

Motivation as an Mediation Variable in the Influence of Competence and Work Discipline on Employee Performance

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Abstract

This study seeks to examine the influence of competence, work discipline, and motivation on employee performance. The study was conducted at the State Polytechnic of Malang, East Java, Indonesia with a sample of 208 contract employees. The reason for choosing this sample is because contract employees for performance assessment are regulated, assessed and evaluated by the leaders at the State Polytechnic of Malang. Unlike employees with civil servant status, who are assessed by the ministry. The data analysis method uses the Structural Equation Model (SEM) with Variance Based SEM with smartPLS 3.3.0 Software. Questionnaires distributed through Google Forms were used to collect the data. The study's outcomes show that both competence and work discipline play a significant role in shaping employee performance. Likewise, motivation succeeded in becoming an mediating factor for assessing the relationship between competence, work discipline, and employee performance, although its value was not greater than its direct influence. The data reveal that competence, work discipline and motivation remain considerations from time to time to achieve optimal employee performance.

Keywords: Competence, Motivation, Work Discipline, Employee Performance, Contract Employees

INTRODUCTION

An organization's success depends largely on the roles and performance of its employees. Performance is an activity of fulfilling duties and responsibilities as aligned with established objectives and expectations (López-Cabarcos, Vázquez-Rodríguez, & Quiñoá-Piñeiro, 2022). Performance is defined as the outcome or degree of success achieved by an individual over a specific period in completing tasks, measured against predefined standards, goals, objectives, or mutually agreed-upon criteria (Rusdiman et al., 2022). In completing their tasks, employees also measure the rewards they receive. Employees also demand a career (Hasan, Nikmah, & Sudarmiatin, 2022), regardless of their obligations as employees. So that many factors determine employee performance. Performance is a crucial component that must be evaluated and confirmed by certain parties to measure the extent to which achievements are related to the vision the organization hopes to accomplish (Hasan, 2023).

Factors that determine employee performance include competence, work discipline and motivation. Competent employees are needed so that in completing their tasks and functions they produce performance in accordance with the expected goals (Wijayanto & Riani, 2021). As a core personal trait, competence significantly impacts how an individual perceives, reasons, and responds to situations, and act so as to make generalizations about all situations faced (Nong, Phuong, & Duc-Son, 2024). Previous research by Harwina (2022), stated that employee competence such as character, motives, knowledge and skills affect performance. The fundamental component of competency is the use of knowledge and work skills to achieve optimal performance (Chen & Chang, 2010). All of a person's possessions, including their abilities, knowledge, and other internal components that enable them to perform a job, will result from their competence. The ability to perform tasks based on each person's unique knowledge and skills is, in other words, competence. Moreover, the current level of competition requires employees to have competence that produces efficient work (Vosloban, 2012).

Competence is complemented by work discipline. Discipline is employees' consciousness and readiness to comply the norms and provisions applicable to the organization (Sitopu, Sijinjak, & Marpaung, 2021). Work discipline encompasses obeying the rules, timeliness, and applying organizational standards consistently (Puspita, Retawati, & Peridawaty, 2024). The application of discipline is often controversial. Work discipline is seen as potentially limiting (Dwiana, Lumbanraja, & Harahap, 2024). Furthermore, what is meant is that an inflexible workplace might result from overly strict discipline, thus inhibiting creativity and innovation. Subsequently, in order to create a more dynamic and appealing workplace, firms need to strike a balance between discipline and flexibility. Measurable work discipline will build good performance, both individual performance and organizational performance. As explained in the study by Marendra & Aryata (2024) that when there are still many workers continue to miss work because they are ill or have authorization to do so, it has a significant impact on disrupting the services of an organization, thus affecting organizational performance.

