

# TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION CLIMATE AS AN ANTECEDENT OF EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY IN THE ERA OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## Article Info

### Article history:

Received March 10, 2023

Revised March 11, 2023

Accepted March 13, 2023

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### KEYWORDS:

Employee creativity

Innovation climate

Transformational leadership

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## ABSTRACT

This research utilized the innovation climate as a mediating variable to examine the impact of transformational leadership style on employee creativity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents in this research were workers of startups. The sample consisted of 129 respondents. The Structural Equation Sampling (SEM) approach was employed using AMOS software to analyze the data. Transformational leadership has a good influence on employee creativity, transformational leadership has a positive effect on the environment of invention, and the atmosphere of innovation has a positive effect on employee creativity, according to this research. Through an innovative atmosphere, transformational leadership has a favorable influence on employee creativity. This research confirms how transformational leadership and an innovation atmosphere are precursors to employee creativity. The consequence of this research is that startup companies must cultivate transformational leadership among their workers and cultivate an innovation-friendly environment so that employees' creativity can be enhanced on occasion.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic that has occurred since the end of 2019 until now has made many changes to human life today. These changes are due to regulations related to health protocols, restrictions on human movement, and difficulties related to meetings between people. The existence of these rules requires many companies, including startups, to be able to adapt quickly to their internal and external environment. Rapid adaptability is necessary for today's radically changing business environment [1]. A startup is defined as a company that is new or is still in the development or research stage to continue to find markets and develop its products [2]. Therefore, companies/organizations with a startup base must be able to continue to adapt to all changes. This is due to the faster an organization/company adapts to the environment and existing conditions. Then the organization will get additional potential benefits such as (new knowledge, demographics, possible new financial resources, and possible industry changes) [3].

Employee creativity is essential for the competitiveness of start-up companies. In addition, staff creativity is described as a valuable update of ideas related to products, services, production processes, and procedures for employees [3]. In addition, there is also a definition from Amabile that states that creativity is a form of personality constellation and intellectual characteristics shown by individuals when given the freedom to spend a lot of time in the creative process [5].

Having employees who have high creativity in a startup company is essential in the industrial world and the world of work today. This is because many company leaders or managers know that to exist in market competition, companies need employees who can be actively involved in tasks and work.

In addition to high employee creativity, startup companies also need a supportive leader who can direct employees in determining new ideas to be used in their business processes. This is because leaders with a supporting character can influence employee creativity through direct assistance with projects, developing subordinate skills, and increasing employee intrinsic motivation [5].

A transformational leader is a leader who can support and motivate subordinates to think creatively and understand differences between individuals to improve work performance and develop the potential of associates. In addition, according to Bass & Avolio, leaders who have the character of transformational leaders can also integrate creative insight, perseverance, energy, intuition, and sensitivity to the needs of others. Transformational leaders also have characteristics that can differentiate them from other types of leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration.

In addition to transformative leadership, a business's creative atmosphere influences its personnel's creativity. The function of a leader is inseparable from the creative atmosphere fostered within the company. The support offered by executives in the form of a favorable atmosphere for organizational innovation can motivate employees. When managers provide their workers the freedom to come up with new concepts or come up with solutions to existing problems, workers may feel more motivated [5]. Furthermore, by referring to the componential theory, researchers want to examine the influence of transformational leadership styles and the climate of innovation as antecedents of employee creativity in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Componential creativity theory comprehensively explains the social and psychological elements necessary to produce creative work. This idea is based on the concept of creativity as the development of ideas or results that are new and fit for purpose [12]. According to this idea, every creative response requires four elements: one outside the person, the social context in which the individual works, and three within the individual, including domain-related abilities, processes essential to creativity, and intrinsic task motivation [6].

Transformational leadership style is a subordinate's assessment of the immediate leader's ability to enable and motivate associates to think creatively and understand individual differences to improve work performance and develop subordinate potential. Transformational leadership allows followers to have feelings of trust, adoration, loyalty, and respect for the leader. Followers are inspired to go beyond what is required of them. In line with Bass's point of view, his empirical findings reveal that transformational leaders have a role in managing organizational change. Transformational leaders influence their followers by influencing their goals, values, needs, beliefs, and ambitions. Research conducted by Palupi also suggests that transformational leaders achieve this shift by comparing it with their followers' self-perceptions (values and personality) [11].

