

Transformational and Transactional Leadership in Relation to Job Performance: Evidence from PULAPOL Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

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Abstract

Leadership is a critical organisational mechanism for translating institutional objectives into employee behaviour and performance, particularly in uniformed public organisations where discipline, accountability and operational readiness coexist with the need for motivation and development. This study examines the relationships between transformational and transactional leadership and job performance among personnel at the Police Training Centre (PULAPOL), Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was used, employing a census approach with a population of 175 personnel. We retained 150 complete questionnaires for analysis, representing an 85.7% response rate. The instrument comprised 10 transformational-leadership items and 11 transactional-leadership items adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, together with 12 job-performance items reflecting task and contextual performance. Data were analysed using SPSS version 29 through descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson correlation and multiple regression. The constructs demonstrated satisfactory to very high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of .963 for transformational leadership, .769 for transactional leadership and .966 for job performance. Transformational leadership was moderately and positively associated with job performance ($r = .556$, $p < .001$), whereas transactional leadership demonstrated a weaker but significant bivariate relationship ($r = .256$, $p = .002$). The multiple regression model was significant, $F(2,147) = 33.957$, $p < .001$, and explained 31.6% of the variance in job performance ($R^2 = .316$). Transformational leadership remained a significant unique predictor ($\beta = .527$, $p < .001$), while transactional leadership was not significant after transformational leadership was controlled ($\beta = .091$, $p = .209$). The findings suggest that inspirational, developmental and role-modelling behaviours have greater unique relevance to performance in the study setting. At the same time, transactional mechanisms remain important for clarifying standards, accountability and routine compliance.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Job Performance, Public Sector, Uniformed Organisation, Police Training, Pulapol, Malaysia

Introduction

Leadership is a central organisational process through which employees interpret institutional goals, prioritise work and understand their relationship with the organisation. In public-sector settings, leadership extends beyond issuing instructions because leaders are also expected to promote accountability, integrity, motivation and trust. Effective leaders connect institutional mandates with employees' everyday experiences so that personnel understand not only what must be done, but also why their work matters to the wider organisational mission (Hennessey, 1998; Ohemeng et al., 2018).

Job performance is likewise a multidimensional construct. It encompasses behaviours associated with core work tasks as well as contextual behaviours such as cooperation, responsibility and support for the organisational environment. Campbell and Wiernik (2015) argue that performance should be understood primarily in terms of behaviours under an individual's control and relevant to organisational goals. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) distinguish task performance, which concerns core job functions, from contextual performance, which includes helping behaviour, conscientiousness and contributions to the social environment.

The relationship between leadership and performance is particularly important in uniformed organisations. PULAPOL operates within a clear hierarchy and emphasises discipline, procedural compliance, readiness and public responsibility. Such conditions require precise direction and dependable control mechanisms. At the same time, personnel are expected to demonstrate problem-solving ability, commitment, continuous learning and willingness to assume responsibilities beyond routine requirements. Leadership that relies too heavily on commands and sanctions may secure minimum compliance without cultivating sustained engagement, whereas leadership that provides autonomy without clear standards may create ambiguity.

Transformational and transactional leadership offer complementary perspectives on this tension. Transformational leadership emphasises vision, inspiration, role modelling, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration, while transactional leadership emphasises explicit exchanges between performance and rewards, together with monitoring and corrective action (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985, 1990). These approaches should not automatically be treated as mutually exclusive. In practice, leaders may require transactional mechanisms to maintain standards and discipline while using transformational behaviours to build motivation, learning and commitment.

The present study focuses on personnel at PULAPOL Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Although leadership-performance relationships have been widely studied in education, business and public administration, empirical evidence from Malaysian police-training institutions remains comparatively limited. The distinctive combination of hierarchy, operational discipline, training responsibilities and public-security demands makes PULAPOL an important context for examining whether transformational and transactional leadership relate differently to job performance.

