

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE RETENTION ON THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP STYLE AND TALENT MANAGEMENT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AT PT PLN (PERSERO) UNIT INDUK DISTRIBUSI EAST JAVA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of leadership style and talent management on employee performance with employee retention as a mediating variable at PT. PLN (Persero) Unit Induk Distribusi Jawa Timur. A quantitative approach with explanatory research design was employed. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 160 employees using a saturated sampling technique. Data analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS. The results show that (1) leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, (2) talent management has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, (3) employee retention significantly improves performance, (4) leadership positively affects employee retention, (5) talent management positively affects employee retention, (6) retention mediates the relationship between leadership and performance, and (7) retention mediates the relationship between talent management and performance. The study provides theoretical implications regarding the mediating role of retention and practical recommendations for PLN's management to strengthen leadership effectiveness and talent strategies.

Keywords: Leadership Style, Talent Management, Employee Retention, Employee Performance

INTRODUCTION

PT PLN (Persero) East Java Distribution Unit is responsible for distributing electricity networks across East Java, from the western to the eastern parts of the province. An efficient and effective operational management system is required to provide the best service and distribute electricity to substations spread across East Java. The emerging issue is that PLN staff in the East Java Distribution Unit (UID) often demonstrate suboptimal performance, such as delayed responsiveness, employees not returning on time after breaks, an uncondusive work environment, and inadequate facilities, which hinder employee mobility during activities. Low employee productivity complicates task completion and often delays responsibilities. The lack of performance among PLN staff in the East Java UID is reflected in the tables below. Table 1 shows that from 2022–2024, targets were not fully achieved, with realizations stagnating at around 104,000 customers, consistently reaching only 99% of the target. Table 2 indicates that the Network Loss Indicator (without EMIN) also experienced a decline from 116% in 2022 to 98% in 2023–2024.

Table 1. Data on Target and Realization of New Meter Installations

Year	Target	Realization	Percentage
2022	104,235 customers	104,191 customers	99%
2023	105,500 customers	104,500 customers	99%
2024	105,660 customers	104,762 customers	99%

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 2. Performance Achievement of Network Loss Indicator without EMIN

Year	Achievement
2022	116%
2023	98%
2024	98%

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Employee performance, or job performance, refers to the level of success employees achieve in completing their work. Performance is the manifestation of abilities in the form of actual work achieved by employees in carrying out tasks assigned by the organization (Priansa, 2018). Some scholars define performance as the result of work completion, while others view it as behaviors necessary to achieve desired outcomes (Sopiah & Etta, 2018). In essence, performance is a measure of how well an employee performs their expected tasks (Manihuruk & Tirtayasa, 2020).

Employee performance is a key factor in achieving organizational goals, including at PT PLN (Persero), which plays a strategic role in providing national energy. In modern organizations, performance is influenced not only by technical and individual competencies but also by leadership. Effective leadership can create a conducive work environment, enhance motivation, and build employee loyalty and retention, ultimately improving overall performance (Sarboini et al., 2017).

One leadership issue at PLN UID East Java is the frequent rotation of top management, with leadership tenures lasting a minimum of two years. Such rotations force employees to readjust to new leadership styles, as each leader brings different orientations in directing, influencing, and motivating staff. Employees generally prefer leaders who are humble, listen to their concerns, and are results-oriented, while they tend to dislike leaders who become angry when outcomes are not optimal. According to Robbins and Judge (2012), employee engagement requires clear guidance from leaders and opportunities for employees to voice opinions, fostering a sense of recognition and appreciation, which enhances performance (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016).

Previous research has shown that both talent management and effective leadership positively impact employee performance. Employees involved in talent management programs tend to have higher performance, stronger retention, and greater organizational commitment (Hidayat, 2023). At PLN, talent management includes not only recruitment but also development, placement, retention, and promotion of talented employees, as regulated by PT PLN (Persero) Director’s Decree No. 387.K/DIR/2008 concerning the Competency and Career Development System (Putra, 2022). However, challenges remain, such as mismatched employee placements, competency gaps in certain positions, and under-optimized HR development programs (Chan & Claudia, 2018). These issues hinder organizational effectiveness in achieving performance targets. Talent management is considered a critical element in HR management, emphasizing the need to identify and manage talent in appropriate positions for organizational success (Collings et al., 2019).

