

The Role of Creative Self-Efficacy as a Mediator Between Transformational Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior in Food and Beverage SMEs in Malang City

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE) as a mediator in the relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) within food and beverage SMEs in Malang City. A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing structured questionnaires distributed to employees and managers. Data were analyzed using multiple regression and mediation analyses. Results indicate that TL positively and significantly influences IWB both directly and indirectly through CSE. The findings demonstrate that transformational leaders not only inspire employees to innovate but also enhance their confidence in generating creative ideas. The model exhibits excellent fit indices, reinforcing the validity of these relationships. Practical implications include the need for leadership development programs and organizational initiatives that foster CSE to drive innovation. This study contributes to the literature on leadership and innovation in SMEs, particularly within the food and beverage sector.

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership, Creative Self-Efficacy, Innovative Work Behavior, SMEs, Innovation*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE) sebagai mediator dalam hubungan antara Transformational Leadership (TL) dan Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) pada UMKM makanan dan minuman di Kota Malang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan kuesioner terstruktur yang disebarakan kepada karyawan dan manajer. Data dianalisis menggunakan regresi berganda dan analisis mediasi. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa TL berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap IWB, baik secara langsung maupun tidak langsung melalui CSE. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa pemimpin transformasional tidak hanya menginspirasi inovasi, tetapi juga meningkatkan kepercayaan karyawan dalam menghasilkan ide kreatif. Model yang diuji menunjukkan indeks kesesuaian yang sangat baik, memperkuat validitas hubungan tersebut. Implikasi praktis mencakup perlunya program pengembangan kepemimpinan dan inisiatif organisasi yang mendukung CSE untuk mendorong inovasi. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi pada literatur tentang kepemimpinan dan inovasi di UMKM, khususnya di sektor makanan dan minuman.

Kata Kunci: Transformational Leadership, Creative Self-Efficacy, Innovative Work Behavior, UMKM, Inovasi

Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are widely recognized as the backbone of economic development, particularly in developing countries like Indonesia, where they contribute significantly to gross domestic product (GDP) and employment generation (Tambunan, 2006). Within this ecosystem, the food and beverage industry stands out as a vital sector, not only for its economic contribution but also for its cultural and social significance. In urban areas like Malang City, known for its culinary tourism and vibrant local economy, food and beverage SMEs play a pivotal role in shaping the regional economy (Nurfitriya &

Iskandar, 2020). Despite their importance, these SMEs face escalating challenges, including rapid technological advancements, shifts in consumer preferences, and heightened market competition. In such a dynamic environment, fostering Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) among employees becomes essential to ensure adaptability, sustainability, and competitive advantage.

IWB is defined as the intentional creation, promotion, and implementation of novel ideas, processes, or products within the workplace, aimed at improving organizational performance (Janssen, 2000). For SMEs in the food and beverage sector, IWB can manifest in various ways, such as introducing new recipes, enhancing customer service strategies, or adopting digital marketing innovations. While the significance of IWB is well-established, its determinants, particularly in the context of SMEs, require further exploration. One critical determinant is leadership style, with transformational leadership emerging as a key driver of innovation. Transformational leaders inspire employees by fostering a shared vision, encouraging intellectual stimulation, and providing individualized support, thus creating a fertile ground for innovation to thrive (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

However, the relationship between transformational leadership and IWB is not always direct and often relies on mediating factors that shape employees' attitudes and behaviors. One such factor is Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE), which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to generate creative solutions and outcomes (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). CSE plays a pivotal role in empowering employees to take risks, experiment with new ideas, and persist in the face of challenges. Employees with high CSE are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors, as they feel confident in their creative capabilities and the potential impact of their contributions.

Despite its theoretical importance, the mediating role of CSE in the relationship between transformational leadership and IWB has been underexplored, particularly within the SME context. This gap is even more pronounced in the food and beverage sector, where innovation often hinges on the creativity and initiative of employees (Newman et al., 2018). Moreover, studies focusing on specific regional contexts, such as Malang City, are limited, leaving a critical void in understanding how local cultural, economic, and organizational dynamics influence these relationships.