Problem Statement and Research Gap

Performance in public organisations is commonly reflected in timeliness, task quality, discipline, productivity, procedural compliance and teamwork. However, these outcomes do not depend exclusively on technical competence. How supervisors set expectations, provide feedback, respond to mistakes and recognise contributions can strengthen or weaken employee motivation and performance. Jacobsen and Andersen (2015) demonstrate that intended leadership practices and leadership as actually perceived by employees may differ, highlighting the importance of employees' lived experience of leadership.

Transactional leadership has a strong functional rationale in uniformed organisations. Clear instructions, defined responsibilities, performance standards and corrective action help maintain accountability and reduce operational ambiguity. Conditional rewards can clarify expected outcomes, while active monitoring may identify deviations before they become serious. Nevertheless, excessive reliance on exchange and control may constrain intrinsic motivation. Judge and Piccolo's (2004) meta-analysis indicates that although contingent reward can be positively associated with leadership outcomes, transformational leadership generally demonstrates more consistent validity across a range of criteria.

Transformational leadership may be particularly relevant because it provides meaning, role modelling, intellectual challenge and individual support. Malaysian public-sector studies report positive relationships between transformational leadership and employee performance (Ahmad, 2020; Abdul Halim et al., 2023). Related evidence from education also indicates positive associations between transformational leadership and performance (Suzyanty et al., 2021; Lester Surai & Muhamad Suhaimi Taat, 2024). However, these findings cannot simply be transferred to police-training institutions because organisational culture, authority structures and task risks differ.

The empirical issue addressed in this study is therefore not only whether each leadership style is associated with job performance, but also whether each style contributes unique explanatory power when both are examined simultaneously. A leadership style can correlate with performance in isolation but become non-significant when controlling for overlapping variance with another style. Examining both bivariate and multivariate relationships provides a more precise basis for leadership development decisions.

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The study has two primary objectives: (1) to determine the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance among personnel at PULAPOL Kota Kinabalu; and (2) to determine the relationship between transactional leadership and job performance. The study also examines the relative contribution of the two leadership styles when entered simultaneously in a multiple-regression model.

Hypothesis	Proposed relationship	Expected direction
H1	Transformational leadership → Job performance	Positive and significant
H2	Transactional leadership → Job performance	Positive and significant

H1: Transformational leadership is positively and significantly related to job performance among personnel at PULAPOL Kota Kinabalu.

H2: Transactional leadership is positively and significantly related to job performance among personnel at PULAPOL Kota Kinabalu.

Literature Review

Leadership in Public and Uniformed Organisations

Leadership involves influencing individuals or groups to understand required actions, accept shared objectives and coordinate efforts toward organisational goals. Yukl (2013) emphasises that effective leadership involves influence, situational adaptation and relationship management rather than formal authority alone. In public organisations, leaders must balance legal requirements, procedures, public interests, resource constraints and employee well-being. Consequently, leadership effectiveness is assessed not only through efficiency but also through integrity, fairness and accountability.

Uniformed organisations add an important dimension because formal chains of command can facilitate rapid coordination while potentially constraining upward feedback. Leaders must therefore distinguish situations that require direct instruction from those in which dialogue, participation and learning are more appropriate. A contingency perspective suggests that no single leadership style is optimal across all circumstances. Routine tasks and high-risk situations may require stronger structure, whereas complex problems, learning and competency development require meaning, confidence and opportunities for reflection (Yukl, 2013).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership originated prominently in Burns' (1978) distinction between transactional exchanges and leadership that transforms aspirations, values and shared purpose. Bass (1985) subsequently developed the concept by proposing that transformational leaders can raise followers' motivation beyond formal exchange relationships. Bass and Avolio (1994) identify four widely recognised dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration.

Idealised influence concerns leaders acting as ethical and credible role models. Inspirational motivation involves communicating goals in ways that create meaning and commitment. Intellectual stimulation encourages employees to question assumptions, solve problems and identify improvements within legitimate organisational boundaries. Individual consideration involves coaching, support, recognition of individual differences and opportunities for development. These behaviours can strengthen motivation, trust, competence and adaptive problem-solving.