The atmosphere of innovation is described as an organizational environment that encourages people to continue to create and think creatively. A good organization is adaptive, versatile, entrepreneurial, and creative in responding to the dynamics of an ever-changing and competitive global market. Organizations should support the free expression of workers' ideas by offering fair and constructive evaluations. Employees should have the freedom to decide what tasks are to be done and how to do them when there is no excessive regulation [9]. Then, Van der Vegt et al. define an atmosphere of innovation as the awareness employees share of the policies, processes, and behaviors that drive the creation, recognition, and manifestation of innovative ideas in business. If the innovation atmosphere of the organization is favorable, employees can submit and implement their fresh ideas. Measurement of the innovation climate presented by Jaiswal & Dhar where superiors value the ability of employees to work creatively, the organization is described as a flexible organization and constantly adapting to change, open and responsive to change. Employees here usually get credit for various ideas. These are just a few of the 16 items used to measure innovation climate outcomes [10].

Employee creativity is the generation of new ideas to improve performance and increase effectiveness and efficiency. Employee thinking, skills, and innovative abilities based on their experience and qualifications constitute creativity [11]. Employee innovation involves a high intellectual engagement; therefore, employees must be incentivized to exert significant effort to produce breakthroughs. In addition, innovative personnel can make valuable contributions and new suggestions to implement important product and service modifications. Khalili stated that to influence employee creativity and innovation beneficially, leaders must reward creative and innovative work and provide innovation assistance.

H1: Employee creativity is influenced positively by transformative leadership.

Research conducted Zhang et al. (2018) who believe transformational leadership has a good influence on the innovation atmosphere [5]. The research that was conducted backs this up as well Moolenaar et al. claims that an inventive climate benefits from transformative leadership. Research conducted by Zuraik & Kelly moreover, it was discovered that CEO transformational leadership enhances the environment for innovation [9]. Khalili stated that to influence employee creativity and innovation beneficially, leaders must reward creative and innovative work and provide innovation assistance [13].

H2: There is a good relationship between transformative leadership and innovative climate.

Research conducted by Sanda & Arthur [14] with Jaiswal & Dhar [10] who believe that the atmosphere for innovation has a good and significant impact on employee creativity. This is also backed by research that has been undertaken Ghosh (2015) explains that the creative environment has a favorable and substantial impact on employee creativity. This research, using a novel methodology, examined the characteristics of self-leadership in relation to employee creativity, creative climate, and innovation readiness in the workplace. There is a significant connection between self-leadership; employee creativity; a climate of creativity; and an innovative orientation in the workplace, according to the findings of structural modeling equation analysis based on sample responses from research, design, and development units of a variety of organizations across India's industries [15]

H3: There is a good correlation between innovation atmosphere and employee creativity.

A leader must be able to inspire his people to maintain their innovative thinking. Leaders might assign employees a number of creative-development responsibilities. Additionally, leaders might offer assistance to employees. This may be accomplished by providing a secure and comfortable work atmosphere that employees can sense. This might make employees feel at ease and encourage them to continue developing unique ideas. According to the findings of Jaiswal & Dhar research [10], the innovation atmosphere mediates the connection between transformational leadership and employee creativity. This confirms the aforementioned premise. The innovation atmosphere moderates the association between transformative leadership and employee creativity, according to another research conducted by Khalili [13]. Research done by Chaubey et al. revealed that the connection between transformational leadership and employee creativity is mediated by creative self-efficacy and moderated by the physical work environment [16]. Consequently, based on the assertions and outcomes of prior research, the hypothesis for the two variables listed above is as follows:

H4: The connection between transformative leadership and workforce creativity is mediated by the innovation atmosphere.

