

LINKING TRANSFORMATIONAL AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP TO EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF THRIVING AT WORK

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of transformational leadership and servant leadership on employee creativity with the mediating role of thriving at work. The population of this study is employees of municipal waterworks in Kudus Regency. The sampling technique of this study is saturated sampling and uses questionnaire method for 140 respondents, with SEM analysis method and analyzed by SmartPLS. The result of this study shows that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity and positive but not significant on thriving at work. Meanwhile, servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity and thriving at work. On the other hand, thriving at work has no mediating effect in the relationship of transformational leadership and servant leadership on employee creativity. The findings of this study suggest that it's important to make creativity and thriving at work as a goal and an achievement so that employees can push themselves toward a better work and career.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Servant leadership, Thriving at work, Employee creativity.

INTRODUCTION

In today's global competition and dynamics environment era, economic conditions are become more volatile and creating challenges to organization to fight against the existing uncertainties, such as business scenarios, so organizations are not only have to encourage but also expecting employees to increase their creativity (Yu et al., 2019; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017). Creativity is a behavior that generates novel and ideas that useful for individual or a group that works together (Amabile, 1983). Therefore, employees who have high creativity are tend to be able to give new ideas and dare to give innovations into the works that they're doing.

Literature shows that employee creativity can be influenced by several factors, such as social factor (self and social-awareness, self-management, and decision making) and contextual factor (transformational leadership, servant leadership, and management approach) (Chen et al., 2017). Transformational and servant leadership are leadership style that emphasize the importance of appreciating, cherishing, listening, training, and empowering employees. The differences between these leadership styles is the focus of the leader. Transformational leadership focuses on commitment and vision, while servant leadership focuses employees and their contribution (Stone et al., 2004). Basically, those two leadership styles have shown their influence and substantial potential on employee creativity (Yang et al., 2017).

Research on the relationship between transformational and servant leadership with employee creativity is very important to be improved. First, because the result about this relationship still shows many gap. Several previous research show that transformational and servant leadership have a positive effect on employee creativity (Gashema, 2019; Khattak et al., 2017). However, in another studies, the result shows that transformational and servant leadership have a negative effect on employee creativity (Khan et al., 2019; Ma & Jiang, 2018).

Second, because of the gap on the previous research, this study aims to re-examine the effect of transformational and servant leadership on employee creativity through a mediation. Thriving at work is considered to be the one of the potential variables to explain the effect of mediation on this relationship. Thriving at work is a psychological state which individual has a joint of learning and vitality and desire to learn new things (Spreitzer et al., 2005). In previous research (Sheikh et al., 2019), the result shows that thriving at work is partially mediates the relationship between transformational and servant leadership with employee creativity. Therefore, mediation model of this study can explain further about how transformational and servant leadership affect the level of employee creativity.

Third, the research about employee creativity and transformational and servant leadership still requires another result to generalize the result. Gashema, (2019) and Khattak et al., (2017) conducted the research about this employee creativity and two leadership styles on banking employees, while Khan et al., (2019) conducted the research on non-profit organization. Khattak et al., (2017) suggest for future research to replicate this research with different cultures, organizations, and job categories because theoretical ideas about employee creativity widely applied and may produce different results. Therefore, it's appropriate if this research examine the effect of transformational and servant leadership on employee creativity through the mediation effect of thriving at work is carried out in different organization (regional owned enterprises (BUMD)) and different country and culture (Indonesia).

Based on the explanations and problems, the purpose of this study is to examine the direct effect of transformational and servant leadership on employee creativity. In addition, this research is also examine the mediating effect of thriving at work on the relationship between transformational and servant leadership with employee creativity

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Creativity is a production of novel and useful ideas (Amabile, 1983). Employee creativity is considered important because with creativity, employee can develops creative ideas so that it increases the possibility on another employees to develop and apply new ideas that come from an employee (Shalley et al., 2004). In this case, transformational leadership is considered to have a relationship with employee creativity. Transformational leadership is a way of the leader to achieve organizational goals by empowering, paying attention, and increasing employee commitment, providing challenges and supports, and also maximizing the potential of the employees (Saleem & Mahmood, 2018; Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership plays an important role in encouraging individual outcomes (Astuty & Udin, 2020). Employees who perceive appropriate leadership will encourage their creativity (Siswanti & Muafi, 2020).

Transformational leader will influence employee by becoming a role model and increase self-actualization so that employees become more matures and confident to use their creativity (Gashema, 2019). Previous researches show that transformational leadership influence employee creativity (Gashema, 2019; Saleem & Mahmood, 2018; Khattak et al., 2017). According to

Gashema (2019), transformational will conduct a mentoring and training, improve employee skills in problem solving, build employee's confidence and optimism, and expand employee knowledge and raise employee standard, so it makes an effect and generates employee creativity (Gashema, 2019). Based on the explanation above, the following hypothesis is:

H₁: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on employee creativity.

Employee creativity is important to organizational innovation and leaders often play an important role to increase creativity (Amabile & Khaire, 2008). Servant leadership is considered to be capable on increasing employee creativity at work (Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010). Servant leadership is considered to have an influence on employee creativity because servant leaders will encourage and support employees by empowering, prioritizing needs, and triggering employees potential so that it can affect employees' motivation and employee creativity. Servant leaders will show more attention to what employees need and want, which is can provide comforts and confidences in the work place (Yang et al., 2019). Leadership style has been shown to affect individual performance. An organization needs a leader who can be an example for its employees (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

In addition, servant leadership will more focus on employees by respecting the commitments, prioritizing employees, and inviting employees to thing further ahead (Stone et al., 2004). Servant leaders will also make employees to give a positive feedback so it that motivation and comfort that employees feel at work can increase their creativity (Yang et al., 2019). Therefore, servant leadership shows a positive relationship with employee creativity (Khan et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2019; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017). From the discussion above, the following hypothesis is:

H₂: Servant leadership has a positive effect on employee creativity

When employees shows the creativity at work, employee will produce new ideas that useful for product, practice, service, and organization (Shalley et al., 2004). Thriving at work is considered capable to influence employee creativity because thriving at work is able to increase and develop employees. Thriving at work also has a potential to not only increasing employee outcome, such as career development and creativity, but also the profitable for organization through increased performance because employees that thriving at work will make a progress and momentum in their work (Niessen et al., 2012; Porath et al., 2012).

Thriving at work has two dimensions, learning and vitality. When employees learning new things, employees are in an ideal position to see opportunities for changes and self-improvement. Learning new things is also mean have a new skill, so it can affect creativity. When employees are vital at work, employee will have more energy and motivation to explore and implementing their jobs so it can increase cognitive and creative thinking in solving problems (Kleine & Rudolph, 2019). Therefore, the statement is an evidence that thriving at work has a positive effect on employee creativity.

H₃: Thriving at work has a positive effect on employee creativity.

Thriving at work is one of the important things for employees because employees are have to learn how to maintain performance and bring the career to a better position (Niessen et al., 2012). Transformational leader may be able to influence thriving at work because

transformational leadership includes aspect that support and challenging employees to develop themselves, such as providing standard goals, providing understanding and optimism, new perspectives, supports and also training so that it can affect thriving at work. (Niessen et al., 2017).

Transformational leadership affects thriving at work for three reasons. First, leader is the center of attention and have an impact on the job and employees characteristic. Second, transformational leadership encourages thriving at work by giving an understanding about the job so that it can lead to a positive self-conceptualization. Third, Thriving at work can be improved through supporting aspect of transformational leadership, such as providing well-being and new understanding, which allows employees to develop (Niessen et al., 2017). Based on the discussion above, the following hypothesis is:

H₄: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on thriving at work

Thriving at work can help employee to maintain and change their jobs to improve their development (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Servant leadership is considered as an important factor that can improve thriving at work because servant leadership emphasizes on employee development, which is can achieved by helping employees to grow and bring out their potential, and also prioritizing employees need. In addition, servant leadership is focused on employees growth and development (Greenleaf, 2002).

There are several reasons about the influence of servant leadership on employee creativity. First, servant leadership gives an opportunity to improve skills for the employee effectiveness, so that employees will have a vigor because they feel attached to their work. Second, servant leaders will motivate employee to behave creatively and think ahead, and also encourage employees to have plans and increase their performance. Third, servant leaders give a feedback and resources, such as paying a maximum attention on employees development, knowledge, and skills (Walumbwa et al., 2017). Based on the explanation, the following hypothesis is:

H₅: Servant leadership has a positive effect on thriving at work

The role of leadership style is also an important factor in the resilience and development of an organization. Transformational leadership is an effective and dynamic style to build a good relationship with subordinates (Khan et al., 2019). Transformational leadership encourages employees to increase their creativity and plays a significant role in making an organizational environment to be more creative. Transformational leadership encourages employees directly or indirectly by making organizational environment and climate more creative and encourages employees to exchanges mind and ideas (Saleem & Mahmood, 2018). However, employees' thriving have also been considered as a predictor of employee creativity.

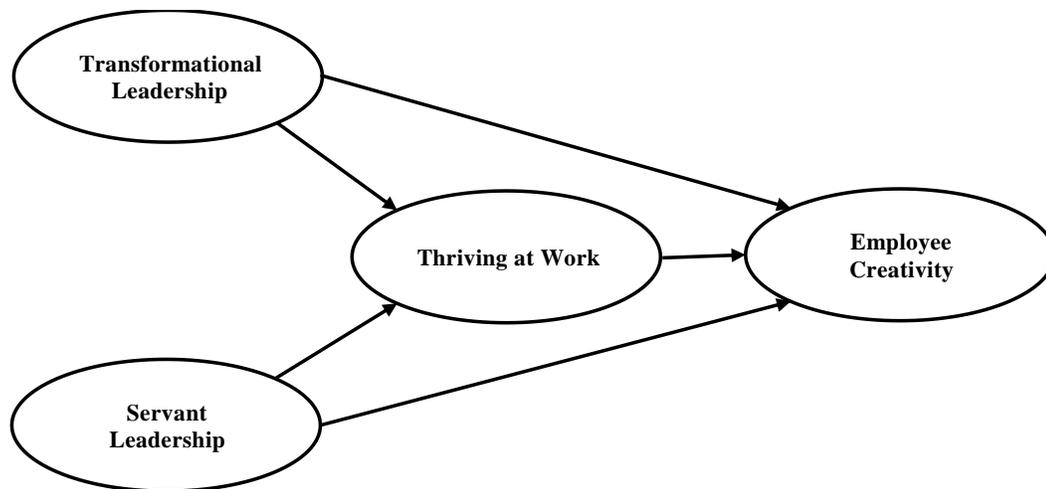
Thriving at work is social embedded, it means that social or work environment creates employees' experience to develop (Niessen et al., 2017). The role of transformational leader on the workplace can increase employees' experience so that they feel more "alive" and vigor in the workplace. Transformational leadership encourages employees motivations, moral, and skills (Kleine & Rudolph, 2019). When employees feel alive, vigor and motivated, and encouraged, employees will thrive and spread positive energy in their jobs and showing creative behavior (Sheikh et al., 2019). Based on the discussion, the following hypothesis is.

H₆: *Thriving at work mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity*

Creativity is one of the factor that can make an organization achieve a competitive advantage. Servant leaders encourage creativity by directing employees to a new ideas, interacting and supporting employees to be more creative, and provide adequate knowledge (Oldham & Cummings, 2014; Marion, 2012). With the role of serving leaders, employees will have an opportunity to thrive, learning new thing, motivated, have more initiative, and maximize their potential to be more creative (Niessen et al., 2017). However, servant leadership isn't considered as the only predictor of creativity. Another predictor that can affect employee creativity is thriving at work (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009).

Thriving at work shows that employee have feelings and enthusiasm at work. Servant leadership does a lot to encourage and inspiring their employees to support each other. When employees are skillful and have a desire to work, it provides positive energy which is important in completing work and behaving creatively (Sheikh et al., 2019). However, creativity isn't easy to achieve. Creativity needs knowledge and supportive spirit (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009). Based on the explanation above, the following hypothesis is (Figure 1):

H₇: *Thriving at work mediates the relationship between servant leadership and employee creativity*



**FIGURE 1
RESEARCH MODEL**

METHODOLOGY

The data collection technique used in this study was survey using questionnaire. The survey conducted on all employees at Tirta Dharma municipal waterworks. In total, there are 140 respondent that used in this study. The demographic data regarding to respondent is: 74.3% male and 25.7% female with age of employees dominated with age range of 50-56 years (29%) and 29-35 years (24%) and tenure of employees dominated by 1-7 years (45%).

The questionnaire used in this study was adopted from previous research instrument. The dependent variables, employee creativity, was measured with four-item scale adopted from Baer and Oldham, (2006), the independent variable, transformational leadership and servant

leadership was measured with seven-item scale adopted from Jensen et al. (2019) and Liden et al., (2015), and mediation variable, thriving at work, was measured with ten-scale item adopted from Porath et al. (2012). All items are on a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to indicates the extent to which the employee agree with each items. All items are listed in the Appendix.

The validity and reliability test in this study used SEM-PLS analysis methods. First, validity test in this study measured through convergent validity, which is 4 item had to be eliminated because the value < 0.7 . After elimination, discriminant validity test produces a value which all items in the construct variable must be greater than the value of other variable. Thus, all data is valid. Afterward, validity test of all items were reliable with the criteria of cronbach's alpha and composite reliability > 0.7 . Furthermore, hypothesis test in this study was tested using analytical tools: SmartPLS 3.3.2.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research uses data processing technique with SEM-PLS method and SmartPLS 3.3.2 analysis tool by looking at the value of outer model to measuring the validity and reliability of the construct variable in the model analysis. The hypothesis test is measured based on the result of inner model test by looking at the value of original sample, t-statistics, and p-values. Every variables is written using the following abbreviation: (1) employee creativity (EC); (2) transformational leadership (TL); (3) servant leadership (SL); (4) thriving at work (TaW).

Validity Test

We tested convergent and discriminant validity. The results showed the convergent validity value > 0.70 . The value for discriminant validity shows that the cross loading value has met the requirements. The loading factor value for the same construct is greater than the loading factor for other constructs (cross-loading). Therefore, this study has good convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Reliability Test

Reliability test is used to measure the stability and consistency of an instrument in measuring a variable. Reliability test is measured by looking at the value of cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. If both value is > 0.70 , then the variable is said to be reliable.

| Variable | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | Result |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| EC | 0,910 | 0,937 | Reliable |
| SL | 0,938 | 0,950 | Reliable |
| TL | 0,922 | 0,941 | Reliable |
| TaW | 0,939 | 0,949 | Reliable |

Based on the Table 1, the result shows that all variables' cronbach's alpha and composite reliability value is > 0.70 . So, it can be said that all construct are reliable.

Hypothesis Test

The hypothesis test is the final goal that is used as the final benchmark in the research. The output is presented in Table 2. The rule of thumb used in this study is t-statistics > 1.645 with significance level $> 5\%$.

| Variable | Original Sample | T Statistics | P Values | Result |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------|---------------|
| TL \rightarrow EC | 0.160 | 2.883 | 0.005** | Supported |
| SL \rightarrow EC | 0.759 | 1.500 | 0.000*** | Supported |
| TaW \rightarrow EC | 0.019 | 0.334 | 0.739* | Not supported |
| TL \rightarrow TaW | 0.137 | 1.492 | 0.138* | Not supported |
| SL \rightarrow TaW | 0.587 | 7.487 | 0.000*** | Supported |
| TL \rightarrow TaW \rightarrow EC | 0.003 | 0.299 | 0.766* | Not supported |
| SL \rightarrow TaW \rightarrow EC | 0.011 | 0.312 | 0.756* | Not supported |

Note: ***, ** and * indicates significant at 1%, 5% and 10% level of significance based on t-statistics

