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Perceived Leadership Communication, Interpersonal Justice, and Job Performance: The Mediating Role of Trust in Leader

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Abstract: The variable order fulfillment accuracy of an iron and steel industry illustrates the difficulties in sustaining employee performance under a challenging work environment. This study, grounded in social exchange theory, investigates the impact of perceived leadership communication and interpersonal justice on work performance, with trust in the leader serving as a mediating variable. A quantitative methodology was utilized, employing census sampling with a cohort of 150 employees. Data were examined utilizing structural equation modeling. The findings demonstrate that perceived leadership communication substantially influences work performance and trust in the leader. Trust in leadership significantly influences work performance and mediates the link between perceived leadership communication and job performance. Nonetheless, interpersonal justice does not substantially influence work performance or trust in leadership, whether directly or indirectly. The findings indicate that effective leadership communication cultivates employee trust, thereby improving work performance. Consequently, firms want to enhance leadership communication strategies to foster trust and elevate employee performance inside the manufacturing industry.

Keyword: Perceived Leadership Communication, Interpersonal Justice, Job Performance, Trust in Leader, Manufacturing Industry.

INTRODUCTION

The manufacturing industry is vital to both organizational competitiveness and economic growth. Employee job performance becomes crucial to attaining organizational objectives and operational success in fiercely competitive sectors. Therefore, companies looking to preserve productivity and sustainability must comprehend the aspects influencing employee performance. The manufacturing sector is crucial to bolstering the sustainability of the national economy, employing over 19.6 million people and contributing roughly 18.67%

of the country's GDP in 2025. Therefore, the success of a manufacturing company is largely dependent on how well human resource management works, especially when it comes to maximizing staff performance (Vu, 2022). However, in reality, manufacturing workers who face constant pressure to perform consistently are still quite difficult to retain. Variations in the accuracy rates for order completion at Precision Component-Iron and Steel Manufacturing Corporation are indicative of this performance instability phenomenon. Out of 7,200 orders, the accuracy percentage for fulfilling orders in 2023 was 98.9%. As order quantities increased to 7,500 in 2024, this percentage dropped to 94.4% before rising to 97.1% in 2025. This performance variance indicates a need to further identify employee job performance issues using organizational relationship variables.

Relational limitations in the industry are causing employee work performance at the precision component iron and steel manufacturing firm to fluctuate. Low perceived leadership communication, which is operationally defined as employee impressions of the regularity, transparency, and clarity of work information supplied by supervisors, is indicated by pre-survey findings (Panjaitan & Arifin, 2023). This problem results from managers' subjective communication styles and lack of transparency while disseminating information. In the business of manufacturing precision components, exceptional accuracy is required in every work process, making it extremely sensitive to even small faults. In addition to lowering motivation, relational unfairness and poor communication on the production line may raise the possibility of technical mistakes that impede the achievement of company goals.

Low interpersonal justice exacerbates this issue, as employees often feel treated unequally and receive improper criticism (Wiseman & Stillwell, 2022). The cumulative impact of poor communication and unfair treatment culminates in a sharp decline in trust in leaders (Mayer et al., 1995). Consequently, supervisory guidance is no longer considered reliable, ultimately disrupting psychological comfort and reducing team productivity.

The purpose of this study is to examine how employee work performance is impacted by perceived leadership communication and interpersonal justice based on these relational phenomena. Additionally, to give a more thorough understanding of the function that trust in leaders plays in fostering connections at work and boosting productivity within the business, this study puts trust in leaders as a mediating variable (Ayça, 2023). By using this method, it is anticipated that the research findings will address the degree to which treatment justice and communication conflicts affect team effectiveness, thereby acting as a strategic reference for the management of the precision component iron and steel manufacturing company in optimizing its human resources management.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research methodology to examine the influence of perceived leadership communication and interpersonal justice on work performance, with confidence in the leader serving as a mediating variable. From March to July 2026, researchers executed the investigation at an iron and steel manufacturing plant in West Java, Indonesia. The population comprised 150 workers. A final sample of 150 employees was acquired through a census sampling method, encompassing all employees as responders.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

A systematic quantitative questionnaire was used to gather data from workers in an iron and steel production firm. A five-point Likert scale, from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), was used to measure each dimension. This study examined four factors: work performance, interpersonal justice, perceived leadership communication, and trust in leader.

The tool for gauging perceived leadership communication was modified from (Schneider et al., 2015) which evaluates workers' opinions on the efficacy, clarity, and quality of leadership communication. The (Colquitt, 2001) scale, which assesses how much employees believe their managers treat them with respect, decency, and civility, was used to gauge interpersonal justice. The (McAllister, 1995) tool, which measures employees' affect-based and cognition-based confidence in their leaders, was used to measure trust in leaders. The (Na-Nan et al., 2018) scale, which evaluates workers' efficacy and achievement in carrying out their designated activities and responsibilities, was used to gauge job performance.

Through the dissemination of questionnaires, respondents directly provided primary data. In the meantime, to support the study framework and analysis, secondary data was gathered from books, scientific journals, corporate papers, and other pertinent material.

Data Analysis Technique

Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software was used to evaluate the data. The measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model) were assessed as part of the investigation. Because PLS-SEM can concurrently evaluate mediation effects and examine intricate correlations between latent variables, it was chosen.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

This study involved a total of 150 employees. Gender-wise, 5 respondents (3.3%) were female and 145 respondents (96.7%) were male. The respondents' ages varied from 18 to over 31. The majority of participants had completed both junior high school (SMP) and senior high school (SMA). Respondents' job duration varied from three months to almost three years, indicating a disparity in employees' levels of work experience.

Measurement Model Assessment

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Perceived Leadership Communication	0,868	0,871	0,901	0,602
Interpersonal Justice	0,817	0,838	0,877	0,641
Job Performance	0,978	0,982	0,981	0,837
Trust in Leader	0,730	0,748	0,847	0,649

Source: Research data processed (2026)

According to Table 1, every concept satisfied the suggested standards for convergent validity and reliability. The measuring model has sufficient reliability and convergent validity, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding 0.70 and all AVE values exceeding 0.50. (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results

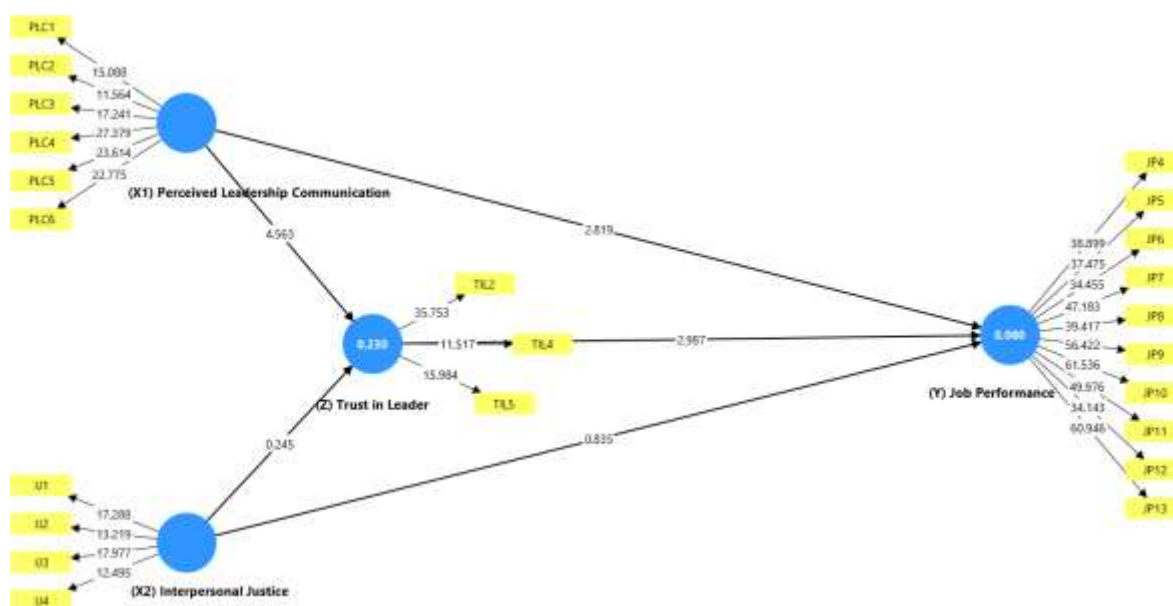
Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample (β)	T Statistics	P Values	Result
H1	Perceived Leadership Communication → Job Performance	-0.354	2.819	0.005	Significant
H2	Interpersonal Justice → Job Performance	0.103	0.835	0.404	Not Significant
H3	Trust in Leader → Job Performance	0.245	2.987	0.003	Significant

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample (β)	T Statistics	P Values	Result
H4	Perceived Leadership Communication $\rightarrow$ Trust in Leader	0.496	4.563	0.000	Significant
H5	Interpersonal Justice $\rightarrow$ Trust in Leader	-0.025	0.245	0.806	Not Significant
H6	Perceived Leadership Communication $\rightarrow$ Trust in Leader $\rightarrow$ Job Performance	0.122	2.560	0.010	Significant
H7	Interpersonal Justice $\rightarrow$ Trust in Leader $\rightarrow$ Job Performance	-0.006	0.225	0.822	Not Significant

Source: Research data processed (2026)

According to the hypothesis testing findings in Table 2, four out of the seven presented hypotheses are statistically significant, while three are not. Perceived leadership communication had a significant negative direct effect on work performance ($\beta = -0.354$, $p = 0.005$) and a significant positive effect on trust in the leader ($\beta = 0.496$, $p = 0.000$). On the other hand, interpersonal justice does not have a statistically significant relationship with job performance ($\beta = 0.103$, $p = 0.404$) or trust in the leader ($\beta = -0.025$, $p = 0.806$). Its indirect pathway is also not significant ($\beta = -0.006$, $p = 0.822$). Significantly, confidence in the leader directly enhances job performance ($\beta = 0.245$, $p = 0.003$) and serves as an essential mediating variable that effectively transforms leadership communication into favorable performance results.

The principal catalyst for improved work performance in this strategy is trust in the boss. Leadership communication does not inherently enhance employee performance; it must first cultivate a foundation of trust to successfully foster favorable performance results. In contrast, interpersonal justice does not substantially influence trust or job performance within this study framework.



Source: Authors' analysis using SmartPLS 4 (2026)

Figure 1. Bootstrapping Results of the Structural Model

Discussion

The results show that job performance is significantly impacted negatively by perceived leadership communication. This implies that increased levels of perceived leadership

communication may not always result in better worker performance—in certain cases, they may even have the opposite effect. This detrimental effect arises from an overload of communication that exceeds human cognitive capability. According to (Sigolo et, 2024) an excess of digital or organizational communication results in significant information overload, which diminishes employees' cognitive resources and hinders their job processing capabilities. Moreover, this cognitive fatigue is evident in persistent job fragmentation and elevated task-switching costs. Excessive communication from leaders compels staff to regularly disrupt their primary operating tasks to address incoming communications. This ongoing disturbance undermines their cognitive concentration, rendering it exceedingly challenging to maintain the "deep work" necessary for superior performance. As a result, the time and cognitive resources that need to be allocated to task proficiency are squandered on sifting through communication noise, thereby diminishing real work performance. This phenomenon may be described by social exchange theory, which states that connections between managers and staff are built on reciprocal social exchanges and that the quality of these relationships is dependent on perceived rewards, trust, and duty (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The balance of social exchange connections may be upset by leadership communication that is considered high yet is ineffective, inconsistent, or puts pressure on workers. Such communication lowers the advantages that workers perceive, lowers their motivation, and eventually results in a drop in job performance. This is consistent with (Men et al., 2024), who stated that poor-quality leadership communication can reduce employees' role clarity and decrease work effectiveness. The findings indicate that interpersonal justice has little impact on job performance. This result implies that being fair, courteous, and respectful by managers does not always result in better worker performance. (Colquitt et al., 2013) state that rather than directly affecting performance, the benefits of interpersonal justice on employee outcomes frequently happen indirectly through psychological mechanisms like trust, commitment, or job engagement. This result (Thompson et al., 2021) found that interactional fairness improves follower performance. Differences in the organizational setting, employee traits, and the presence of additional performance-influencing elements may explain the discrepancy.

