and economic development at the regional level (Endri et al., 2021; Asnada, 2024; Santoso, 2025).

Employee performance in the tourism sector is significantly influenced by the leadership style adopted by managers or supervisors within the workplace. One leadership approach that has demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing employee performance is transformational leadership. This style emphasizes empowering employees and developing their potential by articulating a compelling vision, offering individualized consideration, encouraging intellectual stimulation, and fostering intrinsic motivation. According to Lango et al. (2024), transformational leaders can inspire their followers to exceed expectations by providing appropriate motivation and guidance. Furthermore, this leadership style has been associated with increased job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and improved productivity (Setiyati, 2022; Putra & Puja, 2023). As such, transformational leadership is considered a critical factor in achieving sustainable performance improvements within the tourism industry.

In addition, research by Wijaya & Dewi (2020) indicates that leaders who implement a transformational leadership style can motivate employees to be more creative and innovative in their work. In the tourism sector, service innovation is a key factor in winning the competition and attracting more tourists. Therefore, it is crucial for leaders in the Gunung Kidul tourism sector to adopt a leadership style that has the potential to increase innovation in service.

In addition, Febriansyah et al. (2023; Putra & Puja, 2023) found that transformational leadership has a significant effect on improving employee performance at the Gunung Kidul Regency Tourism Office. This study confirms that leaders who implement transformational leadership principles can increase employee motivation and performance. Transformational leadership fosters a positive and supportive work environment, inspires employees, and encourages innovation, ultimately leading to higher organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and overall performance.

However, the implementation of transformational leadership in the Gunung Kidul tourism sector still faces various challenges. According to research by Mustakina et al. (2024), although leaders in the Gunung Kidul tourism sector are aware of the importance of effective leadership, not all of them are able to implement a transformational leadership style optimally. This leads to problems such as low employee work motivation, lack of innovation in services, and high employee turnover rates. Based on data obtained from the Gunung Kidul Regency Manpower Office, the employee turnover rate in the tourism sector reaches 13% per year, a fairly high figure for a sector that is highly dependent on service quality. Transformational leaders inspire employees by articulating a clear vision, encouraging innovation, and fostering a sense of purpose. This can lead to increased intrinsic motivation, where employees are driven by a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment rather than solely external rewards.

In addition, research by BPS (Central Statistics Agency) Yogyakarta in 2023 indicated that although tourist visits to Gunung Kidul continue to increase, the level of visitor satisfaction with services at several tourist destinations still shows a relatively low figure. One of the contributing factors is the low motivation of employees in providing quality services. Thus, it is crucial to understand the extent to which the influence of transformational leadership can improve employee performance in the tourism sector of the Gunung Kidul area.

Low employee performance and lack of innovation in service are also often associated with a lack of attention from leaders to the development of individual employees. Transformational leadership style, which emphasizes individual attention, can help improve employee motivation and performance. For example, research by Alhamidi (2022) found that individual attention from leaders can increase employee confidence and encourage them to develop better skills. In the context of tourism, this is very crucial because skilled and motivated employees tend to provide better service to tourists.

According to Berlian et al. (2025), transformational leadership can be divided into four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four dimensions are interrelated and play a role in creating a work environment that can motivate employees to work better and innovate. In the context of the Gunung Kidul tourism sector, the application of these dimensions is expected to improve the quality of service and provide a better experience for tourists.

This study is significant in several ways. Firstly, it bridges a research gap by connecting micro-level organizational behavior (leadership and employee performance) with macro-level outcomes (regional economic and financial growth). The findings will offer empirical evidence on how transformational leadership in the tourism sector can drive not only operational excellence but also financial contributions to local development in Gunung Kidul. For local governments, the study provides insight into the importance of investing (Putri & Santoso, 2022) in leadership development as part of regional planning. For tourism businesses, it highlights the value of adopting leadership practices that improve human resource outcomes and financial sustainability. Lastly, the study contributes to the academic literature on leadership, tourism economics, and regional development, particularly in emerging tourism destinations.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method, this approach is focused on capturing field phenomena sequentially and based on verifiable facts, based on numerical data that can be measured and analyzed (Sugiyono, 2022; Santoso & Kasih, 2024). In this context, the study focuses on describing employee perceptions of the transformational leadership style implemented in the regional tourism sector and to determine the level of employee performance based on predetermined indicators.

This approach was chosen to allow researchers to present an accurate and comprehensive description of the observed phenomena regarding the variables studied without directly testing causal relationships. The quantitative descriptive approach also allows researchers to interpret data obtained from a large number of respondents objectively and systematically.

All employees who are active in the tourism sector in Gunung Kidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, are the target population in this study. This population includes tourism attraction managers, homestay or lodging owners and managers, tour guides, and workers in tourism support business units such as culinary, regional transportation services, and tourism equipment rentals. The tourism sector in Gunung Kidul was chosen because it is one of the leading sectors of the region that has great potential in supporting the economic growth of the local community.