The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Creativity

Transformational leadership has a direct effect on employee creativity in Tirta Dharma Kudus municipal waterworks. The result shows that the original sample value of transformational leadership on employee creativity is 0,160, t-statistic $2.883 > 1.645$, and p-values 0.005. It means that transformational leadership has a positive direct effect on employee creativity. Thus, H1 supported. This result were consistent with the previous research (Gashema, 2019; Khattak et al., 2017) that also shows that there's a positive relationship between transformational leadership with employee creativity. This is because transformational leadership will shows a charismatic leader, so that transformational leader can empowering, paying attention, supporting, challenging, and increasing the commitment of the employees so that it can help employees to express and increase their creativity.

The Effect of Servant Leadership on Employee Creativity

Servant leadership has a direct effect on employee creativity in Tirta Dharma Kudus municipal waterworks. The result shows that the original sample value of servant leadership on employee creativity is 0.750, t-statistic $13.500 > 1.645$, and p-values 0.000. It means that servant leadership has a positive direct effect on employee creativity. Thus, H2 supported. This result were consistent with the previous research (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; Liden et al., 2015) that also shows that servant leadership can increase employee creativity. This is because servant leadership will make employees feel that they are understood, valued, directed, and in a good work environment, and also assisted by their leader, so that the servant leader can trigger employees to provide a good feedback by showing their creativity. This result is also supported by social exchange theory which individual behavior is the result of social exchange that occurs because of the interactions that make individuals feel obliged and owe something to reciprocate with certain actions.

The Effect of Thriving at Work on Employee Creativity

Thriving at work has a direct effect on employee creativity in Tirta Dharma Kudus municipal waterworks. The result shows that the original sample value of thriving at work on employee creativity is 0.019, t-statistic $0.334 < 1.645$, and p-values 0.739. It means that thriving at work has a positive direct effect on employee creativity. Thus, H3 not supported. The result of this study is consistence with the research of Shahid et al., (2020) that shows that thriving at work didn't have a significant effect on employee creativity. This is due to the desire of ach employees' learning and vitality is different, so that even though have a high thriving at work, employees still can't show their creativity because the vigor and learning at work of each employees are different. Employees may learning something new and have a good vitality at work, but it could be that employees aren't in an ideal position, such as the job that doesn't allow to produce new things or job routine that doesn't need improvisation. This make employees unable to take the opportunities to change and improve themselves so that employees don't have self-confidence and unable to initiate new things so that employees are unable to show their creativity.

The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Thriving at Work

Transformational leadership has a direct effect on thriving at work in Tirta Dharma Kudus municipal waterworks. The result shows that the original sample value of transformational leadership on thriving at work is 0.137, t-statistic $1.492 < 1.645$, and p-values 0.138. It means that transformational leadership has a positive direct effect on thriving at work. Thus, H4 not supported. Transformational leadership is able to generate charismatic leader, also become a role model for employees and able to provide support, challenge, and increase employees motivation. On the other hand, transformational leadership potentially become a barrier and put a pressure to the employees so that they can thrive in the workplace (Niessen et al., 2017). Therefore, transformational leadership can have various effects on employee creativity.

The absence of significant effect between transformational leadership on thriving at work may occur because thriving at work isn't bound by certain variable, such as transformational leadership. This is also supported by self-determination theory which thriving at work is formed based on someone's motivation and is not shaped by outside control, such as charismatic leader (Niessen et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2005), so that even though transformational leadership that felt by employees in Tirta Dharma Kudus municipal waterworks is high, it's still not be able to stimulate thriving at work.

The Effect of Servant Leadership on Thriving at Work

Servant leadership has a direct effect on thriving at work in Tirta Dharma Kudus municipal waterworks. The result shows that the original sample value of servant leadership on thriving at work is 0.587, t-statistic $7.847 > 1.645$, and p-values 0.000. It means that servant leadership has a positive direct effect on thriving at work. Thus, H5 supported. This finding is in line with previous research that shows that servant leadership has a positive effect on thriving at work (Walumbwa et al., 2017). The significant influence of servant leadership on thriving at work is due to the implications of the leader. Servant leaders will make an approach to employees by building good communication, togetherness, and giving employees more attention

so that this can increase employees' vigor. In addition, servant leaders will provide opportunities, directions, and invite employees to think ahead so that employees are able to learn new things (Walumbwa et al., 2017). In that way, employees will be able to thrive by taking initiative and taking every opportunity to develop themselves.