This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the role of CSE as a mediator between transformational leadership and IWB in food and beverage SMEs in Malang City. By focusing on this specific sector and location, the research aims to provide actionable insights for SME owners and managers on how to cultivate a work environment that fosters creativity and innovation. Furthermore, the findings will contribute to the broader literature on leadership, creativity, and innovation by highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in the food and beverage sector. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of empowering employees through transformational leadership and enhancing their creative self-efficacy to drive innovation and sustain competitiveness in an ever-changing market landscape.

Research Methods

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the mediating role of Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE) in the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) among employees of food and beverage SMEs in Malang City. The data for this research were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to employees and managers working in the food and beverage sector. The study focuses on SMEs officially registered in Malang City's business directory. A purposive sampling method was applied to select respondents who are directly involved in innovation-related activities within their respective organizations.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections, corresponding to the study variables consist of Transformational Leadership, CSE, and IWB. Transformational Leadership was measured using items adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) by Bass and Avolio (Bass & Avolio, 1996). CSE was assessed using the scale developed by Tierney and Farmer (2002), while IWB was measured with Janssen's (2000) Innovative Work Behavior scale. All responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The validity and reliability of the instruments were tested in a pilot study before the main data collection phase.

The data were analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis, and mediation analysis based on Baron and Kenny's (1986) framework. To examine the mediating effect of CSE, the study employed the following regression model:

$$IWB = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TL + \beta_2 CSE + \epsilon$$

Where IWB is Innovative Work Behavior, TL represents Transformational Leadership, CSE is Creative Self-Efficacy, β_0 is the constant, β_1 and β_2 are the regression coefficients, and ϵ or epsilon is the error term. Sobel's test was further utilized to confirm the significance of the mediating role of CSE in this relationship.

The data collection was conducted over a two-month period, ensuring a balanced representation of SMEs across various food and beverage sub-sectors. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while inferential statistics provided insights into the hypothesized relationships between variables. Path analysis was performed using SPSS and AMOS software to identify the direct and indirect effects of Transformational Leadership on IWB through CSE. By focusing on food and beverage SMEs in Malang City, this research aims to provide actionable insights for business owners and managers on fostering creativity and innovation among their employees.

Table 1. Operational Variable

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators	Items	Measurement Scale	Source
Transformational Leadership (TL)	A leadership style that motivates and inspires subordinates to achieve	Idealized Influence Inspirational Motivation	My leader acts in ways that build my respect My leader talks	Likert 1-5	Bass & Avolio (1995)

	higher performance through influence, motivation, and individual support.	Intellectual Stimulation	enthusiastically about what needs to be done My leader challenges me to think about old problems in new ways My leader pays attention to my needs I am confident in my ability to generate innovative ideas	
		Individualized Consideration	I believe I can handle challenges creatively I regularly suggest new ideas that can benefit the organization I promote my innovative ideas to colleagues I put effort into implementing new ideas	
Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE)	An individual's belief in their ability to generate creative ideas or innovative solutions in their work.	Belief in the ability to generate new ideas Belief in the ability to solve problems creatively		Tierney & Farmer (2002)
Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)	Behaviors exhibited by individuals in generating, promoting, and implementing new ideas for improved work performance.	Idea Generation Idea Promotion Idea Realization		Janssen (2000)

Source: Author, 2024.

Result and Discussions

Table 2. Respondent of Food and Beverage SMEs in Malang City

Identity	Total
Business Duration	
> 5 Years	84
1-5 Years	63
< 1 Years	53
Gender	
Female	107
Male	93

Business Hours	
Night-Morning	58
Morning-Night	50
Aftrenoon-Night	47
Morning-Afternoon	45
Education Level	
Diploma	54
Master	54
Bachelor	48
High School	44
Age Group	
< 25	37
25-40	45
41-60	59
> 60	59

Source: Author, 2025.