Competence, discipline is a drive that comes from within the employee himself or internal drive. It is not easy to create a person like this, and all of that must be strengthened with motivation. Motivation is an internal impetus that cultivates a person's passion for their work, encouraging cooperation, efficiency, and a unified effort toward achieving job satisfaction (Aji, Saputra, & Mariappan, 2021). Motivation can be created from outside or from within the employee himself. Similar to competence and discipline, motivation that comes from within is not easy. High levels of motivation and performance in employees often lead to substantial contributions to a company's productivity and the realization of its objectives (Bohórquez et al., 2021). In practice, though, hardly every employee exhibits constant levels of drive and output. The degree of employee motivation and performance can be impacted by elements like stress, a lack of acknowledgment, a lack of difficulties at work, or insufficient assistance from the employer (Nendi, Abdurokhim, & Askano, 2024). In order to get the best possible performance and outcomes, it is crucial for organizations to comprehend employee motivation and performance dynamics and to put into practice efficient tactics to preserve and enhance both. Motivation is often created from outside, such as from a good relationship between employees and leaders (Aljumah, 2023), conditions or work environments that are able to appreciate employees who excel, so that external encouragement triggers the growth of motivation from within. Motivation is not only associated with economic needs, it could be that employees need social recognition such as respect and admiration from their leaders or colleagues (Fisher, 2009).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study implements an explanatory research type, grounded in a quantitative approach. The sample is contract employees at the Malang State Polytechnic, a state university in East Java, Indonesia. The reason for selecting the sample is because contract employees are contractually bound by the institution and performance assessments are given by the university leadership. While employees with state status are assessed by the central ministry. The number of respondents was 208 people, and data collection process involved administering questionnaires through Google Forms. Data analysis utilized path analysis with SEM PLS. The hypotheses built in this study are:

- H1: Competence has a significant effect on motivation.
- H2: Work discipline has a significant effect on motivation.
- H3: Competence has a significant effect on employee performance.
- H4: Work discipline has a significant effect on employee performance.
- H5: Motivation has a significant effect on employee performance.

H6: Competence has a significant effect on employee performance mediated by motivation.

H7: Work discipline has a significant effect on employee performance mediated by motivation.

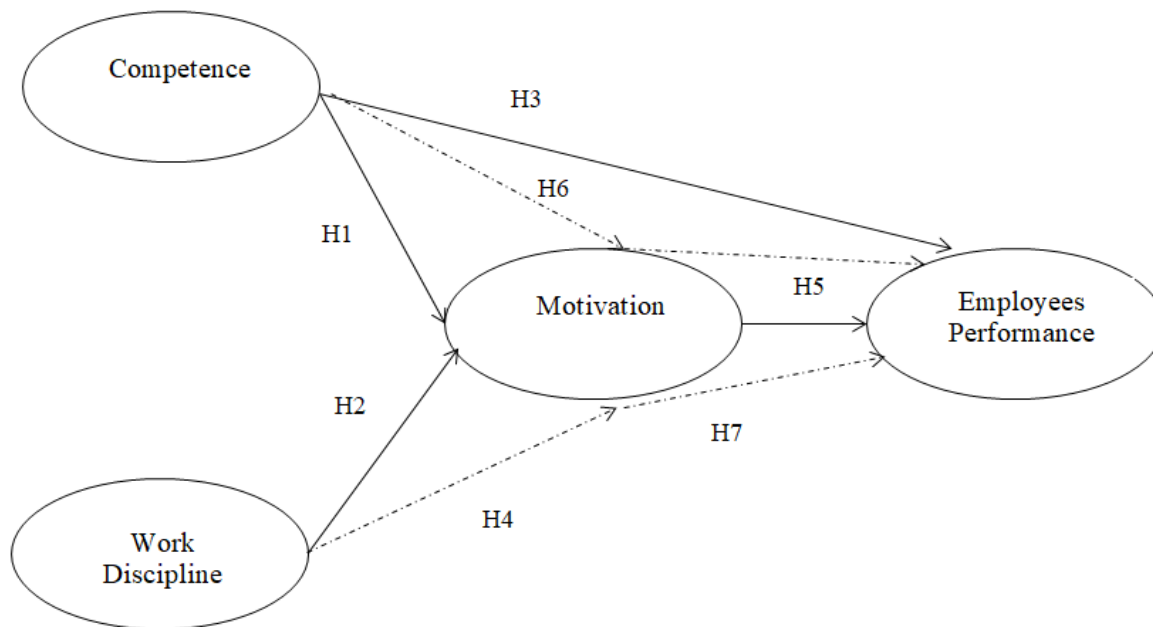


Figure 1. Conceptual Research

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis with statistical tests using path analysis with SEM PLS. There are two tests, such as the outer model and the inner model. Validity and reliability are tested using the outer model. The convergent validity test uses the outer loading value parameter of more than 0.5 and the AVE of more than 0.5 (Hussein, 2015), so that in this study it is indicated by the two parameters, as follows:

Table 1. Convergent Validity Test

	Outer Loading	Result
Competence	0.723	Valid
Work Discipline	0.792	Valid
Motivation	0.680	Valid
Work Performance	0.711	Valid

Source: Data Processed (2025)

As shown in the table above, the outer loading values fulfill the validity requirements, with all values above 0.5. Apart from outer loading, with the AVE, convergent validity may also be evaluated, detailed below:

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Test

	AVE	Result
Competence	0.532	Valid
Work Discipline	0.632	Valid
Motivation	0.516	Valid
Work Performance	0.633	Valid

Source: Data Processed (2025)

As presented in Table 2, the AVE values for all constructs are above 0.5. This confirms that the convergent validity criterion is satisfied, and all items are valid representations of their respective constructs. The next stage is the reliability test. This test uses the parameters of composite reliability value and Cronbach's alpha value. If the Cronbach's alpha value is more than 0.7 and the composite reliability value is exceeding 0.70, this research tool will be considered dependable (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). The reliability test's conclusions about the study's constructs are as follows:

Table 3. Reliability Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Competence	0.887	0.910
Work Discipline	0.882	0.911
Motivation	0.815	0.864
Work Performance	0.903	0.924

Source: Data Processed (2025)

As presented in Table 3, each construct has a Composite dependability and Cronbach's Alpha score is exceeding 0.7, fulfilling the dependability requirements. Reliability of a construct is established if the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is greater than 0.70 (Ghozali & Latan, 2015), and reliability of the research instrument is confirmed when the composite reliability value exceeding 0.70. Accordingly, all constructs in this study have demonstrated satisfactory reliability, or can be said to be reliable.

Furthermore, the inner model is tested by Evaluation of the Determination Coefficient (R-Square/ R^2). The R^2 value indicates the extent to which the dependent variable is impacted by the independent one. R^2 also indicates the strength or weakness of a research model.

Table 4. Determination Coefficient Test

Construct	R Square
Motivation	0.476
Employee Performance	0.772

Source: Data Processed (2025)

Table 4 presents that the R^2 value for the motivation variable is 0.476, so the model is categorized as a model with a fairly strong influence, meaning that the variation in the motivation variable can be explained by the competence and work discipline variables by 47.6%. On the other hand, factors not included in the model account for the remaining 52.4%. The R^2 value of the employee performance variable is 0.772, which is classified as a moderate model. The competence, work discipline, and motivation variables account for 77.2% of the explanation of the employee performance variable. While factors outside the model account for the remaining 22.8%. The next analysis is to test the previously established hypothesis. The results are as follows:

Table 5. Direct Effect Test

Direct Effect	Original Sample	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
Competence -> Motivation	0.262	2.368	0.018	Significant
Work Discipline -> Motivation	0.465	4.112	0.000	Significant
Motivation -> Employee Performance	0.192	2.840	0.005	Significant
Competence -> Employee Performance	0.241	3.207	0.001	Significant
Work Discipline -> Employee Performance	0.530	7.016	0.000	Significant

Source: Data Processed (2025)

The findings of the data analysis implies that the coefficients of the direct influence paths all have positive values with t-statistics values >1.96 and p-values <0.05, so all direct relationships that are hypothesized are stated to have positive and significant relationships.

Table 6. Indirect Effect Test

Specific Indirect Effects	Original Sample	t- Statistic	p- Value	Results
Competence -> Motivation -> Employee Performance	0.072	1.996	0.046	Significant
Work Discipline -> Motivation -> Employee Performance	0.117	2.615	0.009	Significant

Source: Data Processed (2025)

The outcomes of the analysis show that the coefficients of the indirect influence path or motivation as a mediator all have positive values or t-statistics values >1.96 and p-values <0.05, so they can be stated as having a positive and significant relationship, so it can be it can be inferred that motivation can act as a mediating variable in the influence of competence and work discipline on employee performance.

