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## Leverage as A Mediating Variable on Tax Avoidance

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### ABSTRACT

*The study aims to determine the impact of executive compensation, executive character, sales growth, and capital intensity on tax avoidance using leverage as a mediator variable. The study uses manufacturing companies in the various industrial sectors listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) in 2017-2020. The method of purposive sampling is used, and the samples are 48 companies. Multiple linear regression is used for data analytical techniques. The result reveals that tax avoidance is not influenced by executive compensation, sales growth, and capital intensity, while tax avoidance is affected by the executive character. The relation of capital intensity on tax avoidance is mediated by leverage. On the contrary, the relation of executive compensation, executive character, and sales growth on tax avoidance is not mediated by leverage. This research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution as a source of information in answering the problem of tax avoidance and reveal the variables that influence it. This research is also expected to provide a practical contribution for companies in relation to decision making in tax avoidance efforts and for the government as a tax regulator to set tax rules to anticipate tax avoidance actions taken by companies.*

**Keywords:** *Executive Compensation, Executive Character, Sales Growth, Capital Intensity, Tax Avoidance, Leverage.*

### ABSTRAK

*Tujuan penelitian untuk memperoleh bukti empiris pengaruh kompensasi eksekutif, karakter eksekutif, sales growth, serta capital intensity pada tax avoidance menggunakan leverage sebagai pemediator. Perusahaan manufaktur dari sektor aneka industri yang di Bursa Efek Indonesia (BEI) dalam kurun waktu 2017-2020 digunakan sebagai sampel dengan jumlah sampel akhir sebanyak 48 perusahaan. Studi menggunakan metode purposive sampling dengan teknik analisis regresi linear berganda. Pengujian mengungkapkan bahwa tax avoidance tidak dipengaruhi oleh kompensasi eksekutif, sales growth dan capital intensity sedangkan karakter eksekutif mempengaruhi tax avoidance. Hubungan capital intensity terhadap tax avoidance dimediasi oleh leverage sebaliknya hubungan antara kompensasi eksekutif, karakter eksekutif, dan sales growth terhadap tax avoidance tidak dimediasi oleh leverage. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi teoritis sebagai sumber informasi dalam menjawab permasalahan penghindaran pajak dan mengungkap variabel-variabel yang mempengaruhinya. Penelitian ini*

*juga diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi praktis bagi perusahaan dalam kaitannya dengan pengambilan keputusan dalam upaya penghindaran pajak dan bagi pemerintah sebagai regulator pajak untuk menetapkan aturan perpajakan untuk mengantisipasi tindakan penghindaran pajak yang dilakukan oleh perusahaan.*

**Kata Kunci :** *Kompensasi Eksekutif, Karakter Eksekutif, Sales Growth, Capital Intensity, Tax Avoidance, Leverage.*

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## 1. Introduction

According to Law issue No. 6 of 2009 regarding with General Provisions and Tax Procedures in the Article 1 Paragraph 1, it is stated paying the tax is a mandatory contributions to the state belonging to individuals or entities that are required by law, without receiving direct compensation which is used by the state as a means of prospering the people (Nugraha & Mulyani) [1]. According to the company's assumptions, taxes are considered a burden, thus causing the emergence of different goals between the tax authorities and the company. The tax authorities as stakeholders hope to get large tax revenue. while companies are agents who expect the lowest possible tax payments to the state. This difference in interests between them causes businesses in planning to avoid tax practices. Avoiding tax is a measure used by companies with the intention of reducing the amount of tax liability in order to make a profit. It can be said that tax avoidance does not oppose tax regulations because taxpayers try to run it by minimizing the total tax payable by looking for weaknesses (grey areas) in the regulations (Lazuardi & Mulyani) [2].