Respondent demographics in this study reflect diverse backgrounds in terms of business duration, gender, business hours, education level, and age group. Based on business duration, the majority of respondents had more than 5 years of experience (84 respondents), followed by those with 1-5 years of experience (63 respondents), and less than 1 year (53 respondents). In terms of gender, most respondents were female, totaling 107, while 93 respondents were male. For business hours, the majority operated during the Night-Morning shift (58 respondents), followed by Morning-Night (50 respondents), Afternoon-Night (47 respondents), and Morning-Afternoon (45 respondents). Regarding education level, 54 respondents held a diploma degree, and another 54 had a master's degree. Respondents with a bachelor's degree totaled 48, while those with a high school education comprised 44 individuals. In terms of age group, the majority of respondents were aged 41-60 years and above 60 years, with 59 respondents in each group. Those aged 25-40 years comprised 45 respondents, while the group under 25 years included 37 respondents. These respondent demographics reflect a broad range of experience, education, and demographic characteristics, providing a comprehensive basis for analyzing the relationships between transformational leadership, creative self-efficacy, and innovative work behavior in food and beverage SMEs in Malang City.

Table 3. Validity Test of Food and Beverage SMEs in Malang City

Variable	Correlation	p-value
	0.44	
	0.40	
Transformational Leadership (TL)	0.42	
	0.45	
	0.47	< 0.01
Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE)	0.49	
	0.50	
	0.48	
Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)	0.46	

Source: Author, 2025.

Table 4. Reliability Test of Food and Beverage SMEs in Malang City

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Transformational Leadership (TL)	0,96
Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE)	0,94
Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)	0,96

Source: Author, 2025.

All items show a significant positive correlation with the total score of their respective variables ($p < 0.01$), indicating that all items are valid. The highest correlation is found in the variable Innovative Work Behavior with the indicator Idea Generation ($r = 0.50$), demonstrating a strong contribution to the total score. Additionally, items under the variable Transformational Leadership, such as "My leader pays attention to my needs," also show strong correlations ($r = 0.45$), emphasizing the validity of these indicators. Similarly, the items under Creative Self-Efficacy, such as "I believe I can handle challenges creatively," have notable correlations ($r = 0.49$), supporting their role in measuring the construct. Overall, the results confirm that all items are valid and contribute significantly to measuring the variables of Transformational Leadership, Creative Self-Efficacy, and Innovative Work Behavior. This validation ensures the robustness of the items in capturing the intended constructs in the context of the study.

Table 5. Path Analysis Output of Food and Beverage SMEs in Malang City

Path	Estimate (β)	Standard Error (SE)	p-value	Interpretation
TL \rightarrow IWB	0.35	0.08	< 0.001	Significant direct effect
TL \rightarrow CSE	0.45	0.06	< 0.001	Significant direct effect
CSE \rightarrow IWB	0.50	0.07	< 0.001	Significant direct effect
TL \rightarrow CSE \rightarrow IWB	0.23	0.05	< 0.001	Significant indirect effect

Source: Author, 2025.

Table 6. Model Fit Indices of Food and Beverage SMEs in Malang City

Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Threshold	Interpretation
Chi-square (χ^2)	4.12	$p > 0.05$	Good fit (non-significant χ^2)
RMSEA	0.04	< 0.08	Good fit
CFI	0.98	> 0.90	Excellent fit
TLI	0.97	> 0.90	Excellent fit
SRMR	0.03	< 0.08	Good fit

Source: Author, 2025.

The path analysis results highlight the relationships between Transformational Leadership (TL), Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE), and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB). Transformational Leadership has a positive and significant direct effect on Innovative Work Behavior, with a standardized coefficient of 0.35 ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that higher levels of transformational leadership directly enhance employees' innovative behaviors. Additionally, TL has a significant direct effect on Creative Self-Efficacy ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that transformational leaders positively influence employees' confidence in their creative abilities. Similarly, Creative Self-Efficacy directly

predicts Innovative Work Behavior ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$), showing the importance of self-belief in driving innovation at work. The indirect effect of TL on IWB through CSE is also significant ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that Creative Self-Efficacy partially mediates the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior, emphasizing the role of employee confidence in creative capabilities as a key mechanism through which leadership influences innovation. The model fit indices confirm the robustness of the analysis. The Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 4.12$, $p > 0.05$) indicates a good fit, suggesting no significant discrepancies between the model and the data. Other fit indices further validate the model, including RMSEA = 0.04 (< 0.08), CFI = 0.98 (> 0.90), TLI = 0.97 (> 0.90), and SRMR = 0.03 (< 0.08). These values collectively indicate an excellent fit, demonstrating that the proposed model accurately captures the relationships among TL, CSE, and IWB.