The number of respondents in this study was 100 people, selected using purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique was chosen considering that not all employees in the tourism sector meet the criteria required in this study. The specified criteria include employees who have a minimum of one year of work in the tourism sector, so that they have sufficient understanding and experience in assessing leadership styles and evaluating their own and team performance. The number of 100 respondents is considered sufficient to describe general conditions in the field, while providing strength in interpreting the results descriptively. Data collection was carried out by distributing closed questionnaires designed based on indicators from transformational leadership theory and employee performance theory. This questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", to make it easier for respondents to provide assessments that are in accordance with their experiences and perceptions. Before being distributed to the main respondents, the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability through limited trials on several respondents with similar characteristics. In addition to primary data from the questionnaire, this study also utilized secondary data in the form of Gunung Kidul tourism sector performance reports, regional policies related to tourism destination management, and other relevant documents. Secondary data is used to provide support and context to the main findings of the primary data.

Data analysis is carried out descriptively quantitatively, namely by calculating the frequency, percentage, and average value of respondents' answers for each indicator. The results of this analysis are then used to describe the level of implementation of transformational leadership in the workplace and how employees' performance is reviewed from their own perspective. The results are classified into several categories such as very good, good, sufficient, lacking, and very lacking to facilitate the interpretation and understanding of the data by readers.

The entire research process is carried out in a structured, logical, and systematic manner, starting from problem formulation, literature review, instrument preparation, data collection, data analysis, to interpretation and drawing conclusions. It is hoped that the results of this study will present a factual visualization of the realities faced by leadership and employee performance in the regional tourism sector, as well as being a reference for policy makers and industry players to develop strategies to improve the quality of human resources in the tourism sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The tourism sector is one of the strategic sectors that has a significant contribution to regional economic growth, especially in areas rich in natural tourist destinations such as Gunung Kidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. This area is widely known for its natural wealth such as white sandy beaches, limestone caves, and unique karst mountain formations, which consistently attract domestic and foreign tourists. Based on data from the Gunung Kidul Regency Tourism Office, there has been an increase in the number of tourist visits every year, which indicates the high potential of this sector in creating regional economic value by increasing community income, creating jobs, and encouraging the growth of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (Lestari & Santoso, 2022; Mutiara & Safitri, 2025; Chairani et al., 2025) operating in the tourism service/service sector. However, the sustainability and competitiveness of the tourism sector are not only determined by natural beauty alone, but also by the quality of service provided by human resources (HR) in the field. In this context, employee performance is a key element in determining a quality tourism experience. One of the main factors that influences employee performance is the leadership style implemented by the manager or leader of the tourism business unit. Transformational leadership style is the main focus in this study because it has characteristics that focus on empowerment, motivation, and development of individual employee potential in a sustainable manner.

The research objects include employees from various business units in the regional tourism sector, including tourism object managers, homestay owners and managers, tour guides, regional culinary actors, tourism transportation services, and recreational equipment rental units. They are a crucial part of the tourism ecosystem that is in direct contact with tourists and plays a strategic role in shaping the image of Gunung Kidul tourism.

Data collection was carried out through a survey method using a structured questionnaire, which was distributed to 100 respondents selected using a purposive sampling technique. This technique was chosen so that the study could reach respondents who were directly involved in tourism activities and had an understanding of the dynamics of leadership in their workplace. In addition, a documentation study was also conducted on reports from the Tourism Office and related agencies to complete and strengthen empirical data.

The data obtained were analyzed using a quantitative descriptive approach with the help of a Likert scale to measure employee perceptions of the effectiveness of the transformational leadership style implemented. According to Sugiyono (2022), the Likert scale is effective for measuring a person's attitude, opinion, and perception of a phenomenon or policy. Azhar et al. (2023; Santoso et al., 2024) added that this scale is very relevant for assessing quantitative perceptions of respondents towards social variables, including leadership and work performance. With this approach, the study was designed systematically, logically, and empirically to provide a comprehensive picture of the strategic role of transformational leadership in strengthening the competitiveness of the tourism sector and improving employee performance in Gunung Kidul Regency. This study uses a Likert scale with five assessment categories. This category is used to assess the extent of the influence of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance in the Regional Tourism Sector in Gunung Kidul. Table 1 below shows the descriptive categories used to classify the level of importance or urgency of the variables studied.

Table 1. Descriptive Variable Categories

Value	Category
1.00 – 1.80	Not Important
1.81 – 2.60	Less Important

Value	Category
2.61 – 3.40	Quite Important
3.41 – 4.20	Important
4,21 – 5.00	Very Important

This study evaluates the perception of employees in the tourism sector of Gunung Kidul region towards the implementation of transformational leadership style consisting of four main indicators: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The assessment was conducted using a Likert scale of 1–5 which reflects the level of respondent agreement with the statements in the questionnaire.