Some factors are able to influence the practice of avoiding tax, including executive compensation, executive character, sales growth, capital intensity and leverage. Executive compensation is the amount of wages used as a substitute for services to the company, with the aim of motivating, attracting, and retaining employees (Fatimah et al) [3]. Executive compensation has been studied by researchers (Fatimah et al) [3], (Omega et al) [4], (Pratiwi et al) [5], which results in the finding that compensation received by executive influenced the behavior of avoiding tax. However, research (Dewi & Sari) [6] finds that compensation does not have influenced to tax avoidance.

The next factor that influences the behavior of avoiding tax is the executive character. The character of the executive in this company has a very important role because the executive has high power and authority to run the company. Executive characters in companies have different roles in making decisions and policies in their companies (Praptidewi & Sukartha) [7]. Research conducted by (Swingly & Sukartha) [8], (Feranika et al) [9] (Oktamawati) [10] states if the executive character affects tax avoidance. Different from research (Praptidewi & Sukartha) [7], (Ervaniti et al) [11] and (Sugiyanto & Fitri) [12], which proves that the executive character does not affect avoiding tax. Later, the other factor that able to affect avoiding tax is the growth of sales. Increasing sales will be able to make the company earn significant interest, therefore companies often practice to avoid taxes (Mahdiana & Amin) [13], whereas (Permata et al) [14] and (Pratiwi et al) [5] argues that sales growth does not influence on avoiding tax.

In addition to the three factors mentioned, next factor that can affect avoiding tax is capital intensity. The meaning of capital Intensity refers to the level of investment in the company's assets in the form of fixed assets. This fixed asset is one of the assets which is possessed by the business and has the effect of minimizing the income of companies whose fixed assets can be depreciated. So it can be said that the greater the cost of depreciation that comes out of fixed assets will cause the amount of tax that the company must pay to be smaller. (Mailia and Apollo) [15], (Dharma & Noviani) [16] say if capital intensity affects avoiding the tax, while research conducted by (Puspita & Febrianti) [17] and (Pratiwi et al) [5] say that if capital intensity does not predispose in avoiding

tax. Previous studies have shown many inconsistencies in research results. In addition, various previous studies have not involved the leverage variable as a predictor that affects the relationship between executive compensation, executive character, sales growth, capital intensity variables on tax avoidance. Thus, this research will focus on the leverage variable as a mediator factor, this is because the level of leverage owned by businesses is able to be utilised as an instrument to degrade the company's tax encumbrance. Using of debt may lead to costs in the form of interest costs so that further able to drop the amount of benefit gain by businesses. The company's profits are the basis for the imposition of corporate tax (Brigham et al) [17].

This research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution as a source of information in answering the problem of tax avoidance and reveal the variables that influence it. This research is also expected to provide a practical contribution for companies in relation to decision making in tax avoidance efforts and for the government as a tax regulator to set tax rules to anticipate tax avoidance actions taken by companies.

## 2. Theory and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1 Theory

Agency theory, according to (Jensen & Meckling) [18], is a contractual relationship between companies where the principal uses the agent to work on behalf of the principal in representing authority to the agent to make some decisions. According to (Winata) [19], tax avoidance is an effort to reduce the tax obligation that influences tax reduction where when carrying out the practice does not violate the law. The loopholes in tax regulations or the gray area can be exploited for tax avoidance activities.

Executive compensation is a form of appreciation or wages given by the company to executives or management based on the services the management performs in the plan as the fulfillment of the company's targets (Hanafi & Harto) [21]. The character of the executive has a big role to make and determine policy decisions that must be done by the company, besides that the executive is the determinant of the main activities in a company who responsible for making decisions and policies in the company. According to (Low) [21] companies in carrying out their duties have two different characters, namely ripple takers (executives who dare to take risks) and risk averse (executives who do not dare to take risks).

Sales growth is a characteristic that can show growth in the level of sales of a company in each period (Mahdiana & Amin) [13]. Sales growth can be measured based on changes in the company's total sales. Capital intensity is one of the characteristics inherent in a company and this has become a characteristic of the company. Capital intensity is taken to improve profitability in businesses as a choice of financial decisions that have been implemented. Capital Intensity can reflect how much capital a company needs to generate revenue (Afiana & Mukti) [22]. Leverage become a source of capital that has a fixed burden, meaning that leverage is a long-term debt that is able to generate interest payments on a fixed charge. Companies can use leverage to help increase desired profits (Nugrahitha & Suprasto) [23].