From the explanation regarding the literature review and hypotheses, the empirical model of this study was adapted from Palupi's research. The use of context of this study is the creative behavior of employees in the work environment of startup companies in Yogyakarta. The research conducted by Palupi explains the context of employee creativity, which is influenced by the dimensions of transformational leadership in postgraduate students who are already working [14], so that there is a replication of the context of the research conducted in this study, namely, the research subjects were taught to employees who worked at startup companies. The research model explained the following:

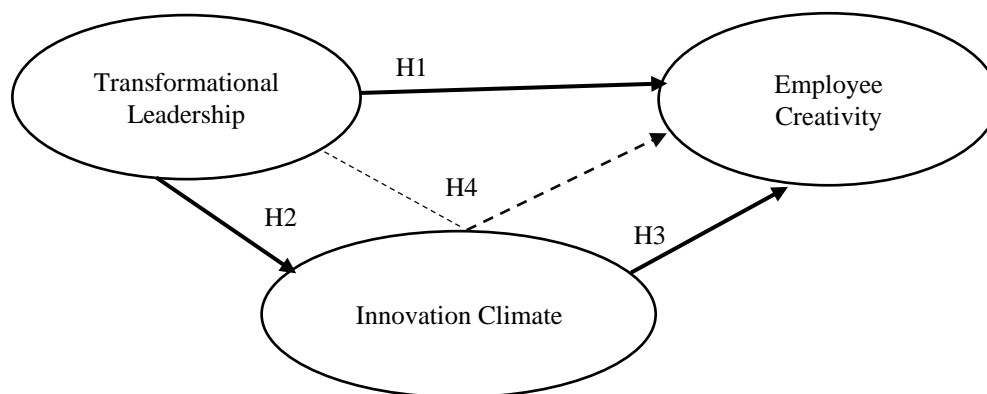


Figure 1. Research Model

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This quantitative research uses statistical analysis to examine all hypotheses using a quantitative approach. By utilizing Google Form, this research collects primary data through online surveys. The objects in this study are startup employees whose research focuses on transformational leadership, the climate for innovation, and employee creativity. The research subjects used in this study were employees working at startup companies such as Ruang guru, Shopee, Fitinline, Tokopedia, Rubsystem, Gojek, Mamikos, Tonjo, Unilever, Zenius, Agoda, Netflix, Flip, and Traveloka.

The sampling method used in this study is convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling approach in which the target sample of the survey is selected depending on their willingness to participate in the research [17], [18]. In addition to determining the sample size using the

Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) method, which ranges from 100 to 200 respondents [19]. The number of samples in this study amounted to 129 respondents who referred to using the Structural Equation Sampling (SEM) test with the AMOS software.

This study uses several variables, including the independent variable, namely transformational leadership; the dependent variable, namely employee creativity; and the mediating variable, namely the innovation climate. The measuring instruments in this study are used as statements in the questionnaire, which will be distributed to respondents with a predetermined amount.

This study uses validity and reliability tests to test the quality of research instruments. Test the validity of this study using AMOS 22.0. Each question item on the questionnaire was directly tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) model. Variable indicators are valid with a standard factor loading  $\geq 0.5$  and a p-value  $\leq 0.05$ . The reliability test can be seen from the cut-off value of Construct Reliability (CR) and Variance Extracted (VE). In terms of reliability, acceptable levels are  $\geq 0.70$  for CR and  $\geq 0.05$  for VE [20].

Testing the hypothesis in this study using the help of Analysis Moment of Structural (AMOS) software. The results obtained in this study are appropriate and can be accounted for. To test the hypothesis, it is necessary to determine the significance level and confidence level. Social science research generally uses a confidence level of 95%, so a significance level of 5% is obtained or can be expressed as a p-value = 0.05[18].

### 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The validity test in SEM is often called CFA or confirmatory factor analysis. The confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) test is a multivariate analysis method that can validate whether the measurement model built is consistent with the hypothesis. In this study consisting of 38 item lists representing each variable and 129 respondents, an instrument quality test was conducted to determine whether the research instrument met the valid and reliable requirements. Based on table 1, each statement item is valid. Every claim regarding transformational leadership, an atmosphere of innovation, and the workforce's creativity is true.