The present study uses 10 items adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to capture employees' perceptions of supervisory behaviours including motivation, ethical modelling, openness to views, encouragement of innovation, coaching, direction, critical thinking, objective clarification, concern for welfare and appreciation of contributions (Avolio & Bass, 1995).

Transformational leadership may affect performance through several mechanisms. Vision and meaningful work can strengthen intrinsic motivation; trust can reduce uncertainty; coaching can build knowledge and confidence; intellectual stimulation can improve problem-solving; and individual recognition can strengthen employees' sense of value. Sudha et al. (2023), for example, identify organisational commitment as a mechanism linking transformational leadership with public-service employee performance, while Saadah and Agustiyara (2024) connect transformational leadership with public-sector innovation capability.

Empirical Evidence on Transformational Leadership and Performance

The empirical literature generally supports a positive association between transformational leadership and performance. Judge and Piccolo (2004) found transformational leadership to be related to multiple effectiveness criteria, including motivation, satisfaction and performance. Malaysian public-sector evidence similarly reports positive relationships (Ahmad, 2020; Abdul Halim et al., 2023). Studies in educational institutions have also reported positive associations between transformational leadership and teacher or administrative performance (Suzyanty et al., 2021; Lester Surai & Muhamad Suhaimi Taat, 2024).

Evidence from security organisations is particularly relevant. Alsuwaidi and Mansor (2022) reported a relationship between transformational leadership and police performance through knowledge management. This suggests that leadership can influence performance not only through direct motivational processes but also through how knowledge is shared and used. Nevertheless, cross-sectional evidence cannot establish causal direction, and self-reported performance may introduce common-method or social-desirability bias.

Taken together, the literature supports H1 while indicating that the magnitude of the relationship may depend on organisational culture, task structure and measurement approach.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is based on exchanges between leaders and followers. Leaders clarify tasks, set standards and link performance to rewards or corrective action. Bass (1985) identifies contingent reward, active management-by-exception and passive management-by-exception as central transactional components. Contingent reward specifies expected outcomes and associated recognition. Active management-by-exception involves monitoring deviations and intervening before problems become serious, whereas passive management-by-exception involves intervention after problems or failures have emerged.

Transactional leadership has clear functional value in uniformed organisations. Explicit instructions reduce ambiguity, defined responsibilities support accountability, and monitoring helps maintain safety and procedural standards. Rewards may include formal recognition, praise, training opportunities or career development rather than financial incentives alone. However, transactional leadership may have limitations when it becomes dominated by minimum-target compliance, reactive supervision or perceived unfairness.

A key measurement issue is that transactional leadership includes behaviours with potentially different implications. Contingent reward may be positive, while passive management-by-exception may be weak or detrimental. Combining them into a single overall score can

therefore reduce the apparent relationship between transactional leadership and performance. This possibility is relevant when interpreting the present study's results.

Empirical Evidence on Transactional Leadership and Performance

Evidence concerning transactional leadership is more mixed than evidence concerning transformational leadership. Mahdinezhad et al. (2013) found transactional leadership associated with academic leaders' job performance, although the effect was less prominent than that of transformational leadership. Ran et al. (2024) reported that conditional rewards and punishments can influence performance through work engagement, supporting the importance of clear performance exchanges when employees perceive targets and outcomes as fair.

Shokory and Suradi (2020) found positive effects of both transformational and transactional leadership on project-team performance, while Intan Diana Sharmiza Hamlizar and Salahudin (2024) reported relationships between both styles and performance in Malaysian public higher-education institutions. These findings suggest that transactional leadership may complement transformational leadership where tasks require explicit goals, deadlines, costs and standards.

Judge and Piccolo (2004), however, demonstrate that transactional components do not operate uniformly. Contingent reward tends to show more favourable relationships than passive management-by-exception. This provides a plausible explanation for why an overall transactional score may correlate positively with performance but fail to demonstrate unique predictive power when transformational leadership is controlled. On this basis, H2 is formulated as a positive relationship hypothesis while recognising that the strength of the relationship may be smaller than that of transformational leadership.

