

The Role of Transformational Leadership in Improving the Performance of the Yellow Troops: A Case Study in Jombang Regency

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

KEYWORD:

Corporate Social
Responsibility, ROA,
ROE, ROS
DOI:



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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran kepemimpinan transformasional dalam meningkatkan kinerja pasukan kuning (petugas kebersihan kota) di Kabupaten Jombang. Sebagai garda terdepan kebersihan perkotaan, pasukan kuning menghadapi tantangan seperti beban kerja yang berat, latar belakang pendidikan yang terbatas, dan pengakuan sosial yang rendah. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pejabat Badan Lingkungan Hidup, pengawas lapangan, dan petugas kebersihan, serta observasi lapangan langsung. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional tercermin dalam memberikan motivasi, teladan moral, pertimbangan individual, dan pemberdayaan kerja. Praktik-praktik ini menghasilkan peningkatan disiplin, peningkatan motivasi intrinsik, inovasi kecil dalam metode kerja, dan sinergi tim yang lebih kuat. Namun, keterbatasan tetap ada, khususnya terkait dukungan struktural dan insentif yang terinstitusionalisasi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis pada wacana manajemen sumber daya manusia sektor publik dan menawarkan rekomendasi praktis untuk memperkuat pelatihan, sistem penghargaan, dan kebijakan kesejahteraan bagi petugas kebersihan di Jombang.

Kata kunci: kepemimpinan transformasional, petugas kebersihan, kinerja, pelayanan publik, motivasi kerja

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of transformational leadership in improving the performance of pasukan kuning (municipal sanitation workers) in Jombang Regency. As the frontline of urban cleanliness, pasukan kuning face challenges such as heavy workloads, limited educational backgrounds, and low social recognition. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews with officials of the Environmental Agency, field supervisors, and sanitation workers, as well as direct field observations. The findings indicate that transformational leadership is reflected in providing motivation, moral examples, individualized consideration, and work empowerment. These practices result in improved discipline, enhanced intrinsic motivation, small-scale innovations in work methods, and stronger team synergy. However, limitations remain, particularly regarding structural support and institutionalized incentives. The study contributes theoretically to the discourse on public sector human resource management and offers practical recommendations for strengthening training, reward systems, and welfare policies for sanitation workers in Jombang.

Keywords: transformational leadership, sanitation workers, performance, public service, work motivation

How to Cite:

Cahyono, E., Maksun, M., J., S., (2025) The Role of Transformational Leadership in Improving the Performance of the Yellow Troops: A Case Study in Jombang Regency, 3(3),140 -146

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INTRODUCTION

Human resources (HR) are the primary capital that determine an organization's ability to deliver quality public services. In the context of urban sanitation services, the "yellow troops" are not merely technical workers—they play a direct role in preventing disease, maintaining the city's aesthetics, and ensuring citizens' sense of security. The quality of the services produced is influenced by various HR aspects such as technical competence, health conditions, workload, and the availability of clear tools and work instructions. Therefore, the management of the yellow troops should be viewed as a strategic investment: not merely assigning people to the streets, but designing roles, workflows, and institutional support that enhance productivity, occupational safety, and sustainable public service quality.

In practice, however, the yellow troops often face marginalization: low job status, minimal or uncertain wages, long and rotating working hours, and heterogeneous educational backgrounds. This combination of conditions impacts work motivation, physical and mental health, and the capacity to adapt to technical updates or safety procedures. The consequences are twofold: on one hand, a decline in service quality (e.g., response speed, cleaning consistency, SOP compliance), and on the other, social costs—such as professional stigma, chronic fatigue, and high turnover rates. Furthermore, precarious employment patterns limit career development opportunities and hinder the formation of a professional culture essential for public service innovation.