Thriving at Work Mediates the Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Creativity

Employees that feel high transformational leaders will feel motivated so that employees can improve creativity in workplace. The result shows that the original sample value of transformational leadership on employee creativity through thriving at work is 0.003, t-statistic $0.299 < 1.645$, and p-values 0.766. It means that thriving at work mediates the relationship between transformational leadership with employee creativity. Thus, H6 not supported. This finding is in line with previous research that shows that servant leadership has a positive effect on thriving at work (Walumbwa et al., 2017). The insignificance of the mediating effect of thriving at work on the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity due to the dominance of respondents where 29% of the respondent that filled this questionnaire were employees with age-range of 50-56 years that had passed the peak of their career, so that they were not prioritizing self-development to show creativity. According to Hennekam, (2017), older employees, that has passed the peak of their career, will tend to withdraw and have less work input, such as desire to learn new things, work methods, or training.

According to Koopman-boyden & Macdonald, (2010), this condition is considered reasonable along with the decrease of physical condition and performance,. In addition, older employees has been experienced everything at work so that they are tend to push and give opportunities to younger worker to develop themselves, especially thriving at work. It can be concluded that the thriving at work is less able to mediate the effect of transformational leadership on employee creativity.

Thriving at Work Mediates the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Employee Creativity

Employees that feel high servant leaders will feel motivated so that employees can improve creativity in workplace. The result shows that the original sample value of servant leadership on employee creativity through thriving at work is 0.003, t-statistic $0.299 < 1.645$, and p-values 0.766. It means that thriving at work mediates the relationship between servant leadership with employee creativity. Thus, H7 not supported. This finding is in line with previous research that shows that servant leadership has a positive effect on thriving at work (Sheikh et al., 2019). The lack of mediating effect on thriving at work in this study could be due to the work factors that employees have. The type of work at Tirta Dharma Kudus municipal waterworks is one type of work that's closely related to regulations and also manage of the livelihoods of many people (manage and distribute water supply). This is doesn't mean that thriving at work aren't required at the work place, but the context of thriving is still too basic and biased.

Thriving at work is not a dominant factor in employee creativity. When servant leadership that felt by employees is sufficient, it can become a stimulus in increasing employee creativity. Employees that feel high servant leadership will that they are appreciated, directed,

and in an ideal environment. This can affect creativity on employees even though thriving at work is high, it doesn't have much effect on employee creativity.

CONCLUSION

From this study, it can be concluded that transformational leadership has a positive effect on employee creativity, but didn't have a significant effect on thriving at work. Meanwhile, servant leadership has a positive effect on employee creativity and thriving at work. In addition, thriving at work is not able to mediate the relationship between transformational and servant leadership on employee creativity. In the end, employee creativity in Tirta Dharma Kudus municipal waterworks can be achieved through transformational and servant leadership without the mediating effect of thriving at work. This research is expected to be able to make a practical contribution to organization, especially in private organizations, such as regional owned enterprises (BUMD). Organizations is expected to be able to create a better and ideal work-environment for employees so that employees will have motivation to thrive and improve their creativity. Organizational leaders need to emphasize leadership style, especially transformational and servant leadership, in a better way so that leaders can increase and growth connection with employees, so that employees feel more comfortable and motivated to thrive. Employees also need to make creativity and thriving as a goal and achievement, so that employees can encourage and lead themselves toward better career.

This study is still have many limitations, such as sample that only uses 1 object. For this reason, we hope that future research can examine different and wider object. For example, employees in F&B or manufacturing sector. In addition, future research can use different variables to extend the result and determine the mediation effect of employee creativity, such as organizational culture and co-workers support.

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