Job Performance

Job performance in this study incorporates efficiency, effectiveness, procedural understanding, work mastery, task planning, skill development, cooperation, responsibility and organisational pride. This broad conceptualisation is consistent with the distinction between task and contextual performance proposed by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) and with Campbell and Wiernik's (2015) emphasis on performance-related behaviour.

A broader performance construct is particularly appropriate in a police-training institution because performance cannot be reduced to the volume of completed tasks. Personnel are also expected to support colleagues, learn new skills, follow procedures, demonstrate responsibility and contribute to a positive organisational climate. The conceptual model therefore positions transformational and transactional leadership as two related but distinguishable predictors of job performance.

Methodology

Research Design, Population and Sampling

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive and correlational cross-sectional design. Cross-sectional research is appropriate for collecting perceptions at a defined point in time and examining statistical relationships without experimental manipulation (Setia, 2016). The

study measured personnel perceptions of supervisory leadership behaviours and their self-reported job performance.

The population comprised 175 personnel at PULAPOL Kota Kinabalu across different units. Because the population was manageable, the study adopted a census approach and distributed questionnaires to the entire population. A total of 150 complete responses were retained for analysis, producing an 85.7% response rate. The unit of analysis was the individual employee performing official duties at PULAPOL, including senior police officers, junior police officers and civilian personnel.

The census approach reduces sampling error within the study organisation because the questionnaire was offered to the entire defined population. Nevertheless, it does not eliminate non-response bias and does not justify treating the findings as a random estimate for all police institutions in Malaysia (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Instrument and Measures

The questionnaire contained four sections. Section A collected demographic characteristics: gender, age, education, position, length of service and the gender of the respondent's supervisor. Section B measured transformational leadership using 10 items adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio & Bass, 1995). Section C contained 11 transactional-leadership items addressing responsibility clarification, performance-reward exchange, expected outcomes, feedback, monitoring, corrective action and management-by-exception behaviours. Section D measured job performance through 12 items informed by task and contextual performance concepts (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993).

All substantive items were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The instrument was prepared in Malay to suit the respondents. The adaptation emphasised retaining the intended meaning of the source constructs while ensuring that terminology was understandable in the local organisational context. Likert-type measurement is widely used to assess agreement and aggregate items into constructs when reliability and interpretation are handled appropriately (Boone & Boone, 2012; Joshi et al., 2015).

Data Collection and Ethics

Questionnaires were distributed in person, with the cooperation of relevant management and organisational units, between 14 and 30 April 2025. Respondents were informed that participation was for academic purposes, that responses should be completed individually, and that names were not required. Anonymity was intended to reduce concerns associated with reporting perceptions of supervisors and personal performance, although anonymity does not eliminate social-desirability effects (Ong & Weiss, 2000).

The authors checked completed questionnaires before entering data into SPSS version 29. The study did not report personally identifying information. For journal submission, the authors should explicitly state relevant institutional permission and ethical approval details, if obtained, along with informed-consent procedures, confidentiality arrangements and funding information required by the target journal.

Data Analysis

Analysis began with frequencies and percentages to describe the respondent profile, followed by means and standard deviations for the study constructs. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Pearson correlation was used to assess the direction and strength of linear associations among transformational leadership, transactional leadership and job performance. Multiple regression using the enter method was then employed to assess the unique contributions of both leadership styles to job performance.

Standardised beta coefficients were used to compare predictor strength, R^2 indicated the proportion of variance explained by the model, the F-test assessed overall model significance, and individual t-tests assessed predictor significance. The analysis considered regression assumptions, including linearity and multicollinearity, in accordance with standard SPSS procedures (Pallant, 2020).