These conditions call for a comprehensive leadership and HR management design—one that goes beyond administrative functions. Transformational leadership, for instance, is vital for building a collective vision, providing individual attention, and fostering initiative and ownership toward work. Practically, this must be accompanied by concrete HRM policies: enhancing technical and safety training, creating reward and incentive mechanisms (both financial and non-financial), organizing health-friendly work schedules, and involving workers in drafting SOPs and field innovations. An integrated approach—combining psychosocial development, capacity building, labor regulation strengthening, and social recognition—will enhance intrinsic motivation and operational performance, ensuring that the strategic role of the yellow troops in maintaining urban health and quality of life is sustainably realized.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformational leadership combines four core dimensions—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—which synergistically transform employees' orientation from merely following instructions to being committed to shared goals (Bass, 1990). Idealized influence positions the leader as a moral and professional role model, fostering trust and legitimacy; inspirational motivation communicates a meaningful and challenging vision, giving daily work greater purpose; intellectual stimulation encourages subordinates to think critically, experiment with new methods, and view problems as learning opportunities; while individualized consideration means leaders provide personal attention—coaching, mentoring, and competency development—that enhance individual capacity and well-being.

These combined dimensions cultivate not only instrumental compliance but also intrinsic motivation (through feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness), leading

workers to become more proactive, resilient under stress, and innovative in service delivery (see Self-Determination Theory).

In public organizations and field-based work such as sanitation services, the effectiveness of transformational leadership depends on leaders' ability to translate these dimensions into concrete and sustainable managerial practices. Examples include: regular and clear vision communication (inspirational motivation); field workshops to test new working methods (intellectual stimulation); mentoring programs and individual training needs assessments (individualized consideration); and consistent, accountable leadership behavior (idealized influence). However, leadership style alone is insufficient—it must be combined with supportive HRM policies (fair incentives, healthy schedules, safety protection, reward mechanisms) and institutional support to ensure that behavioral and performance changes are structured and sustainable. Without such structural reforms, transformation relying solely on a leader's figure risks being temporary or exhausting for the leader. Thus, transformational leadership is most effective when integrated into a broader organizational system.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study at the Environmental Agency (DLH) of Jombang Regency. The subjects included the Head of the Agency, structural officials, and representatives of the yellow troops. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis of policies and internal reports. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model (data reduction, presentation, and verification), enabling contextual understanding of leadership dynamics and performance outcomes, as well as practical policy recommendations grounded in field findings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Environmental Agency (DLH) of Jombang Regency manages 498 human resources, of which 433 are yellow troops and the rest administrative staff—a composition that emphasizes the dominance of field workers and high operational burdens (morning–night shifts, overtime during events). In this context, leadership must balance policy-making and operational control. The Head of DLH acknowledged, *"I have delegated these tasks to my structural subordinates,"* indicating formal delegation while maintaining ultimate responsibility. This delegation structure allows transformational leadership to operate through mid-level supervisors (division heads, field coordinators), yet its effectiveness depends on the recipients' capacities, as varying educational levels and work rhythms among the yellow troops can create implementation inconsistencies.

Manifestations of transformational leadership appeared highly practical and field-oriented: routine supervision, direct communication, and attention to work safety. Supervisors reported, *"Every morning at 5 a.m., I patrol to check on the yellow troops,"* showing daily supervision and rapid feedback. Several field workers confirmed the leader's strong presence—*"We meet the Head of DLH almost every day,"*—demonstrating visible leadership that enhances legitimacy. Safety instructions were clear: the leader *"encouraged and instructed everyone to wear uniforms, shoes, and complete PPE,"* reflecting protective actions that strengthen workers' sense of security. Additionally, social security

coverage (BPJS) was repeatedly mentioned by informants as an institutional concern—*“The yellow troops are also covered by BPJS,”*—which reinforces security-based motivation. The combination of visible leadership and social protection fosters social trust and creates psychological capital for behavioral change.

The functional impacts observed include improved discipline, stronger intrinsic motivation, emergence of small operational innovations, and enhanced team synergy. Operationally, a division head explained, *“Daily tasks are carried out hierarchically,”* illustrating how vision translates into daily routines. Public and legislative perceptions were also positive: a neighborhood leader noted that the environment *“looks clean and tidy,”* while a council member described the DLH leader as *“open and communicative.”* These perspectives affirm measurable service improvements in both performance and public perception.

