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TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION IN GENERATION Z: THE ROLE OF CREATIVE SELF-EFFICACY

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Abstract

Amid mounting bureaucratic complexity and performance demands, public organizations increasingly rely on employees' innovative work behavior (IWB) to remain adaptive and effective. This study examines the effect of transformational leadership on IWB among Generation Z employees in a State Financial Management Organization, focusing on the mediating role of creative self-efficacy. Data were collected through a survey of 351 respondents using purposive sampling and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via LISREL. The results reveal that while transformational leadership has a significant direct effect on IWB, its indirect effect through creative self-efficacy is stronger. This underscores the importance of employees' belief in their creative capabilities as a key psychological mechanism linking leadership style to innovative behavior. Theoretically, this study contributes to the leadership and innovation literature in Indonesia's public sector context, particularly concerning the underexplored Generation Z workforce. Practically, the findings highlight the need to foster work environments that enhance creative self-efficacy and promote leadership that is not only visionary but also psychologically empowering.

Keywords: Creative Self-Efficacy, Generation Z, Transformational Leadership, Innovative Work Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Innovation remains a critical driver of organizational adaptability and effectiveness, especially within public sector institutions facing increasing demands and bureaucratic rigidity. In this context, employees' innovative work behavior (IWB) has emerged as a key enabler for sustained reform and service improvement. However, innovation efforts in the public sector often face significant obstacles due to hierarchical structures, rigid procedures, and risk-averse cultures (Hameli et al., 2025; Muñoz et al., 2022). For example, Indonesia's ranking of 64th in the 2024 E-Government Development Index reflects continuing challenges in building innovative governance systems.

Organizational innovation is fundamentally driven by individual behaviors. IWB comprises proactive efforts by employees to identify problems, generate creative ideas, promote novel solutions, and implement changes (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Ramamoorthy et al., 2005). Without such employee engagement, institutional innovation remains unlikely to materialize (Coetzer et al., 2018; Janssen, 2000). As a result, fostering IWB has become a strategic priority, particularly in environments seeking agility and continuous improvement (Iqbal et al., 2023).

The growing presence of Generation Z in the public workforce adds a new dimension to this challenge. As digital natives, they tend to value autonomy, flexibility, and purpose-driven work (Mahmoud et al., 2021). However, they also exhibit tendencies such as "quiet quitting" when faced with unengaging or unsupportive environments (Hameli et al., 2025; Moss, 2021). These traits present both an opportunity and a risk: with the right support, Gen Z can contribute meaningfully to public innovation, but if misaligned, their potential may remain untapped.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in activating IWB, and transformational leadership (TL) has been widely recognized for its ability to inspire, empower, and intellectually stimulate employees (Bass & Avolio, 1993). In public sector settings, where top-down control is prevalent, transformational leaders may foster a more conducive transformational leadership climate for creativity and change (Afsar et al., 2014). Nevertheless, evidence about the direct effect of TL on IWB is mixed. Several studies suggest the relationship is not straightforward and may depend on intervening psychological variables (Jaskyte, 2004; Khaola & Musiiwa, 2021).

One such variable is creative self-efficacy (CSE), defined as individuals' belief in their capability to solve problems creatively and contribute original ideas (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). CSE is essential for promoting intrinsic motivation and resilience in creative tasks (Afsar & Masood, 2018). Although CSE has been identified as a key mediator in various organizational settings, its role in Indonesian public institutions—particularly among Generation Z—has not been thoroughly examined.

As Walumbwa & Hartnell (2011) argue, psychological mechanisms at the individual level are essential to understanding how leadership translates into innovation. In light of this, the present study explores the influence of transformational leadership on the IWB of Gen Z employees, emphasizing the mediating role of creative self-efficacy.

Theoretically, this research contributes to leadership and innovation literature by offering empirical evidence on psychological mediation in the public sector context. Practically, it aims to inform HR strategies that address generational expectations and foster sustainable innovation through empowering leadership.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Background

This research is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which provides a framework for understanding how transformational leadership influences innovative work behavior through creative self-efficacy.

According to SCT (Bandura, 1997), individual behavior is shaped by the interplay of cognitive beliefs, environmental factors, and personal experiences. Central to this theory is the concept of self-efficacy—particularly creative self-efficacy in this study—which refers to employees' confidence in their ability to generate and apply novel ideas in the workplace (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). This theoretical lens supports the notion that psychological mechanisms, such as self-belief, are crucial in translating leadership into innovation-driven actions.