Another major challenge faced by PT PLN (Persero) is employee retention—the organization’s ability to retain talented employees for long-term development. High retention reduces turnover costs, preserves institutional knowledge, and ensures operational stability (Kusumaningrum, 2023). Studies confirm that talent management positively influences retention, and retention in turn significantly impacts performance (Mahyuni, 2021).

Table 3. Mutation, Demotion, and Promotion at PLN UID East Java

Year	Total Employees	Mutation	Demotion	Promotion
2022	161	27	14	11
2023	158	23	17	10
2024	168	30	18	5

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 3 shows that employee transfers increased from 27 in 2022 to 30 in 2024. Demotions also increased, while promotions decreased significantly from 11 in 2022 to

only 5 in 2024. High turnover disrupts organizational stability and productivity, making employee retention a key mediating variable between leadership, talent management, and performance (Surya et al., 2024). High retention reflects an organization's ability to sustain quality human resources for long periods, positively influencing overall performance (Olivia et al., 2024).

Previous research findings show mixed results. Some studies found leadership significantly affects employee performance (Guruh et al., 2021; Syahputra et al., 2023; Subrata & Rizky, 2024; Mannipi et al., 2019; Youssef, 2024), while others reported insignificant or even negative impacts (Sari et al., 2025; Fadillah & Marzuki, 2023; Wahyudi & Mahargiono, 2022; Setyawan & Bagasworo, 2022; Huda & Abdullah, 2022). Similarly, studies on talent management mostly found a significant positive relationship with performance (Kaleem, 2019; Novryanto & Effendi, 2024; Rahman et al., 2023; Khairina et al., 2022; Kardo et al., 2020), while others found no significant effect (Wang, 2021; Ivana & Marzuki, 2023; Utami & Wardani, 2021). This creates a research gap. Sugiyanto & Sutianingsih (2023) examined employee retention as a mediating variable between talent management and performance, while Riza et al. (2023) studied retention as a mediator between leadership style and performance. The present study seeks to integrate these approaches by using employee retention as a mediating variable in examining the effects of both leadership and talent management on employee performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership

Transactional leadership to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision (Bass, B. M. 1990), Leadership is the art of influencing others to achieve organizational goals (Ismail, 2013; Kartono, 2010). Zainuddin & Maryadi (2017) describe leadership as a purposeful behavior aimed at mobilizing members of an organization to accomplish common objectives. Transformational Leadership Indicators (Mulyani et al., 2023) is Decision-making ability, Motivation, Subordinate control, Communication skills, Responsibility, Emotional regulation.

Talent Management

Pella & Inayati (2011) Talent management is a continuous strategic process to retain and optimize the best employees. Armstrong (2006) describe 61% of employees engaged in talent management practices are high-potential workers. Silzer & Dowell (2009) Core objectives include developing high-potential employees, preparing future top management, and retaining key staff. Indicators Talent Management is is Recruitment, selection, development, placement, succession planning, performance management, employer branding (Rida et al., 2016).

Employee Retention

Hasibuan (2018) Retention is an organizational effort to sustain employees physically, psychologically, and emotionally. Rahmawati (2019) Retention refers to strategies to maintain competent employees' loyalty. Das & Baruah (2013) Retention is a policy to reduce turnover and ensure long-term commitment. Kumar et al. (2012) Retention is the ability to maintain high-potential employees' loyalty. Indicators Employee Retention is Work environment, job satisfaction, employee relations, organizational support (Ekhsan & Taopik, 2020).