### 2.2 Hypothesis

#### **The effect of executive compensation on tax avoidance**

Executive compensation influence the behavior of avoiding tax, meaning that executives who receive high compensation can increase tax avoidance in a company to be even greater. This hypothesis is supported by (Fatimah et al) [3], (Omega et al) [4], (Pratiwi et al) [5]. From the description, the hypothesis can be shown as follows:

H1: Executive compensation has an effect on tax avoidance

#### **The effect of executive character on tax avoidance**

Executive means the holder who get mandate from the owner to achieve the company's goals, so as the executive has the right to make decisions in every business activity. Executives who have

the sense of risk takers will not feel afraid when making high-risk decisions. Executives with high courage in taking risks tend to run higher tax avoidance. This hypothesis is supported by research conducted by (Swingly & Sukartha)[8] (Feranika et al) [9] (Oktamawati) [10]. The statement above can be concluded to a hypothesis below:

H2: Executive character influence the tax avoidance

#### **The effect of sales growth on tax avoidance**

Increased sales in a company will make the company get increased interest as well. The company bears a large tax burden when the interest earned by the company is also large. Then, high interest in a company tends to reduce its tax payments by avoiding tax. This hypothesis is supported by research conducted by (Mahdiana & Amin) [13]. Below the hypothesis of above description:

H3: Sales Growth has an effect on tax avoidance

#### **The effect of capital intensity on tax avoidance**

An investment in fixed assets that is invested the company when carrying out its operational activities is called capital intensity. The emergence of depreciation expense caused by the ownership of the company's fixed assets can have a large or small effect on the total tax obligations that ought to be fulfilled by businesses. Profits gained by the company can decrease if the depreciation expense is large, thus the income tax will also decrease. This hypothesis is sustained by a study taken by (Mailia and Apollo) [15], (Dharma & Noviani) [16], From this explanation, the hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H4: Capital Intensity affects tax avoidance

#### **Tax avoidance is affected by leverage**

Leverage can be defined as a ratio that can burden the company's loan capability both in short term and in long term which is useful for funding company assets. To fulfill the operational needs as well as to make investments made by the company, it is possible using debt. However, the debt can lead to a fixed rate of return or a higher interest rate will make the tax burden to be paid by the company lower, so that it is able to make the company do tax avoidance with a fairly high level of interest costs from debt. This hypothesis is supported by research conducted by (Nugraha & Mulyani) [1]. The hypothesis of the argument above as follows:

H5: Leverage has an effect on tax avoidance

#### **The effect of executive compensation on leverage**

Agency theory says that the relationship between compensation and leverage is found through the greater the compensation earned by the management so that the source of the cost required is also greater, this is because it is useful for improving executive performance in increasing the value of the company. The increasing need for funds requires large compensation resulting in increased needs so that leverage become elevated. The hypothesis is sustained by a study of (Nugraha & Mulyani) [1] and (Trisianto & Oktaviani) [26].

H6: Executive compensation has an effect on leverage

#### **The effect of executive character on leverage**

Executive character has an influence on leverage. The character of the executive can influence the decision on how much debt will be used to finance its assets. So that it can be said that it will greatly affect the level of leverage in the company. This hypothesis is supported by research conducted by (Nugraha & Mulyani) [1] and (Carolina et al) [24].

The hypothesis of the statement can be proposed as follows:

H7: Executive character affects leverage

#### **The effect of sales growth on leverage**

In investing in a company's success period, it can be reflected by sales growth and can predict the level of sales growth in the future. Companies with high levels of sales growth tend to use more debt to use a lot. This is because high sales growth will require a lot of financial support (Nugraha & Mulyani) [1]. The hypothesis can be stated below:

H8: Sales growth influence the leverage

#### **The effect of capital intensity on leverage**

Fixed assets or inventories can be used to invest and the high capital to be invested in fixed assets can not be separated from the company's funding origin which usually comes from company debt, so companies need debt to assist investment activities and it can be concluded that capital intensity has an influence on leverage (Nugraha & Mulyani) [1], (Dharma & Noviari) [25]. From the description above, the following is the formulation of the hypothesis:

H9: Capital Intensity affects leverage

**The effect of executive compensation on tax avoidance with leverage as a mediator**

Executive compensation has a relation with leverage, along with the increase in the level of rewards that the company provides to its employees. The company will need large funds so that companies use debt as a source of funds, the use of debt causes the emergence of a tax obligation that ought to be paid by businesses. Based on the tax rules on debt interest, it is allowed to reduce tax obligation that ought to be paid, thus the action of avoiding to pay tax will be carried out in order to make a profit. This hypothesis is supported by research conducted by (Nugraha & Mulyani) [1]. From the explanation above, the following is the formulation of the hypothesis:

H10: Leverage as mediating the effect of executive compensation on tax avoidance.

**The effect of executive character on tax avoidance with leverage as a mediator**

Agency theory argues that if the leadership in the company in making decisions will use debt as a source of funds, it means that the company must be ready to accept large debt interest. The emergence of this large interest resulted in a large tax liability borne by the company. However, the executive character who has a risk averse sense will choose to avoid the risk of the debt which may make the company go bankrupt so executives choose to avoid paying tax. The hypothesis is sustain by study conducted by (Carolina et al) [24]. Hypothesis to describe the statement above is as follows :

H11: Leverage as mediating the effect of executive character on tax avoidance.

**The effect of sales growth on tax avoidance with leverage as a mediator**

Agency theory says the profit must be optimized because the company's leaders are trying hard to maximize the value of the company itself. As time goes by, this increased sales growth encourages enterprise to increase its assets, so the company will need debt for its source of funds. This then causes a tax burden the company increasing so that the enterprise intends to do tax avoidance by minimizing the tax burden. This hypothesis is supported by research conducted by (Tristianito & Oktaviani) [26]. The hypothesis to be proposed for describing the statement above is:

H12: Leverage mediates the effect of sales growth against tax avoidance.

**The effect of capital intensity on tax avoidance with leverage as a mediator**

Companies favor to put investment on fixed assets to minimize the amount of tax. This is because investment in fixed assets will make the company posses the depreciation costs which can then be utilized to reduce the tax encumbrance, so debt is not always used by enterprise to avoid paying tax. The argument above raises the following hypothesis:

H13: Leverage as a mediator can not mediate the relation of capital intensity and tax avoidance.

### 3. Method

This study uses all the company financial statements taken from [www.idx.co.id](http://www.idx.co.id) and [www.idnfinancial.com](http://www.idnfinancial.com). This study uses a population of industrial sector choosing of manufacturing companies that have been listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) with a population of companies with 6 sub-sectors from year of 2017 to year of 2020. The sampling technique uses the purposive sampling method which gets 48 companies as samples. The data analysis method utilizes multiple regression equations. The equation model is described below :

$$\text{Equation I: Lev} = \alpha + \beta 1KE + 2KOE + 3CI + 4SG + e \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Equation II: TA} = \alpha + \beta \text{LEV} + e \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Equation III: TA} = \alpha + \beta 1KE + 2KOE + 3CI + 4SG + e \quad (3)$$

Description:

TA: Tax Avoidance                      KE: Executive Character     $\alpha$ : Constant  
 LEV: Leverage                        SG: Sales Growth             $\beta$ : Coefisien Regression  
 KOE: Executive Compensation    CI: Capital Intensity         $e$ : Error/residual

