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**The Effect of Transactional
Leadership on Employee
Performance through Locus of
Control as a Mediating Variable**

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of transactional leadership style on employee performance with locus of control as a mediating variable at PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon. The population in this study consists of all leaders and employees of PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon, totaling 158 people. The research sample consists of 60 respondents selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data processing was carried out using the Smart PLS 3 application, applying two analytical models: outer model and inner model. The results of the study show that transactional leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. Transactional leadership significantly affects locus of control. Locus of control significantly influences employee performance. Locus of control serves as a partial mediator that helps strengthen the influence of transactional leadership on performance, although it does not fully mediate the relationship.

Keywords: *Transactional Leadership, Locus of Control, Employee Performance*

Introduction

An organization is an entity composed of individuals working together to achieve specific objectives. In the current era of disruption, organizational dynamics have shifted from a mechanistic model to one emphasizing human aspects such as motivation, fairness, job satisfaction, and group dynamics. This shift is increasingly evident in modern workplaces, where leadership and employee engagement play a crucial role in organizational success. According to the McKinsey Global Report, (2024), more than 60% of companies in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, struggle to align leadership behavior with employee motivation and engagement. This finding highlights that structural control alone is no longer sufficient to ensure performance effectiveness. As a result, understanding organizational behavior, particularly the role of leadership in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors, has become a strategic necessity to maintain productivity and competitiveness in today's dynamic environment.

In the business context, human resources (HR) play a central role in delivering value-added outcomes. However, Indonesia, despite having the fourth-largest workforce in the world with over 140 million workers, still faces relatively low labor productivity. According to the Ministry of Manpower and ILO, (2023), Indonesia's labor productivity is around IDR 86.5 million (US\$5,300) per worker per year, or approximately US\$14 per hour, significantly lower than Malaysia (US\$26/hour) and Singapore (US\$74/hour). This productivity gap highlights that while HR represents a major asset, the challenge lies in optimizing their competence and motivation to generate higher value-added performance. National initiatives such as the Kartu Prakerja program have begun addressing this issue by providing large-scale vocational training, which has increased participants' income by 15–17% per month (Svara Institute, 2023). Optimizing both the quantity and quality of performance requires more than a sense of responsibility; it demands strategic leadership and systematic efforts that enable organizations to remain resilient and competitive in dynamic environments.

To achieve growth and maintain a competitive advantage, an organization must implement value-enhancing strategies. However, many organizations still face challenges in translating these strategies into measurable outcomes. In Indonesia, various corporate initiatives to boost productivity and innovation have shown uneven results, particularly in sectors heavily influenced by technological change. For example, despite continuous investment in digital infrastructure, companies such as PT. Telkom Akses still struggle to achieve optimal operational targets due to leadership and coordination issues. These conditions indicate that strategic effectiveness is not only determined by the availability of resources but also by the quality of leadership in directing and motivating employees.

Leadership thus becomes a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness. Strategic planning, which serves as a compass for organizational direction, is inherently the

responsibility of leaders. According to Ahmad, (2021), a leader possesses specific competencies that influence followers to work collaboratively toward achieving organizational goals. This underscores the central role of leadership behavior in determining employee performance. One leadership approach widely studied in this context is transactional leadership, which motivates employees by clarifying roles, task expectations, and reward mechanisms. This leadership style relies on structured systems of rewards and punishments to ensure efficiency and control. However, its effectiveness in enhancing performance may depend on individual psychological factors, one of the most prominent being locus of control the degree to which individuals believe they can control outcomes through their own actions (Subroto, 2017).

Locus of control represents a crucial psychological construct that shapes employee motivation and accountability. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe their efforts determine outcomes and tend to exhibit higher levels of performance, while those with an external locus attribute results to luck or external forces and often require external reinforcement to stay motivated (Insani & NRH, 2015). In organizational contexts, these differences determine how employees respond to leadership practices and performance incentives. Thus, understanding how transactional leadership interacts with locus of control provides valuable insights into employee performance dynamics.

