

## THE ROLE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN MANAGING PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CLUBS

### PERAN KEPEMIMPINAN TRANSFORMASIONAL DALAM MENGELOLA KLUB OLAHRAGA PROFESIONAL

**Badaruddin**

Universitas Halu Oleo

\*uddinbadar234@gmail.com

*\*Corresponding Author*

#### ABSTRACT

The professional sports industry faces high competitive and operational pressures, including performance demands, fan loyalty, sponsorship expectations, and media scrutiny. Human resource (HRM) management plays a strategic role in determining the success of professional sports clubs, yet the application of transformational leadership (TL) in this context remains limited, particularly regarding the mechanism of its influence on club performance through HRM practices. This research uses an approach/narrative review, with literature analysis from Scopus, Web of Science, and ProQuest databases (2010–2025), using keywords such as “transformational leadership,” “sports management,” and “human resource management.” The literature was analyzed based on the dimensions of TL, HRM practices, and club performance outcomes, while identifying patterns, gaps, and mediating mechanisms of HRM. The results show that the TL dimension idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration encourage motivation, job satisfaction, talent retention, and innovation for staff and athletes. Effective HRM practices, such as adaptive training, coaching, and performance management, serve as key mediators who translate the influence of TL into improved team and overall organizational performance. Effective integration of TL and HRM practices is essential for superior performance and sustainable success of professional sports clubs, and provides practical implications for managers and coaches.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Human Resource Management, Sports Clubs, Team Performance, Talent Retention

#### ABSTRACT

Industri olahraga profesional menghadapi tekanan kompetitif dan operasional yang tinggi, termasuk tuntutan performa, loyalitas penggemar, ekspektasi sponsor, dan sorotan media. Manajemen sumber daya manusia (SDM) memiliki peran strategis dalam menentukan keberhasilan klub olahraga profesional, namun penerapan kepemimpinan transformasional (TL) dalam konteks ini masih terbatas, terutama terkait mekanisme pengaruhnya terhadap kinerja klub melalui praktik HRM. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan narrative review, dengan analisis literatur dari database Scopus, Web of Science, dan ProQuest (2010–2025), menggunakan kata kunci seperti “transformational leadership”, “sports management”, dan “human resource management”. Literatur dianalisis berdasarkan dimensi TL, praktik HRM, dan outcome kinerja klub, sekaligus mengidentifikasi pola, kesenjangan, dan mekanisme mediasi HRM. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa dimensi TL idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, dan individualized consideration mendorong motivasi, kepuasan kerja, retensi talenta, dan inovasi staf serta atlet. Praktik HRM yang efektif, seperti pelatihan adaptif, coaching, dan manajemen performa, berfungsi sebagai mediator utama yang menerjemahkan pengaruh TL menjadi peningkatan kinerja tim dan organisasi secara keseluruhan. Integrasi TL dan praktik HRM yang efektif penting untuk kinerja unggul dan keberhasilan berkelanjutan klub olahraga profesional, serta memberikan implikasi praktis bagi manajer dan pelatih.

**Kata Kunci:** Kepemimpinan Transformasional, Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia, Klub Olahraga, Kinerja Tim, Retensi Talenta

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a strategic role in the success of professional sports organizations (Doherty, 1998). HR professionals in sports organizations are responsible for a variety of aspects, from recruitment and talent acquisition to legal compliance and conflict management. They also contribute to creating a positive work environment and supporting diversity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, which have been increasingly adopted by many professional sports teams in recent years (Sportsology Group, 2023).

Furthermore, modernizing HR functions is crucial for creating high-performing teams (Sportsology Group, 2023). Sports organizations need to improve their HR processes, optimize team performance, and create a better employee experience. With the help of experienced partners, sports organizations can build agile, resilient, and successful teams (Sportsology Group, 2023). The global sports industry is becoming increasingly professional with increasing investment in talent, analytics and fan experience, creating additional pressure on clubs to maintain high performance and competitiveness (Deloitte, 2025).