**Table 1. Measurement of Variable**

Variable	Name	Measurement
Dependent	Tax Avoidance (TA)	$CETR = \frac{\text{Taxes payment}}{\text{Profit before tax}}$
Independent	Executive Compensation (KOE)	$Ln = \text{Total Executive Compensation}$
	Executive Character (KE)	$Risk = \frac{\text{Current year profit} + \text{Interest expense} + \text{Income tax expense}}{\text{Total Asset}}$
	Sales Growth (SG)	$\text{Sales growth} = \frac{\text{Sales } t - \text{Sales } t-1}{\text{Sales } t-1} \times 100\%$
	Capital Intensity (CI)	$\text{Capital Intensity} = \frac{\text{Total Fixed Asset}}{\text{Total Asset}}$
Mediator	Leverage (LEV)	$DER = \frac{\text{Total Liabilities}}{\text{Total Equity}}$

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1 Statistic Result

The results of statistical tests are as follows:

###### 4.1.1 The F test

The statistical result shows the F test has a significance of less than 0.05 (the equation I has a significance value of 0.002, the second equation has a significance value of 0.025 and the third equation has significance value of 0.004/ so that the three equations are declared feasible and meet the requirements as a regression model.

###### 4.1.2 The T test

The T test can be shown from the table below:

**Table 2. T Test Result**

Model	B	B direction	t-test	t-test	Decision
Executive Compensation	,004	Positive	1.104	,276	H1 rejected
Executive Character	0.080	Negative	3,964	,000	H2 accepted
Sales Growth	-,010	Negative	-1,832	,074	H3 rejected
Capital Intensity	0.019	Negative	1.027	,310	H4 rejected
Leverage	0.088	Positive	2,322	0.025	H5 accepted
Executive Compensation	,004	Negative	,318	,752	H6 rejected
Executive Character	,152	Negative	1,996	0.052	H7 rejected
Sales Growth	,001	Negative	,021	,983	H8 rejected
Capital Intensity	,260	Positive	3,693	,001	H9 accepted

According to the results of the hypothesis test, it is stated that executive compensation, sales growth and capital intensity have no effect on tax avoidance, on the contrary the result shows that executive character influences to tax avoidance. The results of the next hypothesis test are the leverage mediator variable which reveals that leverage has an effect on tax avoidance. According to the hypothesis test on the independent variables above, the executive compensation, the executive character and sales growth have no influence on tax avoidance. The ninth hypothesis test, it is found that capital intensity has an effect on tax avoidance.

##### 4.1.3 The Test of Mediating Variable

**Table 3. Result Calculation of Mediating Variable**

Total correlation effect KOE TA	-0.3701
Total effect of KE TA correlation	1.2742
Total correlation effect of SG TA	-0.0308
Total effect of CI correlation TA	1.8042

The results above shows the total correlation that influence the executive compensation on tax avoidance is -0.3701, so it can be concluded that if H10 is rejected, it means that leverage can not mediate the effect of executive compensation on tax avoidance. The table above shows the total correlation effect of the executive character on tax avoidance is 1.2742, the conclusion that can be drawn H11 is rejected so that leverage is not able to mediate the influence of character executives on tax avoidance. From the results of the table, it shows the results of the total calculation of the correlation between sales growth and tax avoidance is -0.0308, the conclusion is H12 is rejected so that leverage does not work to mediate the sales growth and tax avoidance. The table above indicates the relation of capital intensity and tax avoidance, so the conclusion that can be drawn is that H13 is accepted and the relation between leverage capital intensity and tax avoidance is mediated by leverage.

## 4.2 Discussion

The statistical results state that there is no effect between executive compensation and tax avoidance, indicating that the amount of compensation provided by the company to the executive does not always cause the company to carry out tax avoidance, this can occur because the level of supervision in the company is high and the policies made to earn profits. This study supports the research conducted (Dewi & Sari) [6]. The executive character has an effect on tax avoidance in line with agency theory which argues that someone will only be motivated by personal interests so that this can trigger a conflict of interest between the principal and agent. The executive character is able to influence the company's decisions in carrying out tax avoidance in relation to the individual executives of the company. This is in accordance with research conducted by (Swingly & Sukartha)[8], (Feranika et al) [9] and (Oktamawati) [10]. Sales growth has no effect on tax avoidance, this proves that the existence of sales growth does not always make companies to do tax avoidance because increasing company growth will cause the tax burden to become smaller so this makes the company not take tax avoidance actions. This is in accordance with research (Permata et al) [14] and (Pratiwiet et al) [5]. Capital intensity uses agency theory because in agency theory the amount of corporate tax is more emphasized and idle company funds will be invested in fixed investment by managers, the goal is to get profits in the form of depreciation expense which can be used to minimize the amount of corporate tax so that taxable profit is low. This is in accordance with research conducted by (Puspita & Febrianti) [17] and (Pratiwi et al) [5]. Leverage has an effect on tax avoidance, this means that the company's burden is reduced as a result of the company's high interest costs, which allows companies to do tax avoidance. In accordance with agency theory, the leverage owned by the company is getting bigger, causing higher interest costs arising from the debt itself.

Executive compensation has no effect on leverage, meaning that not all entities use debt as a form of funding for executive compensation. The executive character has no effect on leverage, which means that the greater the debt owned by the company, the greater the interest on the company's debt, where the interest will be used to reduce the amount of corporate tax. This research supports the findings of people (Nugraha & Mulyani) [1]. Sales growth has no effect on leverage because the company manages the company in a good way so that the company does not use leverage for sales growth. Capital intensity reflects how much capital is needed to generate income, this company can use leverage as capital to run the company's operational activities. According to agency theory, leverage can facilitate activities in the company so that the company will earn high profits with a low level of tax burden. This supports the results of research (Nugraha & Mulyani) [1], (Dharma & Noviari) [25].

The test results in this study prove that leverage is not able to mediate the relationship between executive compensation and tax avoidance. In line with agency theory, executive compensation has a relationship with leverage, along with the increase in the level of rewards that the company provides to its employees, the company will need large funds, causing the company to use debt as a source of funds. so that the tax burden that must be paid by the company also increases, but the company does not avoid tax. The results of the study prove that leverage is not able to mediate the effect of sales growth on tax avoidance. The use of leverage as a mediator of the effect of sales growth on tax avoidance is not always used, because it is quite risky if the company's debt level is higher, the interest rate to be paid will be higher and if the company's sales growth decreases it will be feared that the company will no longer be able to accommodate the ever-increasing interest expense, causing bankruptcy. Leverage research results are able to mediate the effect of capital intensity on tax avoidance. According to agency theory with capital intensity, company shareholders can get large profits with a small tax burden, so leverage is able to support and facilitate company operations and large profits can be obtained. Companies that have capital intensity will use leverage as a mediator to reduce the amount of their tax burden, besides that companies can invest in fixed assets, and these fixed assets will make the company have depreciation costs which can then reduce the tax burden. This is according to research conducted by (Trisianto & Oktaviani) [26].

## 5. Conclusion, Limitation and Suggestion

### 5.1 Conclusion

Statistical results and discussion conclude that tax avoidance is not influenced by executive compensation, sales growth and capital intensity while tax avoidance is influenced by executive character and leverage. Leverage is not influenced by executive compensation, executive character, and sales growth however it is influenced by capital intensity. Leverage as a mediator variable can not mediate the relation between executive compensation and tax avoidance as well as the relation between executive character and tax avoidance and also the relation between sales growth and tax avoidance. Leverage as a mediator variable is able to mediate the effect of capital intensity against tax avoidance.

### 5.2 Limitation

This study is limited to five independent variables (executive compensation, executive character, sales growth, and capital intensity and leverage) which are used to influence the variable dependent (tax avoidance).

### 5.3 Suggestion

1. The Directorate General of Taxes needs to obtain information and focus on important factors that affect tax avoidance in order to optimize tax revenue.
2. To add other variables that can affect tax avoidance such as profitability, liquidity, corporate governance and corporate social responsibility
3. To Use average cash in calculating the CETR value.

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