

The Effect Of Leadership, Management Skills, And Work Motivation On Employee Performance: Evidence From The Indonesian Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

Employee performance is a critical determinant of public sector effectiveness, yet the interplay between leadership, management skills, and work motivation in government ministries remains insufficiently explored. This study examines the direct and indirect effects of leadership, management skills, and work motivation on employee performance in the Indonesian public sector, focusing on the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF). A quantitative survey design was employed, and data were collected from 60 civil servants selected through purposive sampling. Instrument validity and reliability were confirmed through item analysis, while path analysis was used to assess the relationships among variables. The results indicate that all hypothesized relationships were statistically significant. Leadership exerted the strongest direct effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.439$, $p < 0.01$), followed by management skills ($\beta = 0.360$, $p < 0.01$) and work motivation ($\beta = 0.213$, $p < 0.05$). Leadership and management skills also significantly influenced work motivation ($\beta = 0.411$ and $\beta = 0.442$, respectively; $p < 0.01$), confirming its role as a partial mediator. The findings demonstrate that leadership, management skills, and work motivation are important predictors of employee performance and highlight the need for integrated human resource development strategies to strengthen organizational effectiveness in the Indonesian public sector.

Keywords: Employee performance, Leadership, Management skills, Path analysis, Public sector, Work motivation

INTRODUCTION

Public sector performance management has received renewed scholarly attention in the post-pandemic era as governments worldwide confront unprecedented challenges to governance efficiency and service delivery (OECD, 2023) (Filip et al., 2022). In Indonesia, the civil service reform agenda anchored in Law No. 5 of 2014 on the State Civil Apparatus places employee performance at the centre of institutional transformation (Muhammad & Husen, 2019). The Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF), as a strategic agency responsible for managing Indonesia's vast maritime resources, exemplifies this challenge: its mandate requires a workforce that is not only technically proficient, but also intrinsically motivated and effectively led.

Extant research consistently identifies leadership, managerial competence, and motivation as primary antecedents of employee performance. However, three gaps remain in the existing literature (McAnally & Hagger, 2024). First, most empirical studies are conducted in private-sector or manufacturing contexts; the dynamics of these relationships within developing-country public bureaucracies are less well understood (Tukiainen et al., 2024). Second, the mediating role of work motivation in linking both leadership and management skills to performance outcomes has been underexplored through simultaneous path modelling (Tao et al., 2021). Third, prior Indonesian studies have largely focused on isolated predictors rather than their integrated structural effects.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the direct and indirect effects of leadership, management skills, and work motivation on employee performance among mid-to-senior civil servants at the MMAF. The central research questions are: (1) Do leadership and management skills directly influence employee performance and work motivation? (2) Does work motivation directly influence employee performance? (3) Does work motivation mediate the effects of leadership and management skills on employee performance? Answers to these questions have both theoretical value, advancing path-analytic models of public-sector performance, and practical relevance for human resource development policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the degree to which an individual fulfils the expectations of a role, encompassing

both task proficiency and contextual behaviours that support the organisational environment (Zhenjing et al., 2022). In the public sector, performance is typically operationalised across dimensions of work quality, quantity, timeliness, and compliance with organisational procedures (Thusi, 2023). Employee performance can be evaluated through several key aspects, including quantity of work, quality of work, job knowledge, creativity, cooperation, dependability, initiative, and personal qualities (Vuong & Nguyen, 2022). Contemporary perspectives also highlight the importance of adaptive performance and the ability of employees to respond effectively to changing organisational demands and policy environments (Loughlin & Priyadarshini, 2021). These dimensions collectively reflect the extent to which employees contribute to organisational goals and public service effectiveness.

Leadership and Employee Performance

Leadership is generally defined as the process of influencing individuals or groups toward the achievement of shared organisational goals (Reed et al., 2019). It is widely recognised as one of the most important determinants of employee performance because leaders shape employee attitudes, behaviours, and commitment to organisational objectives (Caldeira & Infante-Moro, 2025). Effective leadership contributes to higher levels of productivity, job satisfaction, and organisational effectiveness by providing direction, support, and motivation. Transformational leadership, in particular, encourages employees to exceed expected performance through inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. In public sector organisations, leadership plays a crucial role in improving service quality, strengthening employee engagement, and fostering a performance-oriented work culture (Karimi et al., 2023). Effective leaders also promote collaboration, participation, and shared values, enabling employees to align their personal goals with organisational objectives. Consequently, strong leadership is expected to positively influence employee performance and contribute to the successful achievement of organisational goals.