Employee Performance

Employee Performance Dimensions is Quality, Quantity, Timeliness, Effectiveness, Independence, and Work commitment (Robbins, 2019). Hasibuan (2016) Performance is the result of work based on ability, experience, seriousness, and time. Mathis & Jackson (2011) Performance is measured by quantity, quality, timeliness, attendance, and

cooperation. Rivai & Sagala (2014) Performance reflects the success level in achieving organizational goals.

HYPOTHESIS

- H1 : Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.
- H2 : Talent management has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.
- H3 : Employee retention has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.
- H4 : Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee retention.
- H5 : Talent management has a positive and significant effect on employee retention.
- H6 : Employee retention mediates the effect of leadership on performance.
- H7 : Employee retention mediates the effect of talent management on performance

METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the causal relationship among leadership style, talent management, employee retention, and employee performance at PT PLN (Persero) Unit Induk Distribusi East Java. The population consisted of 160 employees, and a census approach (saturated sampling) was applied, thus all employees were included as respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The variables were measured as follows: leadership style (communication, motivation, decision-making, emotional control), talent management (recruitment, development, distribution, evaluation, employer branding), employee retention (work environment, satisfaction, relationships, organizational support), and performance (quality, quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, commitment). Data analysis employed Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) using SmartPLS software.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 160 questionnaires were distributed and returned completely, resulting in a 100% response rate. Respondents consisted of 62% male and 38% female employees, with the majority (55%) aged between 31–40 years. Most respondents had served in PLN for more than five years, indicating that the data reflect employees with adequate organizational experience.

Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The outer model was assessed for validity and reliability. Convergent validity was confirmed with all item loadings exceeding 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50. Reliability was demonstrated as all constructs achieved Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s Alpha above 0.70.

Table 4. Convergent Validity and Reliability

Construct	AVE	CR	Alpha	Status
Leadership Style	0,042	0,061	0,060	Reliable
Talent Management	0,044	0,063	0,061	Reliable
Employee Retention	0.59	0,061	0,059	Reliable
Employee Performance	0,0430	0,062	0,061	Reliable

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio. The square root of AVE for each construct exceeded the inter-construct correlations, and all values were below 0.90, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

Structural Model (Inner Model)

The inner model was tested using path coefficient analysis, R², Q², and effect sizes (f²). The results confirmed that leadership style, talent management, and employee retention significantly influenced employee performance.

Table 5. Path Coefficients

Relationship	Coefficient	t-statistic	p-value	Result
Leadership → Performance	0,21666667	04.21	0.000	Supported
Talent Management → Performance	0,20694444	0,185417	0.000	Supported
Retention → Performance	0,23680556	05.02	0.000	Supported
Leadership → Retention	0,22569444	04.45	0.000	Supported
Talent Management → Retention	0,24722222	0,220833	0.000	Supported
Leadership → Retention → Performance	0,07708333	0,151389	0.003	Mediation Exists
Talent Management → Retention → Performance	0,08472222	03.15	0.002	Mediation Exists

Source: Processed Data (2025)

The R² value for employee retention was 0.58 (moderate), while employee performance obtained an R² of 0.64 (strong). The predictive relevance (Q²) was 0.47, confirming the model's predictive accuracy. The overall Goodness of Fit (GoF) index was 0.58, indicating a good model fit. Findings Leadership style has a significant positive effect on employee performance (H1 Accepted). Talent management positively and significantly influences performance (H2 Accepted). Leadership positively and significantly influences retention (H4 Accepted). Talent Management positively and significantly influences retention (H4 Accepted). Retention directly improves performance and also mediates the effects of leadership and talent management (H3, H6, and H7 Accepted). The model demonstrates strong explanatory and predictive power.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that leadership style and talent management significantly enhance employee performance, both directly and indirectly through retention, in the context of PT PLN (Persero) Unit Induk Distribusi East Java. Leadership style was found to have a significant effect on employee performance, confirming the importance of managerial behavior in shaping work outcomes. This result is consistent with Robbins & Judge (2012) and Youssef (2024), who argue that effective leadership improves motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In PLN's context, where organizational structures are highly bureaucratic, leadership practices that emphasize participation, fairness, and transparent communication are especially important in driving employee engagement and reducing resistance to organizational policies. These findings also align with Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1990), that emphasizes the role of leaders in inspiring, motivating, and empowering employees, ultimately resulting in better performance.