The findings emphasize the critical role of Transformational Leadership in fostering both Creative Self-Efficacy and Innovative Work Behavior. Leaders who exhibit transformational qualities, such as inspiring, intellectually stimulating, and addressing individual needs, contribute significantly to creating an environment where employees feel empowered to generate and implement innovative ideas. This leadership style directly enhances employees' ability to perform creatively, as evidenced by the significant direct effects of Transformational Leadership on both Creative Self-Efficacy and Innovative Work Behavior.

The mediation analysis further highlights the importance of Creative Self-Efficacy as a bridging variable. Employees with higher levels of Creative Self-Efficacy are more likely to feel confident in their ability to solve problems and propose innovative solutions, which translates into increased Innovative Work Behavior. The indirect effect suggests that transformational leaders not only influence innovation through their direct actions but also by cultivating employees' belief in their creative capabilities.

These results have practical implications for organizational leadership and human resource development. Organizations aiming to enhance innovation should prioritize the development of transformational leadership qualities among managers and supervisors. Training programs focused on transformational leadership behaviors, such as effective communication, motivational techniques, and personalized support, could lead to improved creative self-efficacy and innovation among employees. Additionally, fostering an organizational culture that values creativity and provides resources for innovation could amplify the impact of transformational leadership.

The findings of this study reinforce and extend existing knowledge on the significant influence of Transformational Leadership (TL) on Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), both directly and indirectly through the mediation of Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE). Transformational Leadership demonstrated a strong positive effect on IWB, highlighting the importance of leaders who inspire, motivate, and support employees in fostering innovation within organizations. This result aligns with earlier studies, such as those by Bass and Avolio (1996), which emphasized that transformational leaders create environments conducive to creativity and innovation by encouraging employees to think beyond conventional solutions.

The mediation effect of CSE further underscores its critical role as a psychological mechanism in linking Transformational Leadership to IWB. Transformational leaders not only directly enhance employees' innovative behaviors but also build their confidence in generating creative ideas and solving problems. This finding is consistent with research by Tierney and Farmer (2002), which identified Creative Self-Efficacy as a key predictor of creativity and innovation. It also corroborates Janssen's (2000) work, which highlighted the significance of individual-level factors, such as self-efficacy, in promoting idea generation, promotion, and realization.

The strong fit of the proposed model, as indicated by excellent fit indices (RMSEA = 0.04, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.97, SRMR = 0.03), supports the robustness of the hypothesized relationships. This suggests that the interplay between TL, CSE, and IWB is well-represented, reinforcing the theoretical framework. Comparatively, previous studies with similar constructs also reported strong model fits, such as the work of Wibowo et al. (2019), which found comparable fit indices when exploring the role of leadership and psychological constructs in innovative behaviors.

This study provides significant empirical evidence of the dual pathways through which transformational leadership (TL) influences innovative work behavior (IWB). The direct pathway demonstrates that transformational leaders inspire employees by fostering a compelling vision, intellectual stimulation, and autonomy, which drives innovative efforts. Ribeiro et al. (2020) says that leadership enhances individual creativity and motivation. The indirect pathway, mediated by creative self-efficacy (CSE), illustrates that TL fosters psychological empowerment, enabling employees to translate leadership inspiration into actionable innovation, as supported by Shafi et al. (2020) and Zhang (2024). A unique aspect of this study is its focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the food and beverage sector in Malang City—a context rarely explored in existing literature. Research by Wang (2022) and Abdul-Azeez et al. (2024) highlights the tailored leadership approaches required in resource-constrained SMEs, where transformational leadership proves particularly effective.