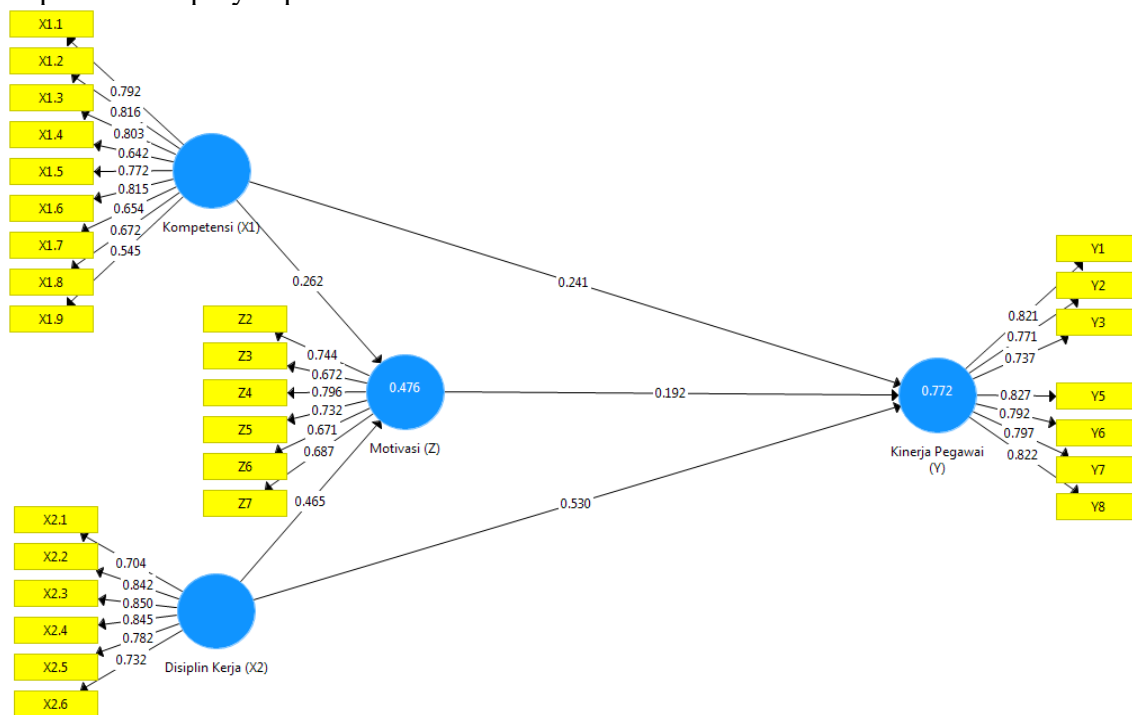


Figure 2. Bootstrapping Result

The research findings show that motivation is significantly impacted by competence. This implies that the more competent an employee is, the more significant the impact on increasing employee motivation. This finding supports the research put forward by Novitasari et al., (2021); Yusnar, Sugiato, & Ridwan (2023) that motivation is significantly impacted by competence. Competence is a type of expertise, knowledge, education and ability to carry out an effective activity (Nong, Phuong, & Duc-Son, 2024). The caliber of an organization's human resources determines its level of success through competence that will encourage a person's motivation to work better. For employees who have good work competence with attitudes that show work professionalism, it will accelerate the achievement of organizational goals, conversely employees who are unskilled and do not have good competence will slow down these goals. Competence improvement can be done through training, workshops and others. So it can be stated that H1 is accepted.

This study shows that motivation is significantly impacted by work discipline. This implies that the more disciplined an employee is at work, the higher the employee's motivation. This finding supports previous studies by Astarina, Hapsila, & Fitrio (2019); Dinantara (2020) that motivation is significantly impacted by job discipline. The state of discipline encourages or forces employees to act and complete their tasks in accordance with predetermined norms or criteria (Kurniawan & Mahdani, 2024). High-discipline employees will drive themselves even if they are not under the supervision of their bosses. A well-behaved employee won't use their work time for non-work-related activities. Similarly, well-behaved employees will adhere to workplace rules with knowledge and without feeling under pressure (Astarina, Hapsila, & Fitrio, 2019), and it can be stated that H2 is accepted.

This study proves that employee performance is significantly affected by competence. This implies that the more competent an employee is, the more significant the impact on enhancing employee performance. This finding supports the research put forward by Harwina (2022) and Nong, Phuong, & Duc-Son (2024) that performance is significantly impacted by competence. Competence as an individual characteristic is needed to achieve effective performance at work (Harwina, 2022). In addition to experience, employee competence is obtained from education, skills, and talents. Based on this finding, H3 is stated to be accepted.

This study explains that discipline serves as a key determinant in enhancing employee productivity. This implies that the more disciplined an employee is at work, the more significant the impact on improving employee performance. This finding supports research presented by Dwiana, Lumbanraja, & Harahap (2024) that employee performance is largely determined by the level of work discipline. Work discipline is one of the crucial elements in developing and improving employee performance (Sitopu, Sitinjak, & Marpaung, 2021). Since work discipline directly affects individuals' ability to finish their tasks, it will eventually enhance organizational performance. The primary operational role of human resource management is discipline since employees who are more disciplined will perform better at work (Astarina, Hapsila, & Fitrio, 2019). Work discipline concerns the level of employee compliance with applicable regulations and the ability to carry out work tasks properly and correctly in an effort to achieve predetermined work targets. Harmonious conditions between wishes and realities will result from the application of discipline based on awareness and belief (Dinantara, 2020). So it can be stated that H4 is accepted.

This study confirms that employee performance is significantly affected by motivation. In other words, the more motivated the employees are, the more significant the impact on enhancing employee performance. These outcomes support the research presented by Sitopu, Sitinjak, & Marpaung (2021), Marendra & Aryata (2024) that motivation has a significant effect on performance. Employee performance cannot be separated from work motivation (Aprillia, Nuraini, & Hanafi, 2024). One element that has a significant impact on performance is employee motivation (Puspita, Retawati, & Peridawaty, 2024). Organizations must focus on motivation since it is a significant determinant in raising employee performance. The power that propels workers to meet particular corporate goals and objectives is called work motivation (Sunyoto & Wagiman, 2023). Two distinct types of motivation are recognized, intrinsic motivation such as responsibility in completing work, challenges in work, and improvements and contributions from employees. Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation that supports the creation of increased employee performance is salary/compensation, security and determination of employee status as well as a comfortable working situation. So it can be stated that H5 is accepted.

The findings of the mediation test successfully proved the influence of competence on employee performance by involving motivation as a mediating variable. However, the impact of motivation mediation is known to be partial mediation. Thus, it can be said that motivation bridges the influence of competence on employee performance. However, without motivation, competence can basically also improve employee performance. Performance cannot be separated

from the human resource factor that is directly involved in its performance. The success of an organization is determined by the quality of human resources through its competence, competence will encourage a person's motivation to work better. Competence can deepen and expand work capabilities. An someone will become more proficient and finish a task more quickly if they perform it frequently. A person will be more motivated to perform better if they engage in a variety of tasks because this will broaden and enrich their work experience (Sunyoto & Wagiman, 2023). A highly motivated worker will be able to complete duties quickly and effectively and perform well (Setiawan et al., 2022). So it can be stated that H6 is accepted.

The mediation test is able to prove the impact of work discipline on employee performance by involving motivation acts as an intermediary factor. However, the impact of motivation mediation is known to be partial mediation. Thus, it can be inferred that motivation bridges the effect of work discipline on employee performance. However, without motivation, work discipline can basically also improve employee performance. Workplace discipline and motivation are critical components for achieving optimal performance (Dinantara, 2020). Employee motivation combined with strong work habits will have a strong bearing on individual performance, ultimately making it simpler to meet corporate objectives. When it comes to implementing employee work, the discipline component is crucial (Kurniawan & Mahdani, 2024). Indicators of work discipline such as personality and environment, both indicators motivate employees to work better. Therefore, with motivation both intrinsically and extrinsically, employees will find it easier to produce good performance. So it can be stated that H7 is accepted.

Finally, it can be concluded that competency, work discipline, motivation provide positive and significant contributions to employee performance, both directly and through mediators. Employee performance is important to build because this is where the performance of an organization is achieved. When every employee is aware of their performance, the organization will be strong in every line.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that competence, work discipline, motivation contributes positively and significantly to employee performance. Also, motivation is successful as the relationship's mediator between competence and work discipline on employee performance. These outcomes signifies that the existence of competence, work discipline and motivation is important to enhance employee performance, regardless of the many other indicators that affect employee performance. The outcomes of this study validate that employee performance must always be considered and evaluated, both using internal and external support. Employees as the driving force of the organization, deserve to always be considered in relation to their performance. Continuous evaluation is needed, including the implementation of placement rotation for work refreshment.

The limitation of this study is that the sample is non-lecturer employees with contract status, while in educational institutions there are also lecturers with contract status. So it cannot represent the overall condition of contract employees in the institution. So that for additional research, it is anticipated to expand the distribution of similar samples or with different samples such as employees in private companies.

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