Table 1. Validity test

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Limit	Information
Transformational leadership	KT1	0,829	> 0,5	Valid
	KT2	0,859		Valid
	KT3	0,856		Valid
	KT4	0,866		Valid
	KT5	0,875		Valid
	KT6	0,841		Valid
	KT7	0,830		Valid
	KT8	0,856		Valid
	KT9	0,838		Valid
	KT10	0,868		Valid
	KT11	0,842		Valid
	KT12	0,882		Valid
	KT13	0,882		Valid
	KT14	0,856		Valid
	KT15	0,839		Valid
Innovation Climate	II1	0,813	> 0,5	Valid
	II2	0,853		Valid
	II3	0,782		Valid
	II4	0,821		Valid
	II5	0,838		Valid
	II6	0,854		Valid
	II7	0,807		Valid
	II8	0,864		Valid
	II9	0,841		Valid
	II10	0,887		Valid
	II11	0,869		Valid
	II12	0,850		Valid
	II13	0,860		Valid
	II14	0,854		Valid

	II15	0,864		Valid
	II16	0,848		Valid
	KK1	0,786		Valid
	KK2	0,858		Valid
	KK3	0,795		Valid
Employee Creativity	KK4	0,862	> 0,5	Valid
	KK5	0,814		Valid
	KK6	0,827		Valid
	KK7	0,805		Valid

Ghozali said the test findings were credible if the construction reliability value was  $> 0.70$  and had a variance extracted value. The results of this study revealed that the importance of C.R and AVE on the five research variables was more than 0.70 and 0.5 for each variable. Based on these data, it is possible to conclude that the complete research instrument is reliable and usable in this study [20].

According to table 2, all variables in this study have Construct Reliability (CR)  $> 0.7$  and VE  $> 0.5$ . Therefore, this study's construct indicators of transformational leadership, innovation climate, and employee creativity are credible.

Table 2. Reliability test

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Factor Loading 2	Standard Measurement Error
Transformational leadership	KT1	0,829	0,687	0,313
	KT2	0,859	0,738	0,262
	KT3	0,856	0,733	0,267
	KT4	0,866	0,750	0,250
	KT5	0,875	0,766	0,234
	KT6	0,841	0,707	0,293
	KT7	0,830	0,689	0,311
	KT8	0,856	0,733	0,267
	KT9	0,838	0,702	0,298
	KT10	0,868	0,753	0,247
	KT11	0,842	0,709	0,291
	KT12	0,882	0,778	0,222
	KT13	0,882	0,778	0,222
	KT14	0,856	0,733	0,267
	KT15	0,839	0,704	0,296
Innovation Climate	II1	0,813	0,661	0,339
	II2	0,853	0,728	0,272
	II3	0,782	0,612	0,388
	II4	0,821	0,674	0,326
	II5	0,838	0,702	0,298
	II6	0,854	0,729	0,271
	II7	0,807	0,651	0,349
	II8	0,864	0,746	0,254
	II9	0,841	0,707	0,293
	II10	0,887	0,787	0,213
	II11	0,869	0,755	0,245
	II12	0,850	0,723	0,278
	II13	0,860	0,740	0,260
	II14	0,854	0,729	0,271
	II15	0,864	0,746	0,254
	II16	0,848	0,719	0,281
Employee Creativity	KK1	0,786	0,618	0,382
	KK2	0,858	0,736	0,264
	KK3	0,795	0,632	0,368
	KK4	0,862	0,743	0,257
	KK5	0,814	0,663	0,337
	KK6	0,827	0,684	0,316
	KK7	0,805	0,648	0,352

Flow analysis can explain how strong the influence of a variable is on other variables, either directly or indirectly.