The mechanisms of change operate through psychological channels (Self-Determination: competence through training/tools, relatedness through direct attention, and autonomy through involvement in evaluation/feedback), shifting motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic—explaining why small innovations (e.g., route organization, equipment maintenance) have begun emerging at the field level.

However, structural limitations still weaken the transformational impact when not institutionalized. Several informants mentioned budget constraints and leader-dependence: *“As for a special budget for the yellow troops, I’m not sure we have one,”* indicating reliance on temporary priorities rather than programmed policy. The Head of DLH and staff emphasized welfare improvement as a key issue: *“The most important thing is welfare.”* Legislators further proposed, *“We should guarantee insurance,”* as a sustainable social protection policy rather than ad hoc initiatives.

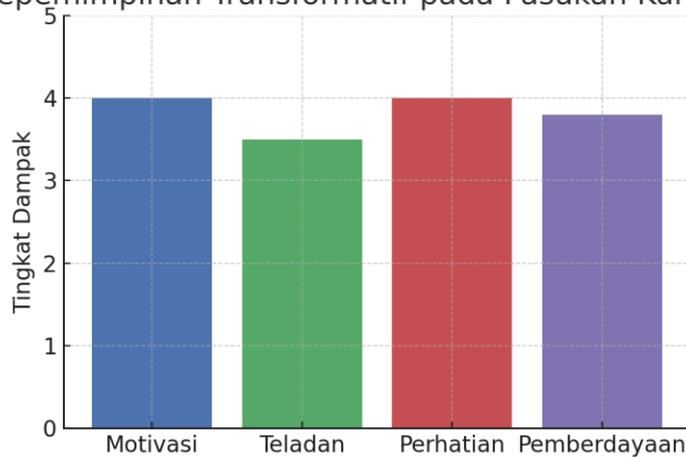
These findings confirm that without institutionalized HRM mechanisms—such as dedicated budgets, systematic rewards, regular training, and safety/equipment standards—transformational practices risk fading when leadership changes. Therefore, to ensure lasting impact, it is essential to translate ad hoc practices into measurable operational policies that integrate transformational leadership within clear budgetary and HR structures.

Summary of Research Findings

Aspect of Transformational Leadership	Impact on Yellow Troops	Structural Limitations	Policy Recommendations
Motivation & Inspiration	Increased work discipline and collective spirit	Lack of adequate financial incentives	Routine training programs and performance-based rewards
Moral Example	Built trust and leadership legitimacy	Still dependent on the leader’s figure	Leadership standardization & accountability mechanisms
Individual Attention	Strengthened sense of appreciation and	Lack of formal career development	Career pathways and welfare improvement

Aspect of Transformational Leadership	Impact on Yellow Troops	Structural Limitations	Policy Recommendations
Empowerment	work loyalty Emergence of small innovations and team synergy	Limited by budget & formal SOPs	Dedicated budget and regular innovation forums

Figure 1: Kepemimpinan Transformatif pada Pasukan Kuning (€)



Leadership Impact Graph:

Based on the table, motivation and individual attention show the greatest impact on the performance of the yellow troops, while moral example and empowerment are relatively strong but still constrained by structural factors. The bar chart indicates motivation and individual attention scoring 4.0, empowerment 3.8, and moral example 3.5. This demonstrates that transformational leadership in DLH Jombang is effective in psychological aspects —enhancing motivation, discipline, and loyalty— but still requires institutional and budgetary strengthening to make empowerment and exemplary behavior more sustainable. Thus, the best strategy is to institutionalize transformational practices through systematic HR policies so that the positive impact does not depend solely on individual leaders.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Transformational leadership has proven to play a vital role in improving the performance of the yellow troops through motivation, individual attention, moral example, and the creation of a collective vision. Through this approach, consistent discipline, deep-rooted loyalty, and improved public service quality are achieved— positioning the yellow troops not merely as technical workers but as strategic actors in sustainable urban development.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. DLH Jombang should strengthen continuous training programs and fair reward mechanisms.

2. Yellow troops should be encouraged to be more proactive in innovation through participatory forums.
3. Future research should explore job satisfaction and organizational culture as key determinants of performance sustainability.

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