

# Innovations

## The Impact of Empathetic Leadership and Job Innovation in Improving Operational Performance and Firm Value

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### Abstract

*This study aims to improve operational performance in Indonesian unicorn companies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purposive sampling method was used to collect data on Empathetic Leadership, Job Innovation, Operational Performance, and Firm Value from managers of various unicorn companies by distributing questionnaires. The data collected were analyzed using a Structural Equation Model, such as statistical software Partial Least Square. The results of this study showed a change in the pattern of work carried out by companies in running their businesses. For instance, Empathetic Leadership and Job Innovation increase Operational Performance and Firm Value. Furthermore, the original sample value of Empathetic Leadership to Job Innovation, Empathetic Leadership to Operational Performance, Job Innovation to Operational Performance, Job Innovation to Firm Value, and Operational Performance to Firm Value were 0.912, 0.629, 0.351980, 0.287, and 0.671, respectively, while the statistical values were 33.881, 9.543, 5.247, 3.106, and 7.272. Therefore, companies must stay on a good performance scale to maintain firm value. In conclusion, Operational Performance and Firm Value can be affected by Empathetic Leadership to Job Innovation.*

**Keywords:** 1. Empathetic Leadership, 2. Job Innovation, 3. Operational Performance, 4. Firm Value.

JEL Classification Code: O15, M41, J24, L25, G32

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## Introduction

The relative role of a cadre of high-tech startups in driving innovation and economic growth has been well-known and fairly celebrated in recent years. Although the overall contribution of startups is important, the high risk and huge reward strategy lead to a significant failure rate and a low ratio of success. Therefore, this quantitative research tends to determine the factors responsible for successful startups while ignoring the numerous lessons drawn by examining the failed ones. It also aims to provide a repeatable and scalable methodology that can be applied to a database of unstructured post-mortem documents derived from startup failure patterns (Cantamessa et al., 2018).

There has been a decrease in the number of startup companies in recent years compared to the closed ones. This raises questions related to the number of failed companies that can be avoided and ways to identify them. Triebel et al. (2018) researched the factors responsible for failed startup companies and the associated typologies. Subsequently, Triebel et al., (2018) investigated the ability of cultural differences to affect the performance of startup companies.

Firm value is often linked to stock prices due to its ability to increase or decrease simultaneously, therefore, it can build trust for the company. Every decision taken by a company's leader is to achieve certain targets to increase the firm's value. Therefore, based on the financial management perspective, a company's primary goal is to grow shareholder wealth by inflating its value. Consequently, it needs to allocate funds to invest in profitable future projects and try to increase its share price to get a high firm value (Mangesti Rahayu et al., 2020). According to Yasar, (2010), strategy is considered a company direction capable of creating benefits from resource management in the long term. Human resources as reflected in skills, attitudes, and performance motivation, as well as the role of leadership and subordinates as internal factors capable of affecting the firm value (Nguyen, 2020).

Leadership is defined as the driver, controller, and implementer of a company's strategy to achieve its predetermined goals. Therefore, the increase in the firm value positively reflects the quality of leadership in the company. This indicates that good leadership helps influence and motivate employees' performance spirit, thereby increasing a company's performance rate. Furthermore, corporate support can help to promote potential activities, build engagement with the company, and improve its performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Every company has leaders with different leadership styles to motivate their employees to perform better to meet set objectives. One of the leadership styles required by companies is empathetic leadership, where a leader can recognize and understand employees' thoughts, emotions, and development. Therefore, the relationship between leaders and employees needs to be established to create comfort and enhance productivity. Morrow et al., (2005) stated that the quality of leadership that establishes a close relationship with its employees inspires employees and helps maintain their respect and loyalty.

Empathetic leadership has the ability to understand employees' performance skills to enable them to contribute to the workplace environment. García-Morales et al., (2008) stated that in quality empathetic leadership, employees get more emotional and moral support needed to carry out their daily activities. Good leaders always support their employees by giving them challenging tasks and providing motivation to overcome risks within the company's environment, which fosters mutual trust and respect between both parties.

Employees tend to contribute more to the company when they are satisfied with their work. Consequently, leaders have professional knowledge and skills for themselves, but they also enable their employees to innovate with confidence while providing the needed support. Therefore, they need to pay attention to the company's vision capable of inspiring and describing employees' positive work in the future. Nguyen, (2020) stated that employee innovation is behavior capable of creating changes in ideas or providing suggestions on something new.