Modern sports fans are increasingly looking for personalized rewards and experiences tailored to their preferences, emphasizing the importance of understanding and meeting fan expectations to build sustainable loyalty (Euromonitor International, 2024). In addition, the widespread use of social media increases mental stress on athletes by exposing them to intense public scrutiny, making it essential to have psychological support and transformational leadership to help athletes manage stress and external pressures (ResearchGate, 2024).

Transformational leadership style can significantly predict athlete well-being, where basic psychological needs act as mediators of this relationship (PMC, 2024a). Additionally, transformational leadership strengthens positive relationships between coaches and athletes, which in turn increases team resilience in elite sport (PMC, 2024b). The transformational leadership behaviors of college athletic directors also impact the overall performance of athletic teams, demonstrating how TL can be applied in a professional sport management context (The Sport Journal, 2016).

Although transformational leadership (TL) has been extensively researched in the context of corporate management and business organizations, its application in the professional sports industry remains relatively limited. Most existing research focuses on the effects of TL on employee performance in companies, while professional sports clubs have unique characteristics, such as a high dependence on athlete performance, intense competitive pressure, public and media interaction, and demands for fan loyalty. These conditions create a significantly different context from corporate organizations, making findings from business studies not always directly applicable to sports management settings.

Furthermore, existing research also rarely examines the mechanism by which TL influences club performance through human resource management (HRM) practices. For example, although TL is believed to enhance motivation, job satisfaction, and staff retention, few studies systematically describe how TL dimensions—such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—interact with specific HRM practices in sports clubs to produce improved team and organizational performance. This gap highlights the need for research that not only directly assesses the relationship between TL and performance but also examines the HRM mediation pathways that serve as key linking mechanisms.

Furthermore, the current literature also pays little attention to contextual variations, such as differences in sports leagues, the level of professionalism of clubs, or the influence of external pressures from sponsors and the media. The lack of research addressing these contextual factors limits our understanding of how TL can be effectively implemented in diverse professional sports club environments. Therefore, there is a clear need for more in-depth and systematic studies of TL in sport management, with a focus on the mechanisms underlying TL. HR management that can improve club performance.

This study aims to address the existing literature gap by conducting a systematic narrative review of empirical and conceptual evidence related to transformational leadership (TL) in professional sports club management. The primary focus of this study is to review and synthesize the literature on the influence of TL on professional club performance through human resource management (HRM). Specifically, this study seeks to understand how various TL dimensions are applied in the context of sports management and how they impact staff and athlete motivation, retention, and development. Furthermore, this study aims to identify the most relevant TL dimensions for enhancing professional sports club performance. The study explores TL dimensions that have significant contributions in the unique context of sports clubs, including the ability to motivate teams, inspire innovation, and build strong working relationships between management and athletes.

This study also seeks to develop a conceptual framework and provide recommendations for future research. By integrating findings from existing literature, this study designs a conceptual model explaining the mechanisms of TL through HRM practices in improving club performance. This model is expected to serve as a guide for subsequent empirical studies, both quantitative and qualitative. Thus, this narrative review not only provides a comprehensive synthesis of knowledge but also establishes a more structured research direction relevant to professional sports management practice.

Based on the identification of literature gaps and research objectives, main research questions the focus of this study is: **“How does transformational leadership influence the professional performance of sports clubs through human resource management?”** This research aims to explore the causal relationships and mechanisms linking TL to club performance through HRM mediator variables, while also addressing the specific context of professional sports clubs. The emphasis on human resource management allows the research to explore the complex internal pathways through which TL can contribute to organizational success, including staff motivation and job satisfaction, talent development, employee retention, and the achievement of optimal team performance.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1. Type of Study

This research uses an approach/narrative review or literature review. Narrative review was chosen because the aim of the research is synthesis findings from relevant literature and identify patterns, gaps, and mechanisms that explain the relationship between transformational leadership (TL) and professional sports club performance through human resource management (HRM). This approach allows researchers to comprehensively explore the literature, integrate empirical and conceptual findings, and develop a more in-depth theoretical framework. Narrative reviews are also flexible in incorporating various types of studies, both quantitative and qualitative, thus providing a holistic picture of the sport management context.