Previous studies have produced mixed findings regarding the relationship between transactional leadership, locus of control, and employee performance. Some studies reported a significant positive influence of transactional leadership on performance (Lakahing & Widodo, 2020; Edityawati, 2024), while others found inconsistent or insignificant results (Hendri & Kirana, 2021). Similarly, the mediating or moderating role of locus of control has not been consistently supported (Battu & Susanto, 2022; Jufrizen & Lubis, 2020). These inconsistencies indicate that further investigation is needed to clarify how transactional leadership affects performance through employees' psychological orientations.

PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon serves as a relevant empirical setting for this research. As a state-owned enterprise responsible for the construction and maintenance of Indonesia's telecommunications infrastructure, it faces challenges in achieving operational targets. Based on internal reports, (2024), operational performance reached only 26.33%, largely due to suboptimal employee output. One contributing factor is the lack of effective leadership, partly resulting from the decentralized nature of work locations. Limited direct communication between leaders and subordinates has weakened supervisory control and hindered strategic execution. Transactional leadership has the potential to address these challenges through clear direction, structured incentives, and performance-based evaluations. Such practices can stimulate employees' locus of control, especially among those with an internal orientation, thereby enhancing motivation and performance.

Building upon the theoretical and empirical foundations above, this study aims to examine the effect of transactional leadership on employee performance with locus of control as a mediating variable. This research contributes to leadership and organizational behavior literature by explaining how leadership behaviors influence performance through psychological mechanisms. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for improving leadership effectiveness and employee productivity, particularly within state-owned enterprises such as PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon.

Theoretical Framework and Research Hypothesis Development

Transactional Leadership

Leadership is often defined as the art of influencing others to achieve the goals of an organization or group (Silalahi, 2023). Within an organization, leadership plays a crucial role in executing the fundamental management functions: planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. A leader sets the organizational direction through a clear vision and mission, thereby enabling the achievement of expected goals. Leadership is considered a critical determinant of organizational success, serving as the central force behind significant organizational changes. It embodies a personality that impacts organizational coherence and stability, while various follower attitudes and performance outcomes are influenced by the leader's ability to shape followers' values to support organizational transformation. A leader's capacity to mobilize individuals and groups within the organization is reflected in their leadership style.

According to Jufrizen & Lubis, (2020), transactional leadership is characterized by a leader's efforts to encourage employees to perform by offering rewards in return for motivation, productivity, and effective task accomplishment. Ahmad, (2021) further describes transactional leadership as a system of exchanging rewards for compliance. This approach, rooted in classical leadership theory, emphasizes reciprocal interactions between leaders and subordinates. Within this framework, the leader acts as a process manager who sets goals, monitors task execution, and administers rewards or sanctions based on outcomes. It serves as a strategy to enhance employee motivation, aiming to improve both the volume and quality of work performed.

Transactional leadership emphasizes clear structures, defined roles, and explicit expectations within the organization. Leaders who adopt this style foster order by clearly communicating tasks and responsibilities to their subordinates, ensuring employees understand the direction of their work. Additionally, transactional leaders actively monitor and direct employee performance to ensure tasks are completed in accordance with established

standards. They respond to performance outcomes by offering rewards or recognition as motivation for satisfactory achievements.

In practice, this leadership style is built on the principle of transparent exchange between the leader and the follower. Subordinates are explicitly informed about what is expected of them and the specific rewards they will receive upon meeting those expectations. This clarity promotes certainty in the working relationship and encourages greater organizational efficiency. Transactional leaders are typically decisive and assertive, particularly when delivering incentives or sanctions based on employee performance. This leadership style is especially suitable in structured and stable work environments, as it enhances performance management effectiveness and supports the consistent achievement of both individual and organizational goals (Wulandari & Mulyanto, 2024).

H₁ : Transactional leadership has a significant effect on employee performance.

H₂ : Transactional leadership has a significant effect on locus of control.

Locus of Control

The concept of locus of control was first introduced by Rotter, a prominent social learning theorist. According to Jufrizen & Lubis, (2020), locus of control contributes significantly to performance quality, serving as an initial response that forms the basis for subsequent behavior. Another perspective defines locus of control as the extent to which individuals believe that their behavior influences the outcomes they experience. Battu & Susanto (2022) explain that locus of control refers to the degree to which individuals believe they can control events that affect their lives.

In the organizational context, locus of control reflects how individuals perceive the control they have over their own lives. This notion is further elaborated by April et al. (as cited in Khalya, 2023), who describe locus of control as a continuum with two opposing dimensions: the belief that outcomes are under one's personal control (internal locus of control) versus the belief that outcomes are determined by external forces beyond one's control (external locus of control).

H₃ ; Locus of control has a significant effect on employee performance.

H₄ ; Locus of control mediates the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance.

Employee Performance

Performance is defined as the achievement or outcome of an individual's execution of assigned tasks, which typically correspond to predetermined goals or targets. According to Ruth Silaen et al. (2021), performance refers to efforts aimed at achieving organizational objectives in a lawful manner, adhering to moral and ethical standards, and in accordance with

the authority and responsibilities of each individual. Similarly, Budiyanto & Mochklas (2020) define performance as a depiction of the level of achievement in implementing activities, programs, or policies to realize the goals, objectives, vision, and mission of an organization as outlined in its strategic planning.

The concept of performance can fundamentally be viewed from two perspectives: the employee and the organization. Employee performance refers to individual accomplishments, whereas organizational performance relates to the overall collective results. This is reinforced by the view of Widokarti et al., (2023), who stated that through performance measurement, organizations can evaluate the extent to which employees' effectiveness and efficiency contribute to achieving predetermined targets. Aligning expectations and outcomes at both the individual and organizational levels fosters the realization of effective performance.

Method

This study employed a quantitative explanatory causal research design to measure and explain the cause-and-effect relationships among the research variables. The research was conducted at PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon, with a population consisting of 158 employees. A total of 60 participants were selectively chosen using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria such as a minimum of three years of work experience and not holding a structural (managerial or supervisory) position.

Criteria	Employees
Employees of PT Telkom Akses Area Ambon at the STO Ambon location	158
Employees in units focused on target achievement (Construction and Operations), excluding support teams	151
Employees with a minimum of three years of work experience	88
Employees not holding managerial, assistant managerial, supervisory, or team leader positions	60
Final Sample	60

The data collection instrument used was a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. Primary data were obtained through the distribution of this questionnaire, which was administered online via Google Forms. Secondary data were sourced from relevant literature and company reports. The operational definitions of each variable are presented in the following table:

Operational Definition of Variables

No	Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators
1	Transactional Leadership (X)	Transactional leadership is a process of exchange that can generate follower compliance toward the leader but does not foster enthusiasm or commitment to task goals (Edityawati, 2024).	1. Contingent Reward 2. Management by Exception (Active) 3. Management by Exception (Passive) (Muzakki & Syaroful, 2020)
2	Locus of Control (Z)	Locus of control refers to an individual's perception in responding to events that occur in their life.	1. Interest 2. Ability (Self-potential) 3. Attitude (Optimism) 4. Fate 5. Luck 6. Others (Battu & Susanto, 2022)
3	Performance (Y)	Observable behavior demonstrated by individuals as a work achievement that aligns with their roles.	1. Quality 2. Quantity 3. Timeliness 4. Effectiveness 5. Independence (Simamora et al, 2020)

The analysis was conducted using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method based on the Partial Least Square (PLS) approach, utilizing the SmartPLS 3.0 software. The analytical procedure involved testing both the outer model (to assess validity and reliability) and the inner model (to evaluate the relationships between variables, R-square values, and the significance of the paths using the bootstrapping technique).

Discussion

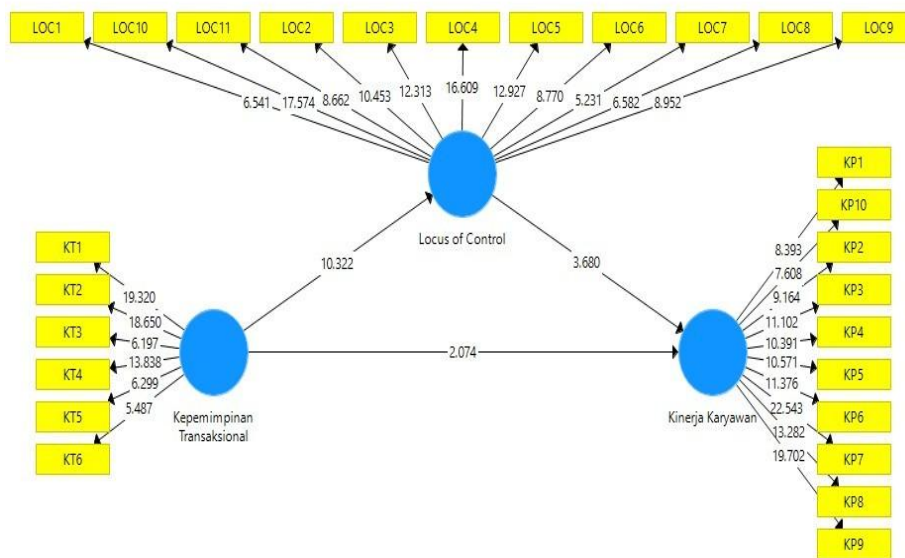
In this study, data were collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms, distributed over a one-month period from April 9 to May 9, 2025. The targeted respondents were employees of PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon who met specific inclusion criteria: being stationed at the STO Ambon office, having a minimum of three years of work experience, and not holding structural or managerial positions.

The majority of respondents were aged 21–40, indicating a relatively young and productive workforce. Most participants were assigned to the operations unit, representing the company's core technical function. Regarding tenure, most respondents had been with the company for 6–10 years, suggesting a mature understanding of internal work processes and leadership dynamics. Furthermore, the majority held technician positions, implying direct involvement in the company's operational activities.

These respondent characteristics indicate a reliable and relevant sample for assessing the influence of transactional leadership and locus of control on employee performance within the organization.

Path Analysis

Transactional Leadership Behavior Significantly Influences Employee Performance



The results of the first hypothesis test indicate that transactional leadership significantly affects employee performance (coefficient = 0.338; t-statistic = 2.074; $p = 0.039$). This finding suggests that the stronger the implementation of transactional leadership, the higher the employee performance at PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon. In a context where work processes heavily depend on achieving technical and operational targets, this leadership style is particularly relevant, as it provides clear work structures, direct feedback, and a fair system of rewards and sanctions.

The mechanism underlying this influence lies in leaders setting specific work expectations and linking them to tangible consequences, thereby encouraging employees to work in a more disciplined and results-oriented manner. This is supported by studies such as Lakahing & Widodo, (2020), which affirm that reinforcing behaviors through ongoing rewards and performance evaluations can boost work output. Therefore, transactional leadership can serve as an effective long-term strategy for fostering accountability and consistently enhancing performance.

This approach demonstrates that leadership behavior can actively shape employees' belief systems, a dimension often overlooked in traditional management practices. For PT. Telkom Akses, these results imply that leadership practices must consistently prioritize clarity, fairness, and feedback. When supervisors communicate measurable goals and directly link

rewards to performance achievements, employees are more motivated to work efficiently and productively, thereby improving overall organizational performance.

Transactional Leadership Behavior Significantly Influences Locus of Control of Employees

The second hypothesis test demonstrates that transactional leadership has a strong and significant effect on employees' locus of control (coefficient = 0.709; t-statistic = 10.322; $p = 0.000$). When leaders provide clear work structures, measurable expectations, and performance-based rewards, employees are more likely to develop an internal locus of control, believing that success depends on their personal efforts and decisions.

Psychologically, the structured guidance and feedback provided by transactional leaders create conditions in which employees feel a sense of control over their work outcomes. This encourages individual responsibility, resilience, and intrinsic motivation. The finding illustrates that leadership behavior can actively shape employees' belief systems, an aspect critical to their overall motivation and performance. This result contributes importantly to organizational and work psychology literature, particularly given the limited research directly linking transactional leadership with locus of control in target-driven work environments such as PT. Telkom Akses.

For organizations like PT Telkom Akses, these results emphasize the need for leaders to design performance management systems that promote fairness and personal accountability, which in turn can foster a culture of ownership and intrinsic motivation among employees.

Locus of Control Significantly Influences Employee Performance

The third hypothesis confirms that locus of control has a significant impact on employee performance (coefficient = 0.486; t-statistic = 3.680; $p = 0.000$). Employees with a higher internal locus of control tend to perform better because they believe that their success is determined by their own efforts and competencies. This belief fosters motivation to independently complete tasks, adapt quickly, and persist under work-related pressures.

In a dynamic organizational setting like PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon, an internal orientation is critical, as employees are required to be proactive and accountable for their individual performance. This finding is consistent with previous research by Jamal et al., (2024) and Battu & Susanto, (2022), which demonstrated that an internal locus of control positively influences efficiency, discipline, and goal attainment in the service sector. The effect is further reinforced by a work environment that encourages initiative-taking and autonomous decision-making.

To leverage this, the company should focus on leadership and HR initiatives that empower employees through autonomy, coaching, and recognition systems that reinforce individual responsibility for outcomes. This finding underscores that individual psychological factors, such as internal control orientation, are critical determinants of employee productivity in knowledge-based and service-oriented organizations.

Locus of Control Mediates the Relationship Between Transactional Leadership and Employee Performance

The fourth hypothesis reveals that locus of control partially mediates the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance. The direct effect of transactional leadership on locus of control (coefficient = 0.709; $p = 0.000$) and the effect of locus of control on performance (coefficient = 0.486; $p = 0.000$) are both significant. The direct effect of transactional leadership on performance also remains significant (coefficient = 0.338; $p = 0.039$), indicating partial mediation.

The psychological mechanism underlying this relationship suggests that when leaders provide structured instructions, objective evaluations, and performance-based rewards, employees develop the belief that work outcomes are directly linked to their own behaviors and decisions. This belief enhances intrinsic motivation and improves performance. Thus, locus of control serves as a key psychological variable bridging the effectiveness of transactional leadership to employee performance. Contrary to the findings of Jufrizen & Lubis, (2020), who did not find a mediating effect, this study emphasizes the importance of considering psychological factors as integral components of effective managerial strategies.

For PT. Telkom Akses, these results imply that leadership development programs should integrate both behavioral and psychological training. Leaders need to be equipped not only to manage performance structures but also to foster employees' internal motivation systems, ensuring that leadership interventions yield both immediate performance improvements and sustainable motivational effects.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that transactional leadership has a positive effect on the performance of employees at PT Telkom Akses Area Ambon. This leadership style also enhances employees' internal locus of control, which in turn contributes to improved performance. Employees with a strong internal locus of control tend to be more responsible and intrinsically motivated. Furthermore, locus of control is proven to act as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between transactional leadership and performance, highlighting the importance of psychological factors in improving workplace outcomes.

Recommendation

PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon is advised to enhance the implementation of transactional leadership by providing clear strategic direction, structured supervision, consistent feedback, and a transparent and equitable reward system. These efforts are expected to improve not only task performance but also employee accountability. Furthermore, the company is encouraged to design development programs that strengthen employees' internal locus of control, such as training in self-management, decision-making, and proactive problem-solving. These initiatives may help employees develop a stronger sense of personal responsibility and confidence in handling workplace challenges.

This study, however, has certain limitations. The use of purposive sampling with a relatively small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings to the wider population of PT. Telkom Akses or other organizations. Additionally, the study focused solely on transactional leadership, without considering other leadership styles that may also influence locus of control or performance outcomes. Future research is recommended to explore longitudinal designs or comparative studies across different leadership styles (e.g., transformational, servant leadership) and to include broader organizational contexts in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms influencing employee performance.

Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to leadership and organizational behavior literature by empirically demonstrating the mediating role of locus of control in the relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance. This finding enriches existing models of leadership effectiveness by emphasizing that leadership behavior does not only influence performance through external control mechanisms but also through internal psychological reinforcement.

Practically, the results provide actionable insights for managers and HR practitioners at PT. Telkom Akses and similar organizations. Strengthening transactional leadership practices through clear goal-setting, consistent feedback, and fair reward systems can improve accountability and productivity. Moreover, leadership development programs should also integrate psychological understanding, particularly regarding locus of control, to better tailor managerial approaches to employees' motivational orientations.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited to a single organizational context, namely PT. Telkom Akses Area Ambon, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other sectors or regions. The use of a cross-sectional design also limits the ability to observe causal relationships over time. Future research is encouraged to expand the scope by involving multiple branches or comparing state-owned and private organizations to validate the model across different contexts.

Additionally, subsequent studies could explore other psychological mediators such as self-efficacy, organizational commitment, or job satisfaction to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership styles influence employee performance. Employing longitudinal or mixed-method approaches could also yield deeper insights into the long-term dynamics between leadership behavior and internal employee factors.

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