The findings indicate that trust in the leader positively and significantly influences job performance. According to this research, workers who have more faith in their managers often perform better. Employees are more motivated, more committed to accomplishing organizational objectives, and more confident in managerial choices when they trust their leaders. This result is in line with that of (C. Lee et al., 2023) who discovered that trust is essential for enhancing work performance through constructive leadership influences. (C. C. Lee et al., 2022) also discovered a link between increased employee engagement, improved work performance, and leadership trust. The findings indicate that perceived leadership communication positively and significantly impacts trust in a leader. According to this research, effective communication increases transparency, lowers ambiguity, and boosts confidence in leadership, all of which increase employee trust. This outcome is in line with the findings of (Namira & Pusparini, 2023), who showed that open communication increases trust and workers' preparedness for organizational transformation, and (Ramadhan, 2024), who discovered that leadership communication positively improves employee trust. (Rajhi & Aljuhmani, 2026), demonstrated that communication quality positively influences trust in leadership.

The research revealed that interpersonal justice did not significantly impact trust in the leader, contrary to predictions. This research implies that treating employees fairly and with respect may not be enough to earn their trust. Other aspects of leadership, such as competency, sincerity, and leadership style, may have a greater influence on employee trust. In a high-pressure industrial setting, factory operators cultivate functional trust rooted in a

leader's technical expertise and problem-solving skills, rather than superficial civility or courteous conduct. A supervisor's courtesy, without addressing production bottlenecks or safeguarding staff incentives, will not substantially enhance confidence.

In contrast, (Alilyyani, 2022), discovered that real leadership increases managers' trust by encouraging openness and credibility. According to Nazarian et al. (2025), transformational and servant leadership also increase employees' faith in their leaders' talents and intentions. The study suggests that trust in the leader mediates the association between perceived leadership communication and job performance. Effective leadership communication builds trust among staff members, which in turn improves work performance. The study suggests that trust in the leader mediates the association between perceived leadership communication and job performance. Effective leadership communication builds trust among staff members, which in turn improves work performance. In the absence of trust, frequent communication is regarded as an invasive cognitive burden that disrupts daily activities. Once trust is formed, workers reinterpret the same amount of communication as transparent and beneficial counsel, which successfully directs their efforts towards enhanced job performance. (Matondang et al., 2021), who discovered that effective communication boosts workers' motivation and trust and improves performance, corroborate this conclusion. Similarly, (Hutama et al., 2024) showed that by boosting workers' confidence in management guidance, trust enhances the beneficial impact of leadership on worker performance. Additionally, employee trust strengthens the impact of leadership communication on work outcomes, leading to improved performance levels, according to (Yang et al., 2020). The research revealed that trust in the leader did not mediate the relationship between interpersonal justice and job performance, contrary to predictions. According to this research, employees' performance may not always increase when supervisors treat them fairly and respectfully. In contrast, (González-Cánovas et al., 2024) found that perceptions of fairness and trust positively influence employee engagement and job outcomes. According to (Edilpatriz et al. (2025), confidence in leaders improves job effectiveness and role clarity, which in turn improves employee performance. Consequently, this study did not support the mediation function of trust in leaders in the link between interpersonal justice and job performance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among work performance, interpersonal justice, perceived leadership communication, and trust in leaders. The findings demonstrate that the relationship between perceived leadership communication and work performance is mediated by confidence in the leader, which also significantly improves employee performance. Enhanced employee trust results from proficient leadership communication, therefore leading to enhanced job performance. Interpersonal justice exerted no substantial influence on job performance or trust in the leader, and trust in the leader did not buffer the relationship between interpersonal justice and job performance.

These findings contribute to the understanding of organizational behavior and leadership by highlighting the significance of leadership communication as a technique for cultivating employee trust and improving performance. The poll indicates that firms have to focus on developing effective communication tactics that promote transparency, clarity, and comprehension between management and employees. Organizations may enhance employee performance and cultivate a more productive work environment by bolstering confidence in leadership via effective communication.

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