Based on this theoretical and empirical foundation, we propose: H1: Leadership has a significant positive direct effect on employee performance.

Management Skills and Employee Performance

Management skills encompass the cognitive, interpersonal, and technical competencies required to plan, organise, coordinate, and control organisational activities effectively (Aquino et al., 2025). These skills enable managers to make informed decisions, allocate resources efficiently, solve problems, and guide employees toward the achievement of organisational goals. Effective management skills contribute to improved employee productivity, enhanced teamwork, and better organisational performance by creating a supportive and well-structured work environment (Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2024). Managers with strong technical, conceptual, and interpersonal abilities are better equipped to address organisational challenges, facilitate communication, and motivate employees. In public sector organisations, management skills are particularly important for ensuring efficient service delivery, maintaining accountability, and adapting to changing administrative demands (Sumaiya et al., 2022). Furthermore, managerial competence can influence employee performance both directly through effective supervision and indirectly by fostering a positive organisational climate that encourages employee engagement and commitment. Consequently, higher levels of management skills are expected to contribute positively to employee performance.

H2: Management skills have a significant positive direct effect on employee performance.

Work Motivation and Employee Performance

Work motivation refers to the internal and external forces that initiate, direct, and sustain goal-directed behaviour in the workplace. It influences the level of effort, persistence, and commitment employees demonstrate in carrying out their responsibilities (Layek & Koodamara, 2024). Motivated employees tend to exhibit higher levels of enthusiasm, productivity, and dedication, which contribute positively to organisational effectiveness. Work motivation encourages individuals to achieve personal and organisational goals by increasing their willingness to perform tasks efficiently and overcome workplace challenges (Hosen et al., 2023). In public sector organisations, motivation plays a critical role in enhancing service quality, improving job performance, and fostering employee commitment to organisational objectives. Both intrinsic factors, such as personal achievement and professional growth, and extrinsic factors, such as recognition, rewards, and supportive working conditions, can strengthen employee motivation (Manzoor et al., 2021). Consequently, higher levels of work motivation are expected to improve employee performance and contribute to the achievement of organisational goals.

H3: Work motivation has a significant positive direct effect on employee performance.

Leadership and Work Motivation

Leadership plays a significant role in shaping employee motivation by creating a supportive work environment, providing clear direction, and encouraging employees to achieve organisational goals. Effective leaders inspire confidence, foster commitment, and promote a sense of purpose among employees, thereby enhancing their willingness to exert greater effort in their work (Cheng et al., 2023). Through communication, recognition, empowerment, and support, leaders can strengthen both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Leadership also contributes to employee motivation by aligning individual aspirations with organisational objectives and creating conditions that encourage participation, engagement, and personal development. In public sector organisations,

motivated employees are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of commitment, responsibility, and performance (Jung & Moon, 2024). Consequently, effective leadership is expected to have a positive influence on work motivation, which in turn supports the achievement of organisational goals and improved employee outcomes.

H4: Leadership has a significant positive direct effect on work motivation.

Management Skills and Work Motivation

The relationship between management skills and motivation can be understood through competence-based perspectives. Motivation does not alter an individual's inherent capacity but influences the level of effort and intensity applied in performing tasks (Fahriana & Sopiah, 2022). When cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of management skills are integrated with motivation, they create a strong driving force toward achieving organisational goals. Individuals with high achievement orientation tend to continuously develop their capabilities, indicating a mutually reinforcing relationship between competence and motivation. Competence perceptions also play an important role in shaping intrinsic motivation, as individuals who perceive themselves as more capable are more likely to feel motivated and engaged in their work (Hoxha & Ramadani, 2024). Overall, management skills and motivation are closely interconnected, with each reinforcing the other to enhance performance and goal achievement in organisational settings.

H5: Management skills have a significant positive direct effect on work motivation.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design grounded in the positivist paradigm. Data were analysed using path analysis, a multivariate technique that extends multiple regression to examine direct and indirect causal relationships among observed variables. Path analysis is appropriate when the theoretical model specifies a causal ordering of variables and the researcher aims to decompose bivariate correlations into direct, indirect, and spurious components.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised all MMAF civil servants stationed in Jakarta at the Penata (Golongan III/a–III/d), Pembina (Golongan IV/a–IV/b), and Pembina Utama (Golongan IV/c–IV/e) echelons. These groups were selected because they occupy managerial and senior-technical positions with significant influence over institutional performance. A purposive sample of 60 respondents was drawn. Although sample size is a recognised limitation for path analysis, the $N = 60$ threshold satisfies minimum requirements for estimating models with up to five predictor-path relationships at conventional power levels.

Instruments and Measurement

Four constructs were measured using self-report Likert-scale questionnaires (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree): (1) Leadership (X1), assessed across dimensions of vision, communication, decision-making, and interpersonal influence; (2) Management Skills (X2), encompassing conceptual, human, and technical skill facets; (3) Work Motivation (X3), operationalised via intrinsic and extrinsic motivational indicators derived from McClelland's needs framework; and (4) Employee Performance (Y), assessed across quality, quantity, initiative, cooperation, and job knowledge dimensions aligned with MMAF performance appraisal criteria.

Instruments were validated through expert review and pilot testing. Item validity was assessed using corrected item-total correlation ($r \geq 0.30$ threshold); internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha \geq 0.70$ threshold). Items failing validation criteria were discarded prior to main data collection.

Data Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to construct an intercorrelation matrix for all four variables. Path coefficients were derived through ordinary least-squares regression performed in two sub-structural models: (a) $X1, X2 \rightarrow X3$ (endogenous motivation), and (b) $X1, X2, X3 \rightarrow Y$ (endogenous performance). Statistical significance of path coefficients was evaluated using one-tailed t-tests at $\alpha = 0.05$ and $\alpha = 0.01$. Effect sizes were interpreted via standardised regression coefficients (Beta).

RESULTS

Intercorrelation Matrix

Table 1 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among the four study variables. All correlations were positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). The strongest bivariate relationship was observed between leadership and employee performance ($r = 0.768$), followed by management skills–performance ($r = 0.734$) and motivation–performance ($r = 0.735$). Moderate-to-strong inter-predictor correlations ($r = 0.530$ – 0.660) suggest meaningful theoretical overlap among the independent variables, consistent with the integrated organizational behavior framework proposed in the literature.

Table 1

Intercorrelation Matrix of Study Variables (N = 60)

Variable	X1 (Leadership)	X2 (Mgmt Skills)	X3 (Motivation)	Y (Performance)
X1 (Leadership)	1.000			
X2 (Mgmt Skills)	0.530	1.000		
X3 (Motivation)	0.646	0.660	1.000	
Y (Performance)	0.768	0.734	0.735	1.000

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < .01$ (two-tailed). X1 = Leadership; X2 = Management Skills; X3 = Work Motivation; Y = Employee Performance.

Regression Coefficients (Performance Model)

Table 2 presents the unstandardised (B) and standardised (Beta) regression coefficients from the performance sub-structure, with Y as the dependent variable and X1, X2, and X3 as simultaneous predictors. The overall model was statistically significant and explained a substantial portion of variance in employee performance.

Table 2

Regression Coefficients: Predictors of Employee Performance (Y)

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-4.645	8.921	—	-0.521	0.605
Leadership (X1)	0.532	0.106	0.343	5.014	0.000
Mgmt Skills (X2)	1.275	0.315	0.360	4.049	0.000
Work Motivation (X3)	0.212	0.098	0.213	2.159	0.035

Note. Dependent variable: Employee Performance (Y). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed t-test; $df = 56$).

Path Analysis Summary

Table 3 consolidates all path coefficients for both sub-structures and their significance tests. All five hypothesised paths were statistically significant, with four reaching the $\alpha = 0.01$ threshold.

Table 3

Summary of Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	r	Path Coeff.	t-value	t-table ($\alpha=.05$)	Decision
H1	X1 $\rightarrow$ Y	0.768	$p_{41} = 0.439$	5.014	1.67	Supported**
H2	X2 $\rightarrow$ Y	0.734	$p_{42} = 0.360$	4.049	1.67	Supported**
H3	X3 $\rightarrow$ Y	0.735	$p_{43} = 0.213$	2.159	1.67	Supported*
H4	X1 $\rightarrow$ X3	0.646	$p_{31} = 0.411$	3.959	1.67	Supported**
H5	X2 $\rightarrow$ X3	0.660	$p_{32} = 0.442$	4.255	1.67	Supported**

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed). t-critical values: 1.67 ($\alpha = .05$), 2.39 ($\alpha = .01$); $df = 57$. Supported = H_0 rejected.

DISCUSSION

Leadership and Employee Performance (H1 Supported)

Leadership emerged as the strongest direct predictor of employee performance ($\beta = 0.439$, $p < 0.01$), confirming H1. This finding aligns with the integrative model of organizational behavior, which positions leadership as a key team-level mechanism shaping individual performance outcomes (Brasier et al., