

Transformational leadership and empowerment as driving factors for employee performance in Star-Rated Hotels in Central Java

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study is to examine how transformational leadership and employee empowerment can improve employee performance in four-star hotels in Central Java.

Research Methodology: The research was conducted in four-star hotels in Central Java, involving a survey of 185 hotel employees selected through proportional random sampling. The data was analyzed using Partial Least Square (PLS) to explore the causal relationships between the study variables.

Results: The study found that transformational leadership has a strong positive effect on employee empowerment. Additionally, employee empowerment positively influences employee performance. Transformational leadership also directly impacts employee performance in a positive manner. Furthermore, employee empowerment acts as a mediator between transformational leadership and employee performance, with a significant indirect effect. The proposed model exhibited strong predictive ability for both employee empowerment and employee performance. Overall, the relationships examined in the study were consistently positive and significant.

Conclusion: The research concludes that both transformational leadership and employee empowerment are crucial for enhancing employee performance in the hotel industry. The interaction between these factors significantly contributes to better performance outcomes.

Limitations: A limitation of the study is that it focuses solely on four-star hotels in Central Java, which may not be generalizable to other types of hotels or regions.

Contribution: This study contributes to the fields of management and hospitality by providing insights into how leadership styles and employee empowerment can work together to boost employee performance. It is valuable for hotel managers, HR professionals, and researchers interested in improving workplace dynamics and performance in the hospitality industry.

Keywords: *Employee Empowerment, Employee Performance, Transformational Leadership*

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1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is a vital component of the tourism sector and plays a strategic role in a region's economic growth. The performance of hotel employees is a crucial factor in determining the quality of service and customer satisfaction. Transformational leadership has a significant impact on hotel

employee performance, where leaders who are inspiring and have a clear vision can enhance employee motivation to achieve organizational goals ([Nugraheni & Triatmanto, 2022](#)). The hospitality sector has faced various adaptation challenges, particularly after the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 on job insecurity and engagement in the performance of hotel employees in Semarang reveals that employee resilience when facing crises is significantly influenced by the leadership model applied ([Octafian & Nugraheni, 2022](#)). This emphasizes the importance of an adaptive human resource management approach for responding to changes in the business environment.

Employee empowerment has become a primary focus in contemporary hospitality human resource management ([Guritno, Widagdo, & Nugraheni, 2024](#)). This study demonstrates that employee empowerment plays a crucial role as an important mediator in enhancing performance. When employees feel empowered, they exhibit higher levels of creativity and initiative in their work ([Wen, Huang, & Teo, 2023](#)). This confirms that employee empowerment practices significantly enhance job engagement and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Transformational leadership in the hospitality sector has specific characteristics, owing to the intensity of interactions between employees and guests. According to [Okto et al. \(2024\)](#), the transformational leadership style not only has a direct impact on employee performance but also strengthens organizational commitment. This finding is supported by [Syarif and Riza \(2022\)](#), who found that transformational leadership enhances organizational resilience and innovation capabilities in the service industry.

In Central Java, star-rated hotels have experienced significant growth in recent years. [Hanandriati and Nugraheni \(2024\)](#) identified that employee engagement supported by transformational leadership has a positive impact on employee performance. A comparative study by [Asbari and Novitasari \(2024\)](#) emphasized that employee empowerment supported by transformational leadership enhances employee loyalty and operational efficiency. These findings indicate the importance of a management approach that focuses on employee development to achieve competitive advantage. Research has found that the integration of digital technology in human resource management combined with transformational leadership results in increased employee productivity ([Wesly, Kristiana, Bong, & Saputra, 2021](#)). Meanwhile, [Nabilla and Wibisono \(2025\)](#) identify that effective employee empowerment can reduce turnover rates and improve customer satisfaction scores. Although several studies have examined the relationship between transformational leadership, employee empowerment, and employee performance separately, there are still limited studies that integrate these three variables in the context of the hospitality industry in Central Java.

This study aims to bridge the existing research gap by developing and empirically testing a holistic interaction model that explores the synergistic effects of transformational leadership and employee empowerment in optimizing the performance of employees in star-rated hotels in Central Java, Indonesia. Specifically, the research investigates: (1) the direct influence of transformational leadership behaviors such as inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration on employee empowerment dimensions including meaningfulness, competence, self-determination, and impact; (2) the subsequent effect of such empowerment on critical performance indicators like service quality, task efficiency, and customer satisfaction; (3) the potential mediating role of empowerment in translating leadership approaches into enhanced performance outcomes; and (4) accounting for contextual factors unique to Central Java's hospitality sector, such as cultural dynamics, tourism fluctuations, and regional workforce characteristics. By employing a robust theoretical framework that integrates leadership theory, empowerment psychology, and service performance metrics, this study seeks to provide actionable insights into hotel management strategies in emerging tourism destinations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is an approach that focuses on inspiring, motivating, and developing followers to achieve performance that exceeds expectations. Transformational leadership is defined as the process by which leaders develop their followers into leaders by motivating and inspiring them to transcend their personal interests for the greater good of the group ([Chen, Ning, Yang, Feng, & Yang,](#)

2018; [Eliyana & Ma'arif, 2019](#); [Hariyono, Sanusi, & Triatmanto, 2017](#)). [Buil, Martínez, and Matute \(2019\)](#) identified three dimensions of transformational leadership that are relevant in the context of the hospitality industry: (1) idealized influence, where leaders serve as role models for their followers; (2) intellectual stimulation, which encourages creativity and innovation; and (3) individual consideration, which involves paying attention to the developmental needs of each individual.

2.2. Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment is the process of granting employees greater power, autonomy, information, and rewards to enhance their self-efficacy and organizational contributions ([Bose, 2018](#); [Murray & Holmes, 2021](#)). It involves identifying and removing workplace conditions that foster helplessness while promoting formal practices that encourage initiative and accountability. This study measures empowerment using instruments adapted from [AlKahtani et al. \(2021\)](#), focusing on four key dimensions: meaning (work significance), competence (skill confidence), self-determination (autonomy in decision-making), and impact (perceived influence on outcomes).

2.3. Employee Performance

Employee performance is the quality and quantity of work achieved by employees in carrying out their tasks in accordance with their assigned responsibilities. According to [Chang and Chen \(2011\)](#), employee performance is what employees do or do not do that affects how much they contribute to the organization. Employee performance is defined as the quality and quantity of work employees achieve when carrying out their tasks. The measurement of employee performance adapts the instrument developed by ([Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Ting-Ding, 2017](#)), and the measurement indicators include task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance.

2.4. Development Hypothesis

1) The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Empowerment

Transformational leadership can enhance employee empowerment by fostering a supportive and motivational work environment. Transformational leaders are adept at inspiring their followers, encouraging autonomy, and promoting participation in decision-making processes. By demonstrating idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation, these leaders empower employees to take ownership of their roles and meaningfully contribute to the organization ([Magasi, 2021](#)). The theoretical framework of transformational leadership suggests that leaders who engage in these behaviors can significantly increase their employees' sense of empowerment. Empirical studies, such as those by [Nawaz, Gajenderan, Manoharan, and Parayitam \(2024\)](#), have shown a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee empowerment.

H1: Transformational Leadership has a positive effect on Employee Empowerment.

2) The Effect of Employee Empowerment on Employee Performance

Employee empowerment can significantly improve employee performance by enhancing job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to the organization. When employees feel empowered, they are more likely to take initiative, demonstrate higher levels of engagement, and effectively adapt to changes in the work environment ([Avey, Hughes, Norman, & Luthans, 2008](#)). The theoretical basis for this hypothesis is supported by empowerment theory, which posits that empowered employees are more likely to exhibit proactive behaviors that lead to improved performance outcomes. [Nurhidayati and Najmah \(2022\)](#) found a strong positive correlation between employee empowerment and performance, indicating that empowered employees tend to deliver higher quality service and productivity.

H2: Employee Empowerment has a positive influence on Employee Performance.

3) The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance

Transformational leadership can directly enhance employee performance by increasing motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Transformational leaders inspire their followers to exceed personal interests for the collective benefit of the organization, creating a culture of high performance ([Suryadi, Setyaningsih, & Tukiran, 2023](#)). Transformational leadership theory posits that leaders who exhibit idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration can significantly elevate their followers' performance levels. Empirical evidence such as

studies by [Ibrahim, El-Monshed, Altheeb, and El-Sehrawy \(2024\)](#) supports this hypothesis, demonstrating that transformational leadership positively impacts employee performance through increased engagement and identification with organizational goals.

H3: Transformational Leadership has a positive influence on Employee Performance.

4) The Mediating Role of Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. Transformational leaders create an environment that fosters empowerment, which in turn enhances employee performance. The theoretical framework suggests that the positive effects of transformational leadership on performance are partially realized through employee empowerment ([Iqbal, Fatima, & Naveed, 2019](#)). Research indicates that when employees feel empowered, they are more likely to perform at higher levels, thereby mediating the impact of transformational leadership on performance outcomes. Studies such as [Stanescu, Zbucnea, and Pinzaru \(2021\)](#) have highlighted the mediating role of empowerment in this relationship, reinforcing the importance of fostering empowerment to achieve optimal performance.

H4: Employee Empowerment mediates the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Performance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study used a quantitative descriptive method. Quantitative methods can be defined as research approaches based on the philosophy of positivism, which is used to study certain populations or samples. Data collection was conducted using research instruments, and the data analysis was quantitative or statistical in nature, aimed at describing and testing previously established hypotheses ([Afif, 2019](#)). Quantitative descriptive research allows researchers to identify patterns, relationships, and effects within variables, facilitating hypothesis testing using structured data collection and statistical analysis ([Juliyanti, 2022](#)). Data collection is carried out using research instruments, and data analysis is quantitative/statistical, which aims to test predetermined hypotheses.

3.2. Population

Population refers to a group of individuals who share common characteristics and traits ([Rumengan, Rumengan, Suhardis, & Riza, 2023](#)). In this research, the population consists of all four-star hotel employees in Central Java, totaling 1940 individuals.

3.3. Samples and Sampling Techniques

The sample was part of the research population. The sample in this study used a non-probability sampling technique in which members of the population do not get the same opportunity to be sampled ([Ani, Lumanauw, & Tampenawas, 2022](#)). The sample criteria consist of There were 185 respondents who were four-star hotel employees in Central Java

3.4. Data Collection Technique

The data collection process carried out by researchers was conducted by distributing questionnaires to four-star hotel employees in Central Java the questionnaire was distributed via gform. A questionnaire is a data-collection technique that provides a set of written questions or statements to respondents.

3.5. Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis method used in this study is multiple regression, which involves one dependent variable and three or more independent variables. This study employed PLS version 3.2. The hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis, which aimed to estimate the effects of several independent variables on the dependent variable. This can be illustrated by the t and F statistical values. In this research, the dependent variable is the level of job performance, while the independent variables are transformational leadership, employee empowerment, and the mediation variable. The regression analysis for testing is as follows:

$$Y = a + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + B_3X_3 + B_nX_n + e$$

Y : *Job Performance*
 α : Constanta
X1 : Transformational Leadership
X2 : Employees Empowerment
Xn : Mediation Variable
 $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_n$: Koefisien regresi
e : Error Model

4. Results and discussions

4.1. Research Results

The unit of analysis in this study is the employees of four-star hotels in Central Java. Employees were considered research subjects because they have significant knowledge of the work environment, thus enabling them to provide valuable insights into the dynamics and challenges that exist in the workplace. Employees of four-star hotels in Central Java come from various backgrounds, including education, occupation, and work experience, which allows researchers to obtain a more representative picture of the population. Therefore, employees are often the focus of these studies to explain how various factors affect performance. The distribution of respondents in this study is as follows:

Table 1. Respondent Data

Category	Classification	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	96	51,9
	Female	89	48,1
Age	18-25 Year	69	37,3
	26-35 Year	35	18,9
	>36 Year	81	43,8
Education Level	High school/equivalent	47	25,4
	Diploma (D1/D2/D3)	72	38,9
	Bachelor (S1/S2/S3)	66	35,7
Length of Service	1-5 Year	84	45,4
	6-10 Year	31	16,8
	>11 Year	70	37,8

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of 185 respondents who were employees of four-star hotels in Central Java. In terms of gender, there is a relatively good balance, with a proportion of males (51.9%) and females (48.1%), indicating gender equality in the hospitality industry in the region. The age distribution of respondents tends to be polarized, with a dominance in the age group over 36 years (43.8%) and the younger group aged 18-25 years (37.3%), reflecting a combination of experienced workers and a new generation in the hospitality industry.

Regarding education, the majority of employees have a background in diploma (38.9%) and bachelor's degree (35.7%), indicating that the four-star hospitality industry in Central Java demands adequate educational qualifications. This aligns with the professional standards required for star-rated hotel services. In terms of work experience, most respondents have relatively new work experience of 1-5 years (45.4%), but there is also a significant proportion of employees with over 11 years of experience (37.8%), indicating a blend of new employees who bring fresh perspectives and senior employees who provide stability and institutional knowledge.

Measurement Model Analysis

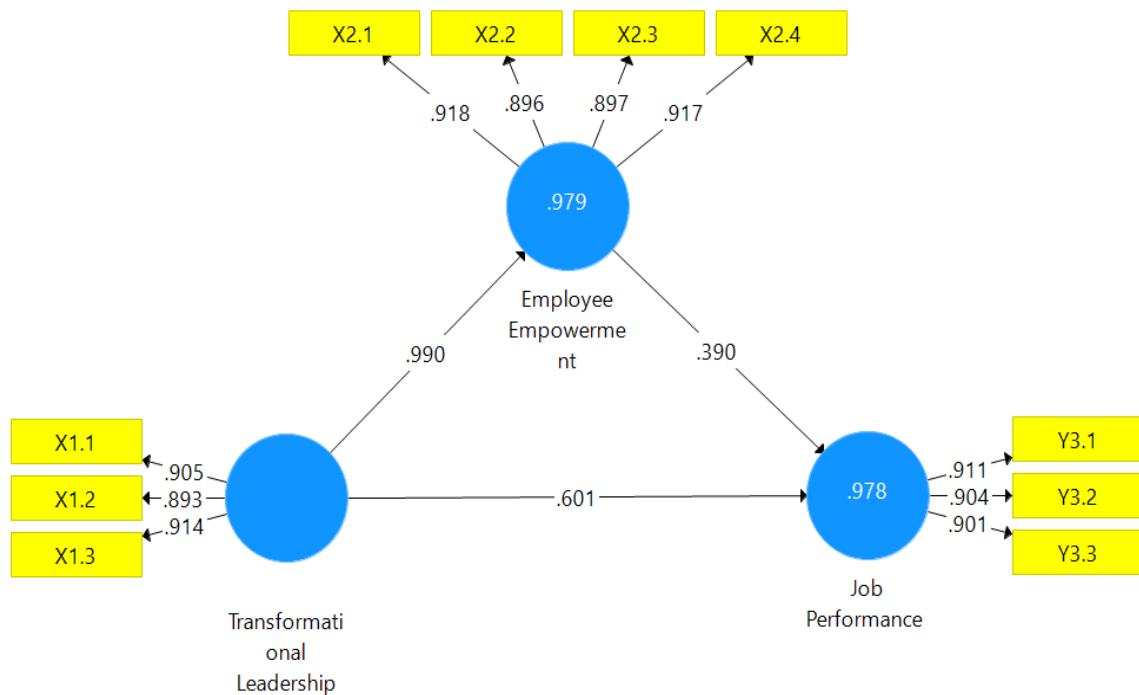


Figure 1. Measurement Model

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

Latent Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Transformational Leadership	0,888	0,817
Employees Empowerment	0,928	0,823
Job Performance	0,890	0,819

Source: Processed Data, 2025

The results of the validity and reliability testing of the constructs presented in Table 2 indicate that all research variables have Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7 (transformational leadership = 0.888; employee empowerment = 0.928; employee performance = 0.890), which signifies good reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are above 0.5 (transformational leadership = 0.817; employee empowerment = 0.823; employee performance = 0.819), indicating that convergent validity has been achieved.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

Latent Variable	Transformational Leadership	Employees Empowerment	Job Performance
Transformational Leadership	0,904		
Employees Empowerment	0,990	0,907	
Job Performance	0,988	0,985	0,905

Source: Processed Data, 2025

In Table 3, the results of the discriminant validity test show that the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than the correlations between the constructs, indicating that discriminant validity was achieved. This means that each construct in the model is conceptually distinct from the others.

Structural Model Analysis

Table 4. Measurement Model Test Result

Dependen Variable	R-square	R-square adjusted
Employees Empowerment	0,979	0,979
Job Performance	0,978	0,978

Source: Processed Data, 2025

The results of the structural model testing are shown in Table 4, which shows the R-square values. The R-square value for employee empowerment was 0.979, indicating that 97.9% of the variation in employee empowerment can be explained by transformational leadership. Meanwhile, the R-square value for employee performance was 0.978, suggesting that 97.8% of the variation in employee performance can be explained by both transformational leadership and employee empowerment. The adjusted R-squared values for both endogenous variables are also very high (above 0.97), indicating that the model has excellent predictive capability.

Table 5. Output Path Coefficients

Laten Variable	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Value	Decision
Transformational Leadership → Employees Empowerment	0,990	10,582	0,000	Accepted
Employees Empowerment → Job Performance	0,601	7,302	0,000	Accepted
Transformational Leadership → Employees Empowerment → Job Performance	0,386	0,390	0,000	Accepted

Source: Processed Data, 2025

In Table 5, the results of the hypothesis testing indicate that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee empowerment ($\beta = 0.990$, $t = 10.582$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that the higher the level of transformational leadership practiced by hotel managers, the greater the level of empowerment perceived by employees. Employee empowerment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.601$, $t = 7.302$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that empowered employees tend to exhibit better performance. Transformational leadership also had a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.390$, $t = 4.732$, $p < 0.001$). These results confirm that a transformational leadership style directly contributes to the enhancement of employee performance.

The indirect effect of transformational leadership on employee performance through employee empowerment was also significant ($\beta = 0.386$, $t = 0.390$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that employee empowerment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. Based on the path coefficient values, it can be observed that the direct effect of employee empowerment on employee performance ($\beta = 0.601$) is stronger than the direct effect of transformational leadership on employee performance ($\beta = 0.390$). This suggests that employee empowerment plays a more dominant role in determining employee performance than transformational leadership directly.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Empowerment

The findings indicated that transformational leadership had a positive and significant effect on employee empowerment, with a path coefficient of 0.990. This finding confirms that transformational leaders who apply idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation can create a work environment that fosters employee empowerment in four-star hotels in Central Java. This finding

aligns with the research by [Buil et al. \(2019\)](#), which found that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in creating a work environment that supports employee empowerment in the hospitality industry. Transformational leaders tend to provide greater autonomy to employees, share information, and encourage participation in decision-making, which are essential elements of empowerment. [Al-Amin \(2017\)](#) stated that transformational leadership leads to high performance in organizations facing reform demands. [Mondiani \(2012\)](#) noted that transformational leadership, as an extension of charismatic leadership, is expected to enhance employee performance. The very high path coefficient (0.990) indicates that in the four-star hospitality industry in Central Java, transformational leadership is a key factor in creating a sense of empowerment among employees. Transformational leaders not only provide direction and control but also inspire and motivate employees to fully develop their potential and take ownership of their work.

4.2.2. The Effect of Employee Empowerment on Employee Performance

Employee empowerment has been shown to have a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a path coefficient of 0.601. This finding confirms that empowered employees tend to perform better in serving hotel guests, increasing productivity, and adapting to changes in the business environment. This result supports the research by [AlKahtani et al. \(2021\)](#), which found that employee empowerment significantly contributes to employee performance in star-rated hotels. When employees feel that their work is meaningful, possess the necessary competencies, have autonomy in decision-making, and can influence work outcomes, they are more likely to be motivated and exhibit better performance. In the hospitality industry, which requires quick responses to guest needs and unexpected situations, employee empowerment is crucial. Empowered employees can make timely decisions without consulting their superiors, thereby enhancing service efficiency and guest satisfaction.

4.2.3. The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance

The findings show that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a path coefficient of 0.390. This finding confirms that a transformational leadership style directly contributes to the improvement of employee performance in four-star hotels in Central Java. This finding is consistent with the results of research by [Ghafoor, Qureshi, Khan, and Hijazi \(2011\)](#) which found that transformational leadership positively impacts employee performance in the hospitality industry by enhancing employee identification, engagement, and proactive personality development. Transformational leaders create a clear vision and inspire employees to achieve higher goals, which in turn enhances performance. Although the direct effect of transformational leadership on employee performance is significant, its path coefficient value (0.390) is lower than that of employee empowerment on employee performance (0.601). This indicates that while transformational leadership is important, employee empowerment plays a more dominant role in determining employee performance in the hospitality industry.

4.2.4. The Mediating Role of Employee Empowerment

The findings also indicate that employee empowerment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance ($\beta = 0.386$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that part of the influence of transformational leadership on employee performance occurs through empowerment. These findings reinforce the conceptual model proposed by the researchers, which posits that transformational leadership enhances employee performance not only directly but also through the creation of an empowering work environment. Transformational leaders create conditions that support employee empowerment, which in turn improves employee performance. This result is in line with the research by [Wen et al. \(2023\)](#), which found that contextual factors such as procedural justice influence hotel employee performance. In this study, employee empowerment can be seen as a contextual factor created by transformational leaders that affects employee performance.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the hospitality management literature by integrating transformational leadership, employee empowerment, and employee performance into a comprehensive model. These findings strengthen the theory that transformational leadership influences employee performance both directly and through employee empowerment as a mediator. Practically, these

findings provide insights for managers of four-star hotels in Central Java to develop strategies for enhancing employee performance. These results highlight the importance of adopting a transformational leadership style that encourages employee empowerment. Hotel managers can focus on developing transformational leadership competencies, such as idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Additionally, hotels can implement comprehensive employee empowerment programs, including training to enhance competencies, providing greater autonomy in decision-making, and creating a work environment that supports employee initiatives and creativity. By paying attention to the aspects of transformational leadership and employee empowerment, four-star hotels in Central Java can improve their employee performance and ultimately enhance service quality and guest satisfaction.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion regarding the model for enhancing employee performance through transformational leadership and empowerment in four-star hotels in Central Java, it is evident that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee empowerment in these hotels. This indicates that the application of a transformational leadership style, which includes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation, can effectively enhance employees' sense of empowerment. Employee empowerment has been shown to have a positive and significant effect on employee performance in four-star hotels in Central Java. Employees who feel empowered through increased job meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact on work outcomes demonstrate better performance in terms of service quality, productivity, and adaptability. Transformational leadership also had a direct positive and significant effect on employee performance in four-star hotels in Central Java, although this effect was not as strong as the effect of employee empowerment on performance. Furthermore, employee empowerment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. This finding suggests that part of the influence of transformational leadership on employee performance occurs through the enhancement of employee empowerment.

5.2. Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the research was conducted in four-star hotels in Central Java, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other hotel categories or regions. Second, the cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time, restricting causal inferences. Additionally, reliance on self-reported measures may introduce bias, as employees may provide socially desirable responses. Cultural factors specific to Central Java may influence the dynamics of leadership and empowerment. Finally, other potential factors affecting employee performance were not examined, suggesting the need for a more comprehensive approach in future research.

5.3. Suggestions

Future research should consider expanding the sample size to include various hotel categories and regions to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies are recommended to better understand the causal relationships between transformational leadership, employee empowerment, and performance over time. Incorporating multiple data sources such as supervisor evaluations and objective performance metrics can provide a more comprehensive view of employee performance. Additionally, exploring the impact of cultural factors on leadership and empowerment dynamics would enrich our understanding of these relationships. Finally, future studies should include other variables such as job satisfaction and organizational culture to create a more holistic model of employee performance.

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