### 2.2. Literature Search Strategy

Literature search was conducted through several leading academic databases to ensure broad research coverage and high source quality. The databases used include: Scopus, Web of Science, dan ProQuest.

In the search process, it is used specific keywords which reflects the researcher's focus, namely:

- “transformational leadership”
- “sports management”
- “human resource management”
- “team performance”
- “professional sports clubs”

Publication year limits apply between 2010–2025 to ensure that the literature studied is relevant to the latest developments in sport management and leadership practices. The types of publications included are peer-reviewed articles, international journals, and academic books to ensure academic quality and credibility of sources.

### 2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To increase the relevance and focus of the study, inclusion and exclusion criteria were systematically established:

#### Inclusion Criteria:

- Studies that discuss transformational leadership in sports organizations or professional sports clubs.
- The study examined HRM practices in sports clubs, including training, talent development, retention, and performance management.
- Studies linking TL with team or organizational performance, either directly or through the mediator variable HRM.

#### Exclusion Criteria:

- The study was conducted in non-sports sector, because the context and dynamics of leadership differ significantly.
- Literature non-peer-reviewed, popular articles, or news reports, because they do not meet academic standards.
- The study that focuses on transactional leadership or other leadership styles besides TL, to maintain the research focus on transformational leadership.

### 2.4. Literature Analysis

Once the literature is collected, the next stage is systematic analysis to synthesize findings and identify patterns. The analysis was conducted by grouping studies based on three main dimensions:

1. **Transformational Leadership (TL) Dimensions**  
Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.
2. **HRM practices involved**  
Athlete and staff competency training and development, coaching, performance management, talent retention, and job satisfaction.
3. **Club Performance Outcomes**  
Improved team performance, competition results, staff satisfaction, athlete loyalty, and overall organizational effectiveness.

This analysis aims to identify the consistency of findings, the patterns that emerge, and the literature gap which can be the basis for recommendations for future research. This approach allows for the formation of a conceptual framework which is clear about how transformational leadership affects club performance through HRM mechanisms.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Dimensions of Transformational Leadership (TL) in Sport Clubs

Transformational Leadership (TL) is recognized as an influential management approach in the context of sports clubs. The four primary dimensions of TL idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration serve as crucial pillars that enhance leadership effectiveness in professional sports club management.

Idealized Influence involves leaders developing credibility and trust through their behaviors and role modeling. In sports clubs, this is illustrated by leaders demonstrating

integrity in their interactions and maintaining consistency in strategic decision-making. Athletes and staff are likely to view such leaders as models worthy of admiration, fostering a respectful organizational culture rooted in shared values. Murray et al. emphasized that social identity within teams can be effectively enhanced through leadership behaviors that promote trust and respect, aligning with transformational leadership principles (Murray et al., 2022). Furthermore, studies suggest that transformational leaders create an environment conducive to players' holistic development, emphasizing personal achievements aligned with team goals (Amoah-Oppong, 2025).

Inspirational Motivation refers to the ability of leaders to motivate their teams through a compelling vision and achievable goals. Effective communication of this vision fosters increased motivation and dedication among athletes. Research indicates that leaders who articulate clear, challenging goals can significantly impact team morale and performance (Arthur et al., 2011). Moreover, motivational climates established by leaders can dictate the level of engagement and commitment from athletes, leading to enhanced performance (Domuschieva-Rogleva et al., 2022). The importance of setting a shared vision in sports management cannot be overstated, as it aligns individual aspirations with collective objectives (Matić, 2022).

Intellectual Stimulation encourages innovation and creative problem-solving among athletes and staff, fostering an environment where team members feel comfortable suggesting improvements and exploring new strategies. Phunsawat and Taweepornpathomkul found that effective management of athlete skill development hinges upon encouraging proactive behaviors and innovative thinking, characteristics central to the intellectual stimulation dimension of TL (Phunsawat & Taweepornpathomkul, 2016). This approach directly influences how clubs adapt to competitive pressures, driving both performance and operational efficiency.