Table 2. Statistical Results on the Influence of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance

No.	Statement	Score 5	Score 4	Score 3	Score 2	Score 1	Total Score	Mean	Criteria
1	Leaders demonstrate exemplary behavior and high integrity in working.	56	33	9	2	0	443	4.43	Very good
2	Leaders provide a clear vision and can motivate the team to achieve it.	51	39	8	2	0	437	4.37	Very good
3	Leaders encourage creativity and critical thinking in solving problems.	48	40	10	2	0	394	3.94	Good
4	Leaders pay attention to the individual development needs of each employee	49	38	10	3	0	433	4.33	Very good
5	Transformational leadership style has an impact on improving work performance.	52	37	9	2	0	439	4.39	Very good
Average Total								4,29	Very good

Source: Data Processing (2025).

Based on the results of the data recapitulation in the previous table, it can be concluded that the respondents' perception of transformational leadership in the tourism sector in the Gunung Kidul region is in the "Very Good" category, with a total average value of 4.29 on a Likert scale of 1–5. This indicates that most respondents have a strong view and believe that the transformational leadership style applied by leaders in this tourism sector can provide a significant and positive impact on employee performance and motivation. This positive perception also illustrates the high level of trust from employees in the leader's ability to lead in an inspiring way, provide clear direction, and show exemplary behavior that can be an example for their subordinates. The positive and supportive environment created by transformational leaders can lead to higher levels of employee performance and engagement. Employees are more likely to feel valued, trusted, and motivated to achieve their best work.

The indicator with the highest score in this study was found in the statement regarding "Leaders show exemplary behavior and high integrity in working," which managed to obtain a mean value of 4.43. This finding indicates that leaders in the Gunung Kidul tourism sector are consistently viewed as figures who can provide examples of positive behavior and are worthy of being role models by all members of the organization. The high level of integrity demonstrated by such leaders not only strengthens their credibility, but also builds solid trust among employees, thereby creating a strong moral foundation in the work environment.

The next indicator that ranks second with a mean score of 4.37 is "Leaders provide a clear vision and are able to motivate the team to achieve it." This indicates that leaders do not only play an administrative role, but also act as effective vision communicators. They are able to articulate the organization's goals clearly so that they can spur the team's enthusiasm and commitment in realizing common targets. This ability to motivate is crucial in the context of transformational leadership, where leaders strive to inspire their subordinates to go beyond conventional performance boundaries.

The third indicator that received a mean score of 4.39, namely "Transformational leadership style has an impact on improving work performance," strengthens the impression that this leadership approach is not only theoretical, but also has a real impact in practice. The transformational leadership style applied by leaders in the Gunung Kidul tourism sector is able to significantly increase work effectiveness and team productivity. Transformational leadership that prioritizes clear vision communication, empowerment of team members, and support for the development of individual potential allows for the creation of a dynamic and productive work atmosphere. Thus, team productivity also increases significantly because each member feels appreciated and motivated to contribute optimally.

Equally important, the indicator "Leaders pay attention to the individual development needs of each employee" scored 4.33, indicating that attention to employees' personal and professional growth has become an integral part of transformational leadership practices in the region. This means that leaders are considered capable of identifying the unique potential of each individual, as well as providing support in the form of coaching and career development opportunities.

However, there is one indicator that is still below the average score of 4, namely "Leaders encourage creativity and critical thinking in solving problems" with a mean score of 3.94, although it remains in the "Good" category. This indicates that although the main elements of transformational leadership have been implemented well, aspects related to innovation, creativity, and critical thinking still have room for improvement. In the context of a dynamic and challenging tourism industry, the ability to innovate and think critically are crucial competencies that need to be strengthened to ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of this sector.

Overall, these findings underline the importance of strengthening aspects of transformational leadership that are oriented towards intellectual empowerment, not only focusing on motivation and role models. In the future, leaders in the Gunung Kidul tourism sector are advised to be more active in encouraging employee involvement in decision-making, solving problems creatively, and developing a work culture that is open to new ideas. Thus, it is expected that organizational performance will be more adaptive, innovative, and competitive in facing changes and demands of the ever-growing tourism industry.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis that has been carried out, it can be concluded that transformational leadership has a very good influence on improving employee performance in the

tourism sector of the Gunung Kidul area. A leadership style that includes motivational inspiration, intellectual stimulation, ideal influence, and individual attention has been proven to be able to raise work enthusiasm, increase loyalty, and encourage employee productivity in providing optimal tourism services. Leaders who are able to inspire a shared vision, provide examples of positive behavior, and pay attention to the development of individual employees contribute to forming a collaborative and inspiring work culture.

The results of this study indicate that the higher the implementation of transformational leadership, the better the quality of employee performance, both in terms of service, operational efficiency, and involvement in the development of regional tourist destinations. Therefore, owners and managers of tourist destinations in Gunung Kidul are advised to implement a transformational leadership approach more consistently in human resource management. Leadership training for managers and supervisors needs to be carried out to equip them with inspirational communication skills, empathy, and the ability to empower employees, so that the regional tourism sector is increasingly superior, adaptive, and highly competitive.

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