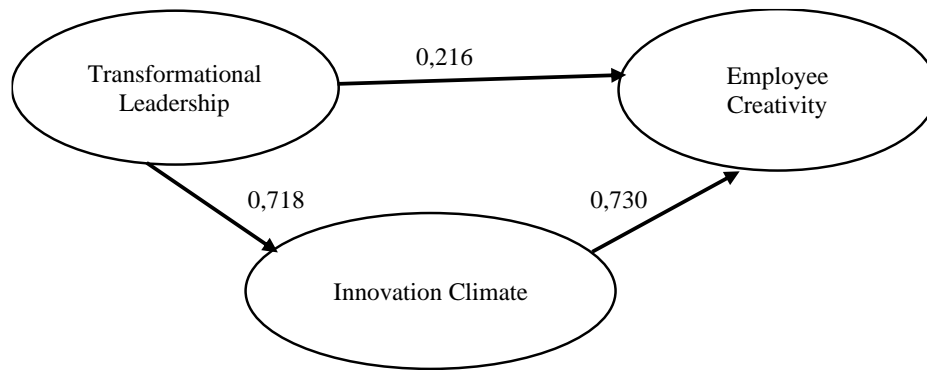


Figure 2. Path Analysis of the Research Model

The picture above shows the visualization of the path analysis (path analysis) of the research model, which consists of 3 paths, namely:

- Transformational Leadership → Employee Creativity
- Transformational Leadership → Innovation Climate
- Innovation Climate → Employee Creativity

Direct effect shows the coefficient of influence from the independent variable to the dependent variable. The results of the direct effect test between variables are shown in the table below.

Table 3. Direct Influence Test Results

	Transformational Leadership	Innovation Climate	Employee Creativity
Innovation Climate	.718	.000	.000
Employee Creativity	.216	.730	.000

Source: Primary data processed, 2022

The results of the direct effect test in the table above show that the immediate effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Creativity is 0.216, and the Innovation Climate is 0.718. The direct influence of the Innovation Climate on Employee Creativity is 0.730.

The indirect effect shows the coefficient of influence from the independent variable to the dependent variable through an intermediary variable (mediation). The results of the direct effect test between variables are shown in the table below.

Table 4. Indirect Influence Test Results

	Transformational Leadership	Innovation Climate	Employee Creativity
Innovation Climate	.000	.000	.000
Employee Creativity	.524	.000	.000

Source: Primary data processed, 2022

The results of the indirect effect test in the table above show that the indirect effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Creativity through the Innovation Climate is 0.524. This shows that the indirect impact of the Transformational Leadership variable on Employee Creativity through the Innovation Climate as mediation is more significant than its direct influence. This means that the Innovation Climate variable has a positive mediating role in the effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Creativity.

Based on the description of the table above, the indirect effect on the Transformational Leadership variable is greater than the direct effect on Employee Creativity. Furthermore, the total impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable is as follows:

Table 5. Results Total Influence

	Transformational Leadership	Innovation Climate	Employee Creativity
Innovation Climate	.718	.000	.000
Employee Creativity	.740	.730	.000

Source: Primary data processed, 2022

Based on the results of the total influence test in the table above shows that the total effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Creativity is a total of 0.740.

Calculation of SMC (Squared Multiple Correlation) shows how much influence the independent variable explains the variance of the dependent variable [21]. The results of the Squared Multiple Correlation (SMC) tests on the dependent variable of the study are presented in the table below:

Tabel 6. Squared Multiple Correlation Test Results

	Estimate
Innovation Climate	.515
Employee Creativity	.807

Source: Primary data processed, 2022

Based on the squared multiple correlation test in the table above, the results can be explained as follows:

- Innovation Climate Variables, The coefficient of determination of the Innovation Climate variable is 0.515, which shows that the contribution made by Transformational Leadership is 51.5%. In comparison, other factors outside the research model influence the remaining 48.5% (100% -51.5%).
- Employee Creativity Variable, The coefficient of determination of the Employee Creativity variable is 0.807, which shows that the contribution made by Transformational Leadership and Innovation Climate is 80.7%. In comparison, other factors outside the research model influence the remaining 19.3% (100% -80.7%).

Hypothesis testing is done to answer the questions in this study or to analyze the structural model relationships. Hypothetical data analysis can be seen from the value of the standardized regression weight, which shows the coefficient of influence between variables in the following table.