From a practical standpoint, organizations seeking to enhance innovation should invest in developing transformational leadership capabilities through structured training programs emphasizing communication, motivation, and individualized support, as suggested by Afsar & Umrani (2020) and Salem (2024). Enhancing employees' creative self-efficacy through problem-solving workshops, recognition of innovative contributions, and fostering a supportive organizational culture is equally critical. Studies like Bao et al. (2024) and Le et al. (2024) emphasize that inclusive and risk-tolerant cultures amplify the positive impact of TL on innovation. Ultimately, this research underscores the synergistic role of transformational leadership, creative self-efficacy, and organizational culture in driving innovation, providing actionable insights for both scholars and practitioners.

In addition, this study highlights the critical role of transformational leadership in fostering innovation in SMEs operating under resource constraints. As SMEs are often limited by financial, technological, and human capital, transformational leadership becomes a catalyst for leveraging existing resources creatively and inspiring employees to overcome challenges. The findings by

Rahman et al. (2024) underscore the unique pressures faced by SMEs in rapidly evolving sectors, like food and beverage, where customer preferences and market dynamics demand constant adaptation and innovation. Abdul-Azeez et al. (2024) further argue that transformational leaders in SMEs not only drive innovative behaviors but also create a shared sense of purpose and resilience, which are essential for navigating such environments.

From a broader organizational perspective, creating a culture that supports risk-taking, experimentation, and open communication is indispensable for maximizing the benefits of transformational leadership. Wang et al. (2024) point out that such cultures, when combined with leadership that emphasizes empowerment and vision, provide a fertile ground for innovation. Practical interventions, such as establishing innovation hubs, conducting regular ideation sessions, and implementing recognition systems for novel contributions, as suggested by Gumbo & Moos (2024), can further strengthen this synergy. Additionally, organizations should focus on systematically enhancing CSE through targeted initiatives. For instance, structured learning environments, mentorship programs, and exposure to challenging yet achievable tasks can build employees' confidence in their creative abilities.

For future research, this study sets the stage for exploring more dynamic and interactive mechanisms underlying leadership and innovation. Johansen & Van Den Bosch (2017) emphasize the importance of longitudinal research to understand how transformational leadership and CSE evolve in tandem and how these changes influence innovation over time. Moreover, studies such as those by Wang et al. (2024) highlight the need to delve deeper into mediators like psychological safety and organizational climate, which could enrich our understanding of the pathways linking leadership to innovation. Expanding the scope to include the impact of digital transformation and technological integration within leadership strategies could also yield valuable insights, given the increasing reliance on digital tools in innovation processes. By addressing these avenues, future research can further illuminate the multifaceted nature of leadership-driven innovation, ensuring practical and theoretical advancements in the field.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of Transformational Leadership (TL) and Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE) in fostering Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) among employees in food and beverage SMEs in Malang City. The findings reveal that TL has both a direct and indirect positive influence on IWB, with CSE serving as a significant mediator. Transformational leaders inspire employees to generate, promote, and implement new ideas while simultaneously enhancing their confidence in their creative abilities. This dual pathway underscores the intertwined importance of leadership behaviors and psychological empowerment in driving innovation. The research also demonstrates the robustness of the proposed model, with excellent fit indices confirming the validity of the hypothesized relationships. These results align with and extend previous studies, offering empirical evidence that transformational leadership not only motivates employees directly but also fosters a sense of creative self-efficacy, which further enhances innovative behaviors.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. The focus on SMEs in a specific sector and geographic area limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should explore the relationships among TL, CSE, and IWB in different industries, regions, and cultural contexts. Additionally, examining other mediators, such as psychological safety or organizational culture, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing innovation. This study reaffirms the vital roles of leadership and self-efficacy in fostering innovation. By leveraging transformational leadership and empowering employees' creative self-efficacy, organizations can effectively enhance their innovative capabilities, ensuring sustained competitiveness in dynamic environments. These findings provide a solid foundation for both academic inquiry and practical interventions aimed at promoting innovation in the workplace.

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