Talent management also emerged as a critical determinant of employee performance. This supports the view of Collings et al. (2019), who highlight talent management as a

strategic driver of competitiveness, and Games (2022), who found that talent development practices are positively associated with performance in Indonesian firms. In PLN, structured recruitment based on competency mapping, continuous professional development, and systematic performance evaluation contribute to higher employee competence and work effectiveness. The perspective of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), such practices represent an investment in employees that enhances the organization's stock of skills and knowledge, ultimately producing superior performance outcomes.

Another important finding of this study is the significant role of retention, both as a direct predictor of performance and as a mediating variable. This result corroborates the arguments of Hasibuan (2018), Sugiyanto & Sutianingsih (2023), and Riza et al. (2024), who demonstrated that employee retention strengthens the impact of leadership and HR practices on performance in Indonesian state-owned enterprises. Within the framework of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), employees reciprocate organizational support, fairness, and recognition with loyalty and higher productivity. In PLN, retention is particularly important because employees possess specialized technical expertise that is not easily replaced. High turnover would result not only in financial costs but also in the loss of tacit knowledge essential for operational continuity.

Taken together, these findings reinforce multiple theoretical perspectives. Social Exchange Theory explains how supportive leadership and talent management create a sense of reciprocity in employees, which enhances retention and performance. Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) highlights that retained employees are valuable and inimitable resources that generate sustainable competitive advantage. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1966) further supports the findings by emphasizing the importance of motivators such as recognition and achievement in sustaining satisfaction and performance. In addition, Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1990) and Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993) together suggest that leadership practices and strategic talent management are not only motivational but also developmental, upgrading employee competencies for long-term organizational success.

From a managerial perspective, the results underline the need for PLN to invest in leadership development programs that encourage participatory and transformational approaches, ensuring that managers are capable of motivating, empowering, and guiding their teams. Furthermore, PLN must treat talent management as a strategic priority by institutionalizing competency-based recruitment, structured training programs, and systematic succession planning. Retention strategies should also be reinforced through improved working conditions, recognition systems, and supportive organizational culture to minimize turnover. By integrating leadership, talent management, and retention into a unified HR strategy, PLN can achieve greater workforce stability and sustainable performance improvements.

Finally, this research contributes to the academic literature by empirically confirming the mediating role of retention in the relationship between leadership, talent management, and performance in the context of Indonesian state-owned enterprises. While prior studies often focused on private or multinational corporations, this study highlights the dynamics of HR practices in BUMN, where bureaucratic structures coexist with public service mandates. Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, including its focus on a single organizational unit, which restricts generalizability. Future research should expand to other PLN units or different industries, and incorporate additional variables such as organizational culture, employee engagement, or digital HR transformation. Employing longitudinal or mixed-method designs in future studies could also provide richer insights into causal dynamics and employee experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of leadership style and talent management on employee performance with employee retention as a mediating variable in the context of PT PLN (Persero) Unit Induk Distribusi East Java. The findings demonstrate that both leadership style and talent management exert significant direct effects on employee performance, while retention not only directly enhances performance but also mediates the relationship between leadership, talent management, and performance. These results confirm that effective leadership practices and strategic talent management are essential for fostering employee loyalty and ensuring higher organizational outcomes.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the application of Social Exchange Theory, Resource-Based View, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory in the context of Indonesian state-owned enterprises, highlighting how leadership and talent management practices strengthen employee retention and performance. Practically, the findings underscore the importance for PLN to prioritize leadership development, institutionalize talent management as a strategic function, and implement retention policies that reduce turnover and secure organizational knowledge. Overall, this research affirms that employee retention is a critical mechanism linking managerial practices to organizational performance. For PLN, strengthening leadership, optimizing talent systems, and enhancing retention strategies will not only improve employee outcomes but also ensure long-term competitiveness in the energy sector.

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