Individualized Consideration, the final dimension, encompasses recognizing and addressing the unique needs of team members. This includes providing mentorship, career development opportunities, and psychological support, which are vital for cultivating a loyal and emotionally engaged team. The connection between individualized support and increased job satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment within sports teams highlights the significance of this dimension. Implementing youth athlete mentoring programs exemplifies how clubs can apply individualized consideration to foster long-term affiliation and dedication to the club (Amoah-Oppong, 2025).

In practice, the implementation of these TL dimensions manifests through diverse strategies within sports clubs, such as tailored coaching sessions, team-building exercises, and open communication channels. Research supports that these strategies not only enhance immediate performance outcomes but also fulfill broader development objectives for athletes and staff alike (Moradi et al., 2020; Gershgoren et al., 2016). Overall, acknowledging and integrating these dimensions can significantly influence a sports club's culture and operational success.

### **3.2. The influence of TL on HRM**

Leadership and team building play crucial roles in shaping human resource management (HRM) practices within sports clubs. These elements contribute significantly to athlete and staff motivation, job satisfaction, talent retention, and the implementation of innovative HRM practices. Transformational leadership characterized by its emphasis on inspirational motivation and individual consideration leads to heightened motivation and job satisfaction among team members. Price and Weiss Price & Weiss (2011) highlight that transformational leadership behaviors foster strong interpersonal relationships among peers in sports, which can enhance group outcomes such as unity and morale. These findings suggest that a positive leadership framework nurtures an environment where both staff and athletes

feel appreciated, thereby enhancing their commitment to the organization. Furthermore, the culture established by effective leadership can lead to improved athletic performance and personnel engagement, emphasizing a culture of recognition and growth.

Additionally, transformational leaders promote ongoing competency development, which is integral to staff and athlete retention. Warner and Dixon indicate that mentoring and performance evaluations from leaders can facilitate skill-enhancement initiatives that empower individuals and connect them closely with the club's values and objectives (Warner & Dixon, 2013). The retention of talent is closely linked with these developmental opportunities, as employees who feel nurtured and valued are less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere. Rasheed et al. assert that talent management strategies focusing on career planning and employee engagement are essential in retaining valuable human resources in sports organizations (Rasheed et al., 2022).

Moreover, leadership and team building have been shown to foster a culture of innovation within HRM practices. Transformational leaders encourage creative approaches to HR management, incorporating initiatives such as data-driven coaching and adaptive training tailored to individual athlete needs. Fransen et al. suggest that athlete leaders can positively influence team dynamics, thereby enhancing team identification and collective efficacy, which reflects innovative approaches to foster collaboration and performance enhancement (Fransen et al., 2014). The systematic implementation of innovative practices aligns with continuous feedback mechanisms, contributing to sustained organizational success. In summary, effective leadership and team building are fundamental in shaping HRM practices within sports clubs. They enhance motivation, promote talent retention through development opportunities, and facilitate innovative HRM practices that collectively improve organizational effectiveness.

### **3.3. Relationship between TL, HRM, Club Performance**

The intricate relationship between leadership, human resource management (HRM), and club performance has garnered significant attention in organizational studies, particularly within sports contexts. Evidence suggests that effective leadership enhances team performance and match outcomes by facilitating athlete skill development and improving overall team coordination. Leadership actions foster an environment where athletes can thrive, ultimately enhancing their performance on the field (Han et al., 2017), (Kloutsiniotis et al., 2022). This assertion is further reinforced by research indicating that transformational leadership positively correlates with improved employee performance through heightened emotional engagement and loyalty, which are critical for maintaining operational stability within a club (Asmini et al., 2023; , (Kloutsiniotis et al., 2022; .

Moreover, HRM practices emerge as a vital mediating mechanism between leadership styles and club performance outcomes. A study examining high-performance work systems reveals that these HRM practices can significantly enhance transformational leadership effects on team performance, suggesting a synergistic relationship where HRM practices amplify the benefits of effective leadership (Han et al., 2017). Consequently, pathways such as job satisfaction, motivation, and a supportive organizational culture become pivotal in illustrating how leadership influences performance outcomes within sports organizations (Papaioannou et al., 2023; , He et al., 2019).