García-Morales et al., (2008) reported that innovation improves company performance by increasing employee creativity. This is because it can further influence success in securing increased market share and revenues with high profits. Hoang & Ngoc, (2019) stated that innovation needs to be the center of attention for managers to improve their operational performance. Employee participation, which is indirectly supported by the leaders on the policy procedures in the company, increases their quality and contribution. This also affects operational performance and the level of performance efficiency within the company (Nguyen, 2020). Yuan & Woodman, (2010) reported that employees must be promoted to innovate to improve the company's operational performance and meet the rising market needs.

Each company needs to arrange its operational activities regularly to obtain good and structured performance and increase its value. Operational performance is measurable from the aspects produced by the company, including talent, production period, and inventory turnover. Mangesti Rahayu et al., (2020) stated that a company's decision to maximize its ability is an achievement to increase its value, which is influenced by operational performance for higher profits. Therefore, operational performance should be the focus in increasing the share because it is an indicator capable of improving the company's value.

### **Literature Riview**

Song et al., (2006) stated that integrating and requiring leadership behavior leads to higher innovation performance. Therefore, leaders need to promote employees to develop creative work. According to Kim et al., (2007), an empathetic leadership attitude leads to a sense of job satisfaction for employees, which improves innovation performance. Furthermore, when a leader applies it towards employees, it increases performance innovation and problem-solving productivity in the company (G. Chen et al., 2005). X. H. Chen et al., (2012) reported that most companies have many groups, and the relationship between them is often essential for employee job satisfaction and innovation competence. Nguyen, (2020) defined empathetic leadership as an important link in human emotional relationships, which plays a key role in interpersonal communication. Good leaders always support their employees by providing challenging tasks and motivating them to overcome risks to the company's environment. Therefore, leaders need to professionally enable their employees to innovate with confidence and support them in promoting performance behavior.

Leaders need to be dedicated to contributing to work by maintaining consistency, supporting employees to create a friendly environment for competency development, paying attention to their daily lives, and creating a sense of comfort. According to Hoang & Ngoc, (2019), when employees receive encouragement and attention from their immediate superiors, the company's commitment and operational performance improvement. Empathetic leadership support affects the encouragement of employees' participation as in the rules and procedures needed to increase their quality and contribution to meet customer

needs. Furthermore, operational performance improves management efficiency (Nguyen, 2020). Varma et al., (2005) stated that guidance, support, and protection from a leader highly value the company's hierarchy in a shared culture for employees. These factors also increase the productivity of operational performance as well as contribute to revenue and profit growth, which is expressed as an increase in the financial capacity of the business (Gamage, 2007).

Innovation is considered a key driver of operational performance (Grant, 2021). Sethibe & Steyn, (2016) reported that an effective innovation strategy can be achieved by supposing the company's conditions to support its employees. However, García-Morales et al., (2008) stated that innovation improves performance. Companies that focus on employee creativity are more successful in securing a larger market share and generating high revenues and profits. In addition, it needs to be a concern for managers to improve their operational performance (Hoang & Ngoc, 2019). Employee innovation is an innovative behavior capable of creating ideas and providing recommendations (Nguyen, 2020). Therefore, it helps to develop capabilities capable of affecting operational performance. Saunila & Ukko, (2012) stated that innovation is a new issue that creates firm value. According to Rubera & Kirca, (2012), it has an indirect effect on the company's interests through its influence on the market. Meanwhile, Veugelers, (2008) reported that innovation is a process that influences the productivity, growth, or profitability of a company.

Job innovation is also expressed through the willingness of employees to conduct work that exceeds expectations. Leaders need to always care for and support employees to increase innovation as an important factor for the company. Apart from providing employee satisfaction, it also improves company performance and increases value (Nguyen, 2020). Therefore, it is seen as an effective driver to enhance company performance and increase value (Lendel & Varmus, 2014). Mangesti Rahayu et al., (2020) reported that the company's decision to maximize the capabilities is an achievement to increase its value, which is influenced by operational performance. The broader market sector, in which the company competes, is very significant in determining operational performance (Nagy, 2009).