Results*Respondent Profile*

The analysis included 150 complete responses. The sample was predominantly male (82.0%), with the largest age groups being 30–39 years (39.3%) and 20–29 years (38.0%). More than half of respondents held STPM or diploma qualifications (51.3%). Junior police officers represented 86.0% of the sample, while 66.7% had between one and ten years of service. Most respondents reported having male supervisors (88.7%). The sample therefore primarily represents personnel at operational or implementation levels within the organisation.

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	123	82.0
Gender	Female	27	18.0
Age	20–29	57	38.0
Age	30–39	59	39.3
Age	40–49	28	18.7
Age	>49	6	4.0
Education	SPM	50	33.3
Education	STPM/Diploma	77	51.3
Education	Bachelor's	20	13.3
Education	Master's	3	2.0
Position	Senior Police Officer	5	3.3
Position	Junior Police Officer	129	86.0
Position	Civilian Officer	16	10.7
Service	<1 year	10	6.7
Service	1–10 years	100	66.7
Service	11–20 years	33	22.0
Service	>20 years	7	4.7
Supervisor gender	Male	133	88.7
Supervisor gender	Female	17	11.3

Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

All three constructs achieved acceptable internal consistency. Transformational leadership and job performance produced very high Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .963 and .966, respectively, whereas transactional leadership produced an alpha of .769. The lower alpha for

transactional leadership is still acceptable for social-science research. It may reflect the conceptual diversity of its components, including contingent reward, active monitoring and passive management-by-exception (Taber, 2018).

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD
Transformational leadership	10	.963	4.6887	.67601
Transactional leadership	11	.769	3.8091	.76357
Job performance	12	.966	4.6222	.63785

The mean transformational-leadership score of 4.69 indicates strong agreement that supervisors displayed transformational behaviours. Job performance also recorded a high mean of 4.62. Transactional leadership had a lower mean of 3.81 but remained above the midpoint. At the item level, transformational leadership means ranged from approximately 4.63 to 4.75, while transactional items varied more substantially, from approximately 2.58 to 4.55. Job performance item means ranged from 4.49 to 4.83.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis showed that both leadership styles were positively associated with job performance. Transformational leadership had a moderate positive relationship with job performance ($r = .556$, $p < .001$), whereas transactional leadership had a weak but statistically significant positive relationship ($r = .256$, $p = .002$). Transformational and transactional leadership were also positively correlated ($r = .315$, $p < .001$), indicating some overlap between the leadership styles but not an association level suggesting they represent the same construct.

Variable	Job performance	Transformational leadership	Transactional leadership
Job performance	1.000	.556***	.256**
Transformational leadership	.556***	1.000	.315***
Transactional leadership	.256**	.315***	1.000

The squared correlation between transformational leadership and job performance is approximately .309, indicating about 30.9% shared variance at the bivariate level. For transactional leadership, r^2 is approximately .066, indicating 6.6% shared variance. These figures reinforce the substantially stronger bivariate association between transformational leadership and job performance.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression was conducted to determine the unique contribution of transformational and transactional leadership when both predictors were entered simultaneously. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(2,147) = 33.957$, $p < .001$, with $R = .562$, $R^2 = .316$ and adjusted $R^2 = .307$. Thus, the two leadership variables jointly accounted for 31.6% of the variance in job performance. The remaining 68.4% may reflect other influences, such as

competence, resources, workload, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, well-being, reward systems and organisational culture.

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	2.002	.331	—	6.052	<.001	[1.349, 2.656]
Transformational leadership	.497	.068	.527	7.333	<.001	[.363, .631]
Transactional leadership	.076	.060	.091	1.261	.209	[-.043, .194]

Transformational leadership was a significant unique predictor of job performance ($\beta = .527$, $p < .001$). Holding transactional leadership constant, a one-unit increase in transformational leadership score was associated with a .497-unit increase in predicted job performance. Transactional leadership, by contrast, did not make a statistically significant unique contribution after controlling for transformational leadership ($\beta = .091$, $p = .209$). The VIF value of 1.110 for both predictors indicates that multicollinearity was not a substantive concern.

The unstandardised regression equation is: Job Performance = 2.002 + .497(Transformational Leadership) + .076(Transactional Leadership). This equation describes the observed pattern in the study sample and should not be interpreted as a universal predictive equation without external validation.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Evidence	Decision	Interpretation
H1: Transformational leadership is positively related to job performance	$r = .556$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .527$, $p < .001$	Supported	Moderate bivariate relationship and significant unique contribution
H2: Transactional leadership is positively related to job performance	$r = .256$, $p = .002$; $\beta = .091$, $p = .209$	Partially supported	Significant bivariate relationship, but no significant unique contribution

H1 is supported at both the bivariate and multivariate levels. H2 requires a more nuanced interpretation. Transactional leadership is significantly related to job performance when examined independently, but its unique contribution becomes non-significant when transformational leadership is included in the regression model. Accordingly, the most accurate interpretation is limited or partial support at the overall hypothesis level rather than a simple rejection of the transactional relationship.

Discussion

Transformational Leadership as the Stronger Predictor

The central finding is that transformational leadership is more strongly associated with job performance and remains significant after controlling for transactional leadership. The moderate correlation ($r = .556$) and standardised regression coefficient ($\beta = .527$) indicate that

transformational behaviours account for a substantial share of the leadership-related variance in performance in the study setting. This finding aligns with Bass's (1985) proposition that transformational leaders can motivate followers to exceed formal expectations.

In PULAPOL, inspirational motivation and coaching may be particularly valuable because personnel operate under conditions requiring discipline, coordination and readiness. Instructions explain what must be done, but inspirational communication and role modelling can help employees understand the purpose and significance of their responsibilities. The finding is also consistent with evidence from Malaysian public-sector settings (Ahmad, 2020; Abdul Halim et al., 2023) and related educational contexts (Suzyanty et al., 2021; Lester Surai & Muhamad Suhaimi Taat, 2024).

Transformational behaviours may operate through trust. Supervisors who model ethical standards and demonstrate consistency can increase confidence that organisational decisions serve legitimate work purposes. In hierarchical settings, trust may make personnel more willing to accept difficult decisions, communicate operational concerns and learn from mistakes. Individual consideration may also be particularly useful for personnel with one to ten years of service, who may benefit from structured coaching and competency development.

Intellectual stimulation is not incompatible with procedural discipline. In a police-training institution, it can involve improving training administration, documentation, scheduling, coordination and technology use while remaining within legal and operational boundaries. This interpretation is consistent with Saadah and Agustiyara's (2024) association between transformational leadership and public-sector innovation capability.

The Limited but Functional Role of Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership showed a weak but significant bivariate relationship with job performance, but it was not significant in the combined regression model. This does not mean transactional leadership is irrelevant. Rather, the finding indicates that the overall transactional score did not explain additional performance variance beyond that associated with transformational leadership in this sample.

Transactional mechanisms remain functionally important in uniformed organisations because personnel require clear responsibilities, measurable standards, accountability and timely corrective action. The weaker unique effect may reflect the mixture of positive and less favourable transactional components within the overall scale. Contingent reward can reinforce desired behaviour when targets are achievable, and rewards are perceived as fair. In contrast, passive management-by-exception may produce reactive supervision by delaying intervention until problems become serious (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

The moderate-low correlation between transformational and transactional leadership ($r = .315$) further suggests that supervisors may display both styles. A leader can clarify standards, monitor performance, reward achievement, coach personnel, and inspire simultaneously. When unique variance is isolated statistically, however, some of the performance-related contribution associated with transactional behaviour may overlap with transformational leadership.

Integrating Transformational and Transactional Leadership

The practical implication is not that PULAPOL should replace transactional leadership with transformational leadership. A more defensible approach is leadership integration. Transformational leadership provides vision, meaning, trust and employee development, whereas transactional leadership provides structure, boundaries, monitoring and accountability. The appropriate balance can depend on task urgency, risk, employee competence and learning requirements.

During emergencies or high-risk operations, direct instruction and procedural compliance may be essential. During training, competency development and process improvement, leaders may gain more from dialogue, coaching and intellectual stimulation. Active monitoring can be constructive when it identifies risks early and is accompanied by fair corrective feedback; passive intervention after problems become serious is less desirable.

This integrated perspective is consistent with Bass and Avolio (1994), who conceptualise transformational leadership as adding value beyond transactional foundations. Accordingly, the present findings support transformational leadership as the primary developmental orientation while retaining transactional practices as necessary management infrastructure.

Theoretical Implications

First, the findings strengthen the relevance of transformational leadership theory in a uniformed public-sector training environment. The significant unique effect of transformational leadership indicates that inspirational motivation, ethical role modelling, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration remain relevant even where hierarchy and formal procedures are strong.

Second, the findings demonstrate the importance of distinguishing bivariate relationships from unique predictor effects. Transactional leadership is positively related to performance at the correlation level but loses significance when the same model includes transformational leadership. This suggests that future research should examine transactional subdimensions separately rather than assuming that contingent reward, active management-by-exception and passive management-by-exception have equivalent effects.

Third, the R^2 of .316 indicates that leadership is an important but incomplete explanation of job performance. Future models could incorporate organisational commitment, job satisfaction, psychological well-being, organisational justice, workload and perceived organisational support. Such models would move research from the broad question of whether leadership matters toward more precise questions about mechanisms, boundary conditions and employee groups.

Practical and Managerial Implications

PULAPOL and comparable public organisations can use the findings to strengthen leadership development at multiple levels. Leadership programmes should extend beyond procedural management to include vision communication, coaching, emotional intelligence, constructive feedback, conflict management, integrity and recognition. Leadership assessment should incorporate subordinates' experiences rather than relying solely on unit-level outputs.

Performance-management systems should combine task-related indicators with behavioural indicators. Accuracy, productivity and compliance remain essential, but teamwork, learning, knowledge sharing and contributions to a healthy work environment should also be recognised. Leaders who respond only when errors occur may unintentionally encourage personnel to conceal problems; a learning-oriented climate can instead promote early reporting and correction.

Two-way communication is particularly relevant because most respondents were junior police officers. These personnel possess operational and administrative experience that may contribute to process improvement. Regular unit dialogue, after-action reviews, improvement suggestions and safe feedback channels can provide management with information that may otherwise remain at lower organisational levels.

Initiative	Key action	Monitoring indicator	Suggested period
Transformational leadership module	Vision, coaching, communication, integrity and intellectual stimulation	360-degree score; leadership-score change; participation	6–12 months
Coaching and mentoring	Pair experienced leaders with newer supervisors; scheduled development sessions.	Number of sessions; development plans; competency progress	Quarterly
Balanced performance recognition	Recognise task achievement, integrity, teamwork and innovation	Recognition distribution; fairness perceptions; KPI achievement	Monthly/quarterly
Two-way communication	Unit dialogue, after-action feedback and suggestion channels	Follow-up rate; issue-resolution time; trust score	Monthly
Active rather than passive monitoring	Early-risk detection, prompt feedback and corrective plans	Recurring issues; compliance; response time	Continuous
Employee well-being	Psychological support, stress and workload management	Support utilisation; absence; well-being index	6–12 months

Organisational Improvement Recommendations

The first recommendation is to establish a clear leadership-competency profile that combines technical capability with transformational behaviours. Leaders can be assessed through a combination of supervisor, peer and subordinate feedback. Use a 360-degree approach primarily for development to encourage honest feedback.

Second, coaching should become a routine management practice. Effective coaching involves setting goals, identifying competency gaps, providing support and giving behaviour-specific feedback. General instructions such as “improve performance” are less useful than feedback that identifies the required behaviour, standard and timeframe.

Third, recognition systems should be transparent and equitable. Transactional rewards need not be limited to financial incentives. Letters of appreciation, training opportunities, project exposure, team recognition and selected forms of flexibility can provide meaningful recognition. Criteria should be transparent so that employees do not perceive rewards as dependent on personal relationships.