In this context, HRM serves not merely as a backdrop but as an active facilitator that drives the enhancement of individual and collective potential within the organization. By integrating transformative leadership coupled with robust HRM practices, sports clubs can optimize both athlete and staff engagement, leading to superior performance metrics on multiple fronts, including team dynamics and competitive outcomes (Zhao et al., 2020; , Engelsberger et al., 2023). This complex interplay underscores that the relationship between leadership and club performance is certainly not linear; rather, it is characterized by

multifaceted interactions whereby HRM consciously strives to harness the leadership approach being employed (Shah, 2021).

Conclusively, the evidence strongly supports the notion that leadership directly impacts club performance while simultaneously operating through HRM strategies that enhance the overall organizational climate. Given the multifaceted nature of these relationships, effective integration of leadership styles with targeted HRM practices remains crucial for clubs aiming for sustained success and improved performance in a highly competitive landscape (Kloutsiniotis et al., 2022; , Engelsberger et al., 2023).

### **3.4. Identify the Gap**

Analysis of the literature on identification of several important gaps which still needs to be researched:

1. There is a lack of quantitative research that directly tests the mediation mechanisms of TL through HRM.in the context of professional sports clubs. Most studies are descriptive or qualitative, so clear causal relationships have not been widely explored.
2. Variations in league or country context are rarely analyzed.Existing studies are generally limited to specific leagues or countries, so the generalizability of the findings is limited. Differences in regulations, sporting culture, and competitive dynamics across regions can influence the effectiveness of TL and HRM practices.
3. The most effective TL dimensions for various HRM functions have not been analyzed in depth. There is no consensus on whether all TL dimensions are equally important or whether certain dimensions are prioritized in improving the performance of professional sports clubs.

These gaps emphasize the need for further research combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, taking into account league and country contexts, and systematically assessing HRM mediation pathways.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Interpretation of Findings**

The relationship between transformational leadership (TL) and the performance of professional sports clubs is significant, particularly as it intersects with human resource management (HRM). Transformational leadership enhances intrinsic motivation among staff and athletes, which is crucial for job satisfaction and club loyalty. Leaders who adopt this style possess the ability to inspire their teams by articulating a compelling vision and providing individualized support to team members. This managerial approach not only inspires motivation but also leads to improved talent retention and competency development of both athletes and staff through structured training programs and consistent performance evaluations. Numerous studies emphasize the effectiveness of transformational leadership in fostering a supportive environment conducive to employee engagement and overall performance improvement (Akdere & Egan, 2020), (Para-González et al., 2018).

Moreover, HRM practices serve as mediators between transformational leadership and organizational performance. Effective HRM strategies such as training programs, coaching, constructive feedback, and performance management—are essential components that translate the positive effects of transformational leadership into tangible improvements in team performance. For instance, a study indicated that appropriate HRM practices contribute significantly to employee engagement, which is crucial for achieving organizational goals (Safwan et al., 2023; , Islam et al., 2021). These HRM strategies are not mere administrative functions but are framed as strategic mechanisms that capitalize on the motivational influences of transformational leadership, thereby enhancing the operational effectiveness of sports clubs (Para-González et al., 2018).

In addition, the degree to which transformational leadership influences talent retention and organizational performance is accentuated by its ability to create an environment of psychological ownership among employees, enhancing job satisfaction (Mir et al., 2020; , Ali et al., 2023). The application of transformational leadership principles encourages employees to perceive their own contributions more positively, thus fostering commitment and aligning their individual goals with those of the organization (Akdere & Egan, 2020). Ultimately, transformational leadership is intertwined with effective HRM practices, enhancing psychological aspects such as motivation and satisfaction as well as operational strategies that uphold the club's competitive edge (Plessis et al., 2015).

In summary, the confluence of transformational leadership and optimized HRM practices creates an environment that not only motivates but also nurtures talent, drives performance, and sustains a favorable working climate within professional sports clubs. The implementation of these principles has been shown to yield substantial benefits, manifesting in enhanced performance metrics and improved employee satisfaction and retention.