Azim et al., (2015) reported that investment and effective financing activities are important operational performances used to increase stock prices. Employee participation, which is indirectly supported by the leadership on the policy procedures, improves operational performance, affecting company efficiency (Nguyen, 2020). Operational performance is measured from the aspects produced by the company, including talent, manufacturing period, and inventory turnover. Therefore, operational performance is an indicator to enhance the quality of company performance, hence it can affect firm value.

### **Research Methods and Material**

This is a quantitative study with hypothesis testing used to make conclusions on population parameters of a large startup company (unicorn) in Indonesia with a total valuation of US\$1.7 billion. The samples were managers and employees of various companies, with data collected using a questionnaire. The variables were Empathetic Leadership (Kock et al., 2019), Job Innovation (Kock et al., 2019), Operational Performance (Nawanir et al., 2013), and Firm Value (Saidi et al., 2021) with 5, 5, and 4 indicators using the Likert scale. Statistical analysis used Partial Least Square (PLS) software version 3 to analyze the data to provide more detailed and clear information.

## Results and Discussion

### Statistical Results

Data related to the study topic were collected from 300 managers and employees through questionnaires. A total of 272 questionnaires were returned and processed using PLS version 3. The results of the data processing are shown in tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1: Data Quality**

Variables	AVE	Composite Reliability
Empathetic Leadership	0,757586	0,949297
Job Innovation	0,691102	0,917752
Operational Performance	0,828397	0,950755
Firm Value	0,617411	0,917132

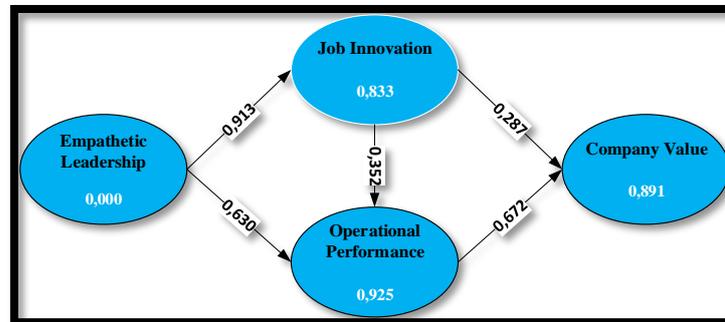
Table 1 shows that Average Variance Extracted (AVE) constructs of Empathetic Leadership, Job Innovation, Operational Performance, and Firm Value were all above 0.6. This shows that each construct had a good validity from all indicators in the questionnaire. The latent variable obtained a composite reliability value above 0.9 on the Empathetic Leadership, Job Innovation, Operational Performance, and Firm Value. This also shows the high consistency and stability of the instruments used. In other words, all the constructs or variables were fit measuring instruments used to determine that each construct had good reliability.

**Table 2: Path Coefficients**

Path	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics ( O/STERR )
Empathetic Leadership to Job Innovation	0,912641	33,881906
Empathetic Leadership to Operational Performance	0,629935	9,543154
Job Innovation to Operational Performance	0,351980	5,247026
Job Innovation to Firm Value	0,287208	3,106896
Operational Performance to Firm Value	0,671706	7,272339

The data processing using SmartPLS Original Sample indicated an effect of Empathetic Leadership on Job Innovation by 0.912641, which was significant with a higher T-statistical than the T-table ( $33.881906 > 1.96$ ). The Original Sample showed an effect of Empathetic Leadership on Operational Performance of 0.629935, which was significant with a higher T-statistic than the T-table ( $9.543154 > 1.96$ ). Job Innovation also influences Operational Performance by 0.351980, which was significant with a higher T-statistic than the T-table ( $5.247026 > 1.96$ ). Besides, Job Innovation had a significant effect on Firm Value by 0.287208 with a higher T-statistic than the T-table ( $3.106896 > 1.96$ ). Furthermore, Operational Performance on Firm Value was affected by 0.671706, which was significant with a higher T-statistic than the T-table ( $7.272339 > 1.96$ ).