Table 7. Hypothesis test results

			Est	S.E.	C.R.	P	Hypothesis
Transformational Leadership	→	Employee Creativity	.222	.074	2.978	0,003	Significant Positives
Transformational Leadership	→	Innovation Climate	.703	.088	8.025	0,000	Significant Positives
Innovation Climate	→	Employee Creativity	.765	.099	7.719	0,000	Significant Positives

Source: Primary data processed, 2022

Based on table 6 it can be explained the relationship between variables.

### 3.1. The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Employee Creativity

The estimated parameter value of the estimated regression weight coefficient is 0.222 and the CR value is 2.978, this shows that there is a relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Creativity. This means that the better Transformational Leadership will increase Employee Creativity. The testing of the connection between the two variables reveals a probability value of 0.003 ( $p < 0.05$ ), supporting the hypothesis (H1) that "transformational leadership has a beneficial effect on employee creativity", is supported.

### 3.2. The Effect of Transformational Leadership on the Innovation Climate

The estimated parameter value of the estimated regression weight coefficient is 0.703 and the CR value is 8.025, this shows that there is a relationship between Transformational Leadership and the Innovation Climate. This means that the better Transformational Leadership will improve the Innovation Climate. Testing the connection between the two variables reveals a probability value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), hence (H2) asserts, "Transformational leadership has a beneficial effect on the innovation atmosphere.

### 3.3. The Effect of Innovation Climate on Employee Creativity

The estimated parameter value of the calculated regression weight coefficient is 0.765, and the CR value is 7.719, indicating that Innovation Climate and Employee Creativity are related. This indicates that the stronger the Innovation Climate, the more creative the workforce will be. Testing the connection between the two variables reveals a probability value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), therefore supporting (H3), which asserts, "The innovation atmosphere positively influences employee creativity".

### 3.4. The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Employee Creativity as Mediated by Innovation Climate

According to the research findings, Transformational Leadership has an indirect influence on Employee Creativity via an Innovation Climate score of 0.524%. The direct effect is 0.216 so that the total effect is  $0.216 + 0.524 = 0.740$ . The importance of the influence of Transformational Leadership on Employee Creativity through the Innovation Climate may be evaluated using the Sobel Test in the following manner:

Input:		Test statistic:	Std. Error:	p-value:
a	0.703	Sobel test:	5.55410818	0.09682833
b	0.765	Aroian test:	5.53176278	0.09721946
s <sub>a</sub>	0.088	Goodman test:	5.57672658	0.0964356
s <sub>b</sub>	0.099	Reset all	Calculate	

Source: Primary data processed, 2022

Figure 3. Sobel test results concerning the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity with innovation climate mediation as a mediation variable

From the results of the Sobel test calculation above, a value of 5.554 is obtained, because the value of  $5.554 > 1.96$  with a significance level of  $0.000 < 0.05$  then proves that (H4) which states "Climate of innovation mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity", is supported.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion reached by this research are: 1) Employee creativity is enhanced through transformational leadership. 2) Transformational leadership has a positive effect on the innovation climate. 3) Innovation atmosphere influences employee creativity positively. 4) Transformational leadership has a favorable effect on staff creativity, which is mediated through the innovation atmosphere.

The consequence of this research is that startup companies must cultivate transformational leadership among their workers and cultivate an innovation-friendly environment in order to encourage employee creativity on a periodic basis.

This research certainly has many limitations, including: 1) There are many factors that can measure employee creativity. However, in this study the factors that influence employee creativity consist of only two variables, namely transformational leadership, and innovation climate. 2) When collecting data, there are answers given by respondents that do not show the actual situation. This is due to differences in thinking and different understanding, as well as the honesty factor in the answers given by respondents in the questionnaire.

Based on the research conducted, the following are suggestions from researchers to bring out the creativity possessed by an employee, including the role of a leader is one of the important factors in bringing out the creativity of employees. For this reason, a leader needs to take good approaches to employees by communicating and encouraging them to always work in accordance with the vision, mission and values of the company. In addition, leaders must also provide equal opportunities and opportunities for every employee to be able to work and participate optimally in achieving the company's vision, mission and goals without coercion. A leader must also be able to provide a sense of security and comfort by supporting and defending employees when problems occur.

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