#### **4.2. Theoretical Implications**

These findings strengthen the literature on transformational leadership in the context of sport, which previously focused more on corporate organizations. This study shows that TL is relevant not only for improving individual performance, but also for facilitating integration between leadership and HRM practices, thus forming a significant mediation pathway for organizational success.

Furthermore, this review confirms that HRM acts as an important theoretical mechanism in the TL–performance relationship. Thus, this study adds to the development of TL theory by emphasizing that the effectiveness of transformational leadership does not stand alone, but depends on the quality of implementation of HR management practices in professional sports organizations. This approach opens up the opportunity to build a more holistic conceptual model, combining the dimensions of TL, HRM practices, and club performance outcomes.

#### **4.3. Practical Implications**

The research results provide several practical implications for managers and coaches of professional sports clubs. First, implementing TL in staff and athlete management must be a strategic priority. Club leaders can improve team performance through communicating a clear vision, individualized attention, and intellectual stimulation that encourages innovation and problem-solving on the field and in daily operations.

Second, development leadership training program. For managers and coaches, this is a crucial step. This program should include strengthening interpersonal competencies, mentoring skills, coaching techniques, and strategies for managing athlete and staff motivation and job satisfaction. This way, clubs can create an environment that supports individual growth while improving overall team performance.

#### **4.4. Literature Limitations**

The literature analysis revealed several significant limitations that need to be considered:

- Most studies are cross-sectional, so the causal relationship between TL, HRM practices, and club performance is difficult to prove definitively.
- This is limited to specific leagues or countries, so the generalizability of the findings to a global context is limited. Variations in regulations, sporting culture, and the level of professionalism of clubs can influence the effectiveness of TL and HRM implementation.

- Limitations of methodology design This is also evident in the paucity of longitudinal research examining the impact of TL on the long-term performance of staff and athletes.

#### 4.5. Future Research Suggestions

Based on these findings and limitations, several future research directions can be identified:

1. Quantitative research with TL mediation model, HRM, club performance, to empirically test the mediation pathway and measure the strength of the TL effect on performance outcomes through HRM practices.
2. Multi-level analysis, encompassing the perspectives of athletes, staff, and management, so that the relationship between TL and HRM can be comprehensively analyzed at various levels of the organization.
3. Cross-country or cross-league studies, to understand the influence of cultural context, regulations, and level of professionalism on the effectiveness of TL and HRM practices.
4. Research that compares TL dimensions and specific HRM practices in different club contexts can help identify the most effective strategies to improve team and organizational performance as a whole.

By following these suggestions, further research can provide stronger theoretical and practical contributions, while broadening understanding of the mechanisms linking transformational leadership, HRM, and performance in the professional sports industry.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the crucial role transformational leadership (TL) and human resource management (HRM) in improving the professional performance of sports clubs. The results of the literature review indicate that TL not only directly influences performance but also works synergistically through HRM practices to create sustainable organizational success. The dimensions of TL, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, has been shown to drive motivation, job satisfaction, talent retention, and innovation among staff and athletes. Effective HRM practices such as adaptive training, coaching, constructive feedback, and performance management serve as key mediators that translate the effects of TL into improved team and overall organizational performance.

In addition to providing empirical and conceptual evidence regarding the relationship between TL, HRM, and performance, this study strengthens the literature on transformational leadership in the professional sport context, demonstrating that the effectiveness of TL is highly dependent on the quality of HRM practices implemented. These findings also have practical implications for club managers and coaches, who should integrate TL principles into staff and athlete management strategies and develop leadership training programs that emphasize interpersonal competencies, mentoring, and motivation management.

However, this study acknowledges the limitations of the existing literature, including the predominance of cross-sectional studies, limited geographic focus, and lack of longitudinal research. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt a quantitative approach with TL–HRM–performance mediation model, a multi-level analysis encompassing the perspectives of athletes, staff, and management, as well as cross-country or league studies to understand the influence of cultural context, regulations, and levels of professionalism. Overall, this research confirms that the effective integration of transformational leadership and targeted HRM practices is a key factor for professional sports clubs to achieve superior performance and sustained organizational success in a highly competitive environment.

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