**Figure 1: Model of Structural Partial Least Square**



The statistical analysis on the first hypothesis indicates a positive effect of Empathetic Leadership on Job Innovation at an estimated value of 0.912641. The T-statistic of 33.881906, was higher than the t-count 1.96 at 0.05 significance, hence, the first hypothesis is accepted. The second showed that the application of Empathetic Leadership had a positive and significant effect on Operational Performance as indicated by the original sample estimate value of 0.629935. The T-statistic of 9.543154, which was higher than the t-count of 1.96 (significant at p 0.05) indicated that the second hypothesis is accepted. The third shows that Job Innovation had a positive and significant effect on Operational Performance, with its data processed using Smart PLS software is shown in Table 2. The coefficient and t-statistic values of the original sample estimate Job Innovation on Operational Performance were 0.351980 and 5.247026, higher than the t-table of 1.96 (significant at p 0.05). Therefore, the third hypothesis is accepted. Subsequently, the application of Job Innovation had a positive and significant effect on Firm Value based on the data processing with an original sample estimate of 0.287208. The T-statistic of 3.106896 was higher than the t-count of 1.96 (significant at p 0.05) which signified that the fourth hypothesis is accepted. Also, Operational Performance had a positive and significant effect on Firm Value as indicated by the original sample estimate of 0.671706 and the T-statistic of 7.272339, which was higher than the t-count of 1.96 (significant at p 0.05). Therefore, the fifth hypothesis is accepted.

### Discussion

According to Nguyen, (2020), empathetic leadership positively affects performance innovation, which increases creative behavior in employees. Kock et al., (2019) stated that it has a positive effect on performance innovation by providing employees with creative opportunities. Meanwhile, the hypothesis test by Alblooshi et al., (2020) showed that empathetic leadership has a direct and indirect positive effect on performance innovation. Deliu, (2019) and Fadillah et al., (2020) also stated that it affects performance innovation.

Hypothesis tests on the effect of empathetic leadership on operational performance led to a positive indirect relationship because it affected operational performance through job innovation. The results showed that empathetic leadership had a significant effect on operational performance. According to Farajallah et al., (2018), the relationship of empathetic leadership to operational performance is significant. Conversley, Almatrooshi et al., (2020) and Le & Tran, (2020) stated that empathetic leadership indirectly positively affects operational performance. Performance innovation produces a direct and significant positive effect on operational performance. Furthermore, Tarigan, (2018) also tested the

hypothesis of performance innovation on operational performance. According to Taghizadeh et al., (2020), hypothesis testing showed that performance innovation positively affects operational performance because it plays an essential role in its improvement.

Agustia et al., (2019) conducted hypothesis testing, which showed a significant positive effect of performance innovation on firm value, indicating that high innovation companies can increase firm value. Furthermore, Li et al., (2020) and Cho, (2020) stated that performance innovation indirectly and positively affects firm value. Studies by Santi Novita; M. Sahrul, (2020), Siregar & Deswanto, (2018), and Soewarno & Ramadhan, (2020) showed that operational performance has a positive effect on firm value. Meanwhile, Hasanudin et al., (2020) stated that operational performance positively and indirectly affects firm value.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, this study shows that Empathetic Leadership correlates mainly with Job Innovation and Operational Performance in increasing Firm Value. Furthermore, Operational Performance needs to be improved to increase Company Value during the pandemic. Leaders can also generate team satisfaction by ensuring tolerance, flexibility, creativity, and independence. A capable leader can create innovation within the team, thereby improving the company's operational performance and creating good Firm Value among stakeholders. One of the limitations in this study is related to the size and structure of the sample because the number of unicorn companies in Indonesia is still very small. Therefore, future studies need to involve more company managers and employees with different activity profiles and coaching programs.

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Appendix of questionnaire indicators

The indicators below are used as a reference for the questionnaire questions for each variable that are answered on a 7 Likert scale.

Variable	Indicators
Empathetic Leadership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Praise for the good work of subordinates</li> <li>2. Encouragement to subordinates</li> <li>3. Attention to subordinates</li> <li>4. Subordinate work development support</li> <li>5. Trust from superiors to subordinates</li> </ol>
Job Innovation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Trying new ideas and approaches</li> <li>2. Adapting to the unfamiliarity of the task</li> <li>3. Can carry out a new method of working</li> <li>4. Working with originality</li> <li>5. Providing new solutions</li> </ol>
Operational Performance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Product quality improvement</li> <li>2. Minimizing inventory</li> <li>3. Product delivery effectiveness</li> <li>4. Increased productivity</li> <li>5. Operational cost reduction</li> </ol>
Firm Value	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sale</li> <li>2. New services and products are available</li> <li>3. Market expansion</li> <li>4. Value-added service</li> </ol>