Fourth, leaders should create an appropriate level of psychological safety consistent with organisational discipline. Psychological safety does not imply freedom to disregard orders; rather, it allows personnel to ask questions, report risks and acknowledge mistakes without humiliation. In training and safety environments, early reporting can prevent minor problems from becoming serious.

Fifth, leadership interventions should be evaluated systematically. Leadership, performance, commitment, absenteeism and complaint indicators can be compared before and after training programmes at aggregate unit level. This evidence-based approach can identify interventions that produce meaningful organisational improvement.

Finally, transactional leadership should be refined rather than expanded indiscriminately. KPIs should be realistic, measurable and aligned with institutional objectives. Active monitoring should identify gaps early, while disciplinary action should be reserved for serious misconduct. Competency problems are better addressed through training and coaching, and leaders should distinguish misconduct from skill deficiencies and resource constraints.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design measures variables at one point in time and therefore cannot establish causal direction. Longitudinal research could examine changes following leadership transitions or leadership-development interventions. Pre- and post-training designs would also provide stronger evidence about whether transformational-leadership capability produces subsequent performance changes.

Second, the study was conducted at one location. Organisational culture and operational characteristics at PULAPOL Kota Kinabalu may differ from those at other police-training centres or police formations. Future research should therefore consider multiple sites, including other PULAPOLs, police colleges and operational formations, to improve external validity.

Third, leadership and performance were assessed from the same respondents. This creates potential common-method and social-desirability bias. Future studies should combine subordinate perceptions with supervisor ratings, objective performance records, KPIs, attendance and peer assessments.

Fourth, the sample was dominated by male respondents and junior police officers. The relatively small numbers of senior police officers and civilian personnel limit meaningful subgroup comparisons. Larger multi-site samples with stratified representation would allow stronger tests of demographic and occupational differences.

Fifth, we treated transactional leadership as a single overall score. Future research should model contingent reward, active management-by-exception, and passive management-by-exception separately. Confirmatory factor analysis could also examine whether the adapted instrument retains its expected structure in the Malay-language and Malaysian uniformed-organisational context.

Finally, the present model contains only two leadership predictors. Future research could examine mediators such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, motivation and work engagement, as well as moderators such as tenure, task type, supervisor gender and organisational climate. Mixed-method designs involving interviews or focus groups could further explain why personnel perceive particular leadership behaviours as effective or ineffective.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that leadership is associated with job performance among personnel at PULAPOL Kota Kinabalu, but the strength and unique contribution of the two leadership styles differ. Transformational leadership shows a moderate positive relationship with job performance and remains a significant unique predictor when controlling for transactional leadership. Transactional leadership shows a weaker positive bivariate relationship but does not provide a significant unique contribution in the combined regression model.

The findings therefore support leadership development that emphasises inspiration, ethical role modelling, coaching, listening, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration. At the same time, uniformed organisations should retain transactional mechanisms that clarify targets, responsibilities, standards, rewards and corrective action. The most appropriate organisational strategy is not to choose motivation over discipline, but to integrate both. Transformational leadership can serve as the primary orientation for building commitment and capability, while transactional leadership provides the management infrastructure needed for accountability and procedural reliability.

In practical terms, PULAPOL can strengthen performance through values-based leadership development, coaching and mentoring, fair recognition, two-way communication, active monitoring and employee well-being support. These interventions should be evaluated using longitudinal and aggregate organisational evidence. Such an approach can help develop personnel who not only comply with standards but are also competent, resilient and committed to the institution's mission.

Ethical Statement, Conflict of Interest and Acknowledgement

The study was conducted for academic purposes using anonymous participation and aggregate reporting. The authors report no conflict of interest in relation to the publication of this article. The authors acknowledge the management and personnel of PULAPOL Kota Kinabalu for their cooperation in data collection. Before journal submission, the manuscript should include the specific institutional ethical approval and permission details, funding information and final corresponding-author information required by the target journal.

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