Transformational Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior

Transformational leadership is characterized by the ability to articulate a compelling vision, promote intellectual stimulation, and provide individualized support (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Within the transforming public sector, this leadership style has been linked to enhanced innovation, as it encourages employees to challenge norms, experiment, and engage in continuous learning (Dyer et al., 2011).

Empirical studies such as Amankwaa et al. (2019), Iqbal et al. (2023), and Stanescu et al. (2021) confirm that transformational leaders can foster innovative climates by nurturing motivation and supporting creative expression. However, other investigations—such as those by Jaskyte, (2004), Khaola & Musiiwa (2021), and Udin & Dananjoyo (2024)—indicate that this influence may be mediated by psychological or contextual factors, rather than exerted directly.

Given these variations, it becomes crucial to explore how transformational leadership operates in specific settings, especially among Generation Z employees in bureaucratic environments who seek participatory, meaningful engagement.

H1: Transformational leadership positively influences innovative work behavior.

Creative Self-Efficacy as a Mediator

Creative self-efficacy (CSE) refers to one's belief in their ability to generate creative solutions (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). It has been identified as a pivotal variable in translating leadership into innovative output. Studies by Afsar & Masood (2018), Iqbal et al. (2023), and Wilaphan et al. (2023) highlight the mediating role of CSE across sectors, showing that when employees believe in their creative potential, they are more likely to engage in innovation.

Leadership that meets employees' psychological needs—such as autonomy and competence—can foster this belief (Wijayanti et al., 2025). Research by Akbari et al. (2021) and Al Wali et al. (2022) reinforces that CSE not only mediates but also buffers against challenges to innovation.

Kafeel et al. (2024) found that innovative behavior depends significantly on employees' levels of CSE, even under supportive leadership conditions.

H2: Transformational leadership positively influences creative self-efficacy.

H3: Creative self-efficacy positively influences innovative work behavior.

H4: Creative self-efficacy mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior.

Informed by the theoretical discussion and empirical insights, the conceptual model of this study is illustrated below:

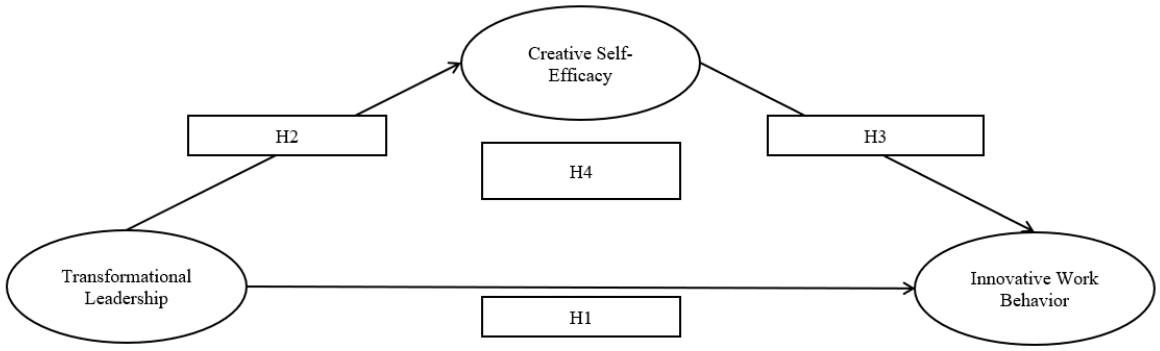

Figure 1.
Proposed Model

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research method with an explanatory design to examine the influence of transformational leadership on innovative work behavior, with creative self-efficacy as a mediating variable. The target population consisted of Generation Z employees (born between 1997 and 2012) working at the Government Financial Management Organization of the Republic of Indonesia. According to the Human Resources Bureau, this group comprised 23,952 employees.

A purposive sampling technique was applied with the following inclusion criteria: (1) the respondent must be a member of Generation Z, (2) have at least one year of work experience, and (3) voluntarily agree to participate. A total of 351 valid responses were obtained and analyzed.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire using a 7-point Likert scale. The constructs measured included:

- Transformational Leadership: 7 items adapted from Carless et al. (2000)
- Creative Self-Efficacy: 8 items adapted from Carmeli and Schaubroeck (2007)
- Innovative Work Behavior: 10 items adapted from Erhan et al. (2022)

Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) was employed for data analysis using LISREL 8.8. The analytical process comprised two stages: (1) evaluation of the measurement model and (2) structural model testing. Construct validity and reliability were assessed through standardized loading factors (SLF), construct reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The overall model fit was evaluated using indices such as GFI, RMSEA, CFI, and TLI. Mediation was examined by evaluating the significance of indirect effects within the model.

This methodological approach was selected to provide a robust analysis of the psychological mechanisms linking leadership behavior with innovation in the public sector context among young employees.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Demographics

The study surveyed 351 valid respondents, all of whom were Generation Z employees within the Government Financial Management Organization of the Republic of Indonesia. Demographic data were collected to provide a contextual understanding of the sample's characteristics.

The gender distribution showed that 58.40% of the participants were female, while 41.60% were male. In terms of educational background, the majority held an Associate Degree (Diploma III) (59.54%), followed by those with below Associate Degree qualifications (23.93%), Bachelor's Degrees (15.67%), and Master's Degrees (0.85%). This reflects a workforce primarily composed of vocational graduates with a modest representation of higher education holders.

Geographically, respondents were spread across Indonesia's major islands. Java accounted for the largest share (44.16%), followed by Sumatra (18.52%), Sulawesi (12.54%), and Kalimantan (10.83%). Smaller proportions were based in Papua (4.84%), Maluku (3.13%), Nusa Tenggara (3.13%), and Bali (2.85%). This distribution aligns with the organization's regional deployment patterns, making the sample suitable for analyzing generational and leadership-related dynamics across diverse public sector setting.

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	205	58,40%
	Male	146	41,60%
Educational Attainment	Below Associate Degree	84	23,93%
	Associate Degree (D3)	209	59,54%
	Bachelor's Degree (D4/S1)	55	15,67%
	Master's Degree (S2)	3	0,85%
Region	Sumatra	65	18,52%
	Java	155	44,16%
	Kalimantan	38	10,83%
	Bali	10	2,85%
	Nusa Tenggara	11	3,13%
	Sulawesi	44	12,54%
	Maluku	11	3,13%
	Papua	17	4,84%

Measurement Model

To analyze the measurement model, this study followed the criteria established by Hair et al. (2019), which recommend evaluating standardized loading factors (SLF), construct reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) to assess the validity and reliability of each construct. An SLF value of 0.50 or higher is generally acceptable, and items with values between 0.30 and 0.50 may be retained if justified theoretically—particularly when supported by a large sample size, as in this study.

Construct reliability was evaluated using CR and AVE. CR values above 0.70 and AVE values above 0.50 were considered satisfactory. All constructs in this study—transformational leadership, creative self-efficacy, and innovative work behavior—met these thresholds, confirming acceptable internal consistency and convergent validity.

Innovative work behavior was modeled as a second-order construct comprising four first-order dimensions: idea exploration, idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation. Each dimension was measured using multiple indicators. The second-order construct approach allowed for a more nuanced examination of innovative behavior by capturing its multidimensional nature. All indicators had SLF values above 0.70, and the associated CR and AVE values exceeded the recommended thresholds.

Thus, both first-order and second-order constructs were validated for inclusion in the structural model, ensuring that subsequent hypothesis testing was based on reliable and valid measures.

Table 2.
Validity and Reliability Test of First-Order and Second-Order Constructs

Variable	Code	SLF	CR	AVE	Conclusion
Innovative Work Behavior (Erhan et al., 2022)			0.956	0.844	Valid and Reliable
Idea Exploration		0.99	0.696	0.533	Valid and Reliable
	IWB1.1	0.71			
	IWB1.2	0.75			
Idea Generation		0.90	0.898	0.750	Valid and Reliable
	IWB2.1	0.78			
	IWB2.2	0.87			
	IWB2.3	0.94			
Idea Promotion		0.85	0.891	0.802	Valid and Reliable
	IWB3.1	0.87			
	IWB3.2	0.92			
Idea Implementation		0.93	0.876	0.704	Valid and Reliable
	IWB3.1	0.91			
	IWB3.2	0.75			
	IWB3.3	0.85			
Transformational Leadership (Carless et al., 2000)			0.938	0.683	Valid and Reliable
	TFL1	0.77			

Variable	Code	SLF	CR	AVE	Conclusion
	TFL2	0.83			
	TFL3	0.83			
	TFL4	0.86			
	TFL5	0.82			
	TFL6	0.86			
	TFL7	0.81			
Creative Self-Efficacy (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007)			0.924	0.607	Valid and Reliable
	CSE1	0.70			
	CSE2	0.78			
	CSE3	0.72			
	CSE4	0.82			
	CSE5	0.90			
	CSE6	0.82			
	CSE7	0.72			
	CSE8	0.75			

Structural Model Goodness of Fit

Following the evaluation of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed to determine how well it fits the empirical data. This evaluation employed three types of fit indices: absolute, incremental, and parsimony fit indices. A model is generally considered acceptable if at least three to four key indices meet the recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2019).

The results demonstrated that the structural model achieved a satisfactory fit. Key indices included RMSEA = 0.0685, Chi-square/df = 2.75, NFI = 0.9690, TLI = 0.9771, and CFI = 0.9800, all of which indicate a good fit. Although GFI = 0.8941 and AGFI = 0.8649 were slightly below the ideal thresholds, they remained within an acceptable range, particularly given the model's complexity and sample size. These findings validate the suitability of the proposed model for further hypothesis testing.

Table 3.
Goodness of Fit Test Result

Fit Index Category	Criterion	Result	Interpretation
Absolute Fit Indices			
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	GFI > 0.90 = good fit	0,8941	Marginal fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	RMSEA ≤ 0.08 = good fit	0,0685	Good fit
Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR)	SRMR < 0.08 = good fit	0,0391	Good fit
Normed Chi-Square	≤ 3.00	410,06 / 149 ≈ 2,75	Good fit
Incremental Fit Indices			

Fit Index Category	Criterion	Result	Interpretation
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	NFI close to 1 = better fit	0,9690	Good fit
Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) / Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI)	NNFI > 0.95 = good fit	0,9771	Good fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	CFI > 0.95 = good fit	0,9800	Good fit
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	RFI ≥ 0.90 = good fit	0,9645	Good fit
Parsimony Fit Indices			
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	AGFI > 0.90 = good fit	0,8649	Marginal fit
Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	PNFI close to 1 = better fit	0,8444	Acceptable

Hypotheses Testing

Based on the validated structural model, the study proceeded to test the hypothesized relationships using Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) in LISREL 8.8. Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level using a one-tailed test, guided by directional expectations from prior theory.

The analysis confirmed that all proposed hypotheses were supported. Transformational leadership had a significant positive effect on creative self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 6.12$), and creative self-efficacy, in turn, positively influenced innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.61$, $t = 11.20$). The direct effect of transformational leadership on innovative work behavior was also statistically significant, though relatively weak ($\beta = 0.10$, $t = 2.16$). Importantly, the indirect effect of transformational leadership on innovative work behavior through creative self-efficacy was stronger ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 5.77$), suggesting that creative self-efficacy plays a dominant mediating role.

These results provide empirical support for the proposed model, reinforcing the notion that creative self-efficacy is a critical psychological mechanism linking transformational leadership to innovative work behavior.

Table 4.
Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Relationship	Coefficient	t-Value	Significance	Conclusion
Transformational Leadership → Innovative Work Behavior (direct)	0.10	2.16	Significant positive	Hypothesis supported
Transformational Leadership → Creative Self-Efficacy	0.35	6.12	Significant positive	Hypothesis supported
Creative Self-Efficacy → Innovative Work Behavior	0.61	11.20	Significant positive	Hypothesis supported
Transformational Leadership → Innovative Work Behavior (indirect via CSE)	0.22	5.77	Significant positive	Hypothesis supported
Transformational Leadership → Innovative Work Behavior (total effect)	0.32	5.89	Significant positive	Hypothesis supported

Discussion

This study examined the effect of transformational leadership on innovative work behavior among Generation Z employees in the Government Financial Management Organization of Indonesia, with creative self-efficacy as a mediating variable. The results show that while the direct impact of transformational leadership on innovative work behavior is statistically significant, its magnitude is relatively weak. In contrast, the indirect effect through creative self-efficacy is substantially stronger and statistically significant, suggesting that creative self-efficacy serves as the primary pathway through which leadership influences innovation.

These findings align with the perspective that innovative work behavior constitutes an extra-role behavior that depends significantly on individuals' belief in their creative abilities (Amankwaa et al., 2019; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Creative self-efficacy emerged as the dominant mediating mechanism, consistent with the works of Iqbal et al. (2023) and Afsar & Masood (2018), which underscore the role of internal psychological resources in enabling innovation. In a hierarchical bureaucratic setting, such as the Government Financial Management Organization, innovation is more likely to be driven by intrinsic motivation and psychological confidence rather than structural incentives.

Notably, the Generation Z respondents exhibited high levels of creative self-efficacy, indicating strong potential for innovative contributions. However, this potential may remain untapped in the absence of institutional structures that nurture and support innovation. As Hameli et al. (2025) highlight, rigid public sector frameworks can hinder innovation if not complemented by empowering leadership and psychologically safe work environments.

Overall, these findings reinforce the importance of equipping leaders with the capacity to build employees' creative self-belief alongside setting strategic directions. Figure 2 visually presents the tested model, illustrating the direction, strength (β), and statistical significance (t-values) of each relationship.

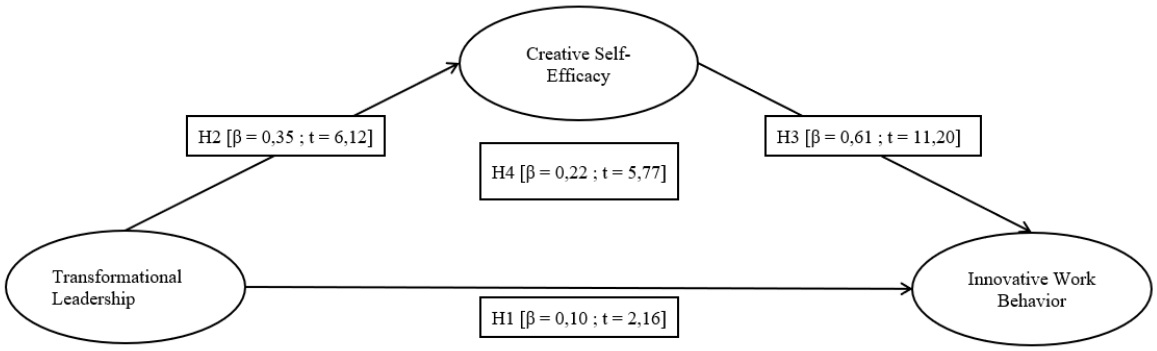

Figure 2.
Results of the Structural Model Analysis

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that transformational leadership positively affects innovative work behavior among Generation Z public employees, primarily through the mediating role of creative self-efficacy. While the direct effect is statistically significant, the indirect effect via creative self-efficacy is more substantial. This underscores the importance of fostering employees' belief in their creative potential to translate leadership influence into innovative performance.

Creative self-efficacy not only emerges as a critical psychological outcome of transformational leadership but also as the central mechanism converting leadership into innovative action. These insights are particularly relevant in public sector environments where procedural rigidity can suppress creativity unless balanced with empowering leadership approaches.

Theoretical Implications

This study provides a valuable theoretical contribution to the leadership and innovation literature in public sector contexts. By highlighting the mediating role of creative self-efficacy, the study reaffirms the relevance of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997) and its emphasis on self-beliefs as drivers of behavior. It adds empirical support for understanding how transformational leadership fosters innovation through psychological mechanisms.

Additionally, the study offers context-specific insights by focusing on Generation Z—a cohort that remains underrepresented in innovation research within bureaucratic settings. It also confirms the validity of key measurement instruments in the Indonesian public sector context, paving the way for future applications.

Overall, the findings emphasize the need for integrative theoretical models that account for the interplay between leadership, psychological enablers, and generational dynamics in driving innovative outcomes.

Practical Implications

The results yield several practical recommendations for human resource development in the Government Financial Management Organization and other public institutions.

First, organizations should redesign human resource management systems to support the entire innovation process—from idea generation to implementation. This includes simplifying innovation submission mechanisms, creating safe spaces for idea sharing, and incorporating innovation metrics into performance appraisals.

Second, leadership development programs must prioritize emotional intelligence and contextual awareness. Generation Z employees benefit from leaders who provide strategic guidance while also supporting psychological autonomy and creative expression. Initiatives such as mentoring, meaningful feedback dialogues, and visibility of transformational leaders as role models should be emphasized.

Third, organizations should implement structured initiatives to foster creative self-efficacy. This may include small-scale pilot projects, process-focused innovation storytelling, and reflective coaching. Enhancing employees' belief in their creative capabilities can drive sustained innovation even in rigid environments.

By adopting these strategies, public sector institutions can unlock the innovative potential of younger employees and foster a resilient and adaptive organizational culture that meets the demands of modern governance.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that offer directions for future research. First, the sample was limited to Generation Z employees within a single government agency, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other

institutions or generational cohorts. Future studies should broaden their scope to include diverse organizational settings and intergenerational samples.

Second, the study's theoretical framework included only three variables—transformational leadership, creative self-efficacy, and innovative work behavior—accounting for 43% of the explained variance in IWB. Future research should consider incorporating additional variables such as intrinsic motivation, psychological empowerment, affective commitment, or job autonomy to enhance model comprehensiveness.

Third, the unequal distribution of respondents across regional offices limited the ability to perform comparative analyses by organizational unit. Future research should utilize stratified sampling techniques to ensure balanced representation across units or regions.

Lastly, the use of self-reported, cross-sectional survey data introduces the potential for common method bias and restricts causal inference. Longitudinal or mixed-method designs are recommended to examine changes over time and triangulate data sources.

Addressing these limitations will help refine the theoretical and practical understanding of how transformational leadership and psychological mechanisms interact to promote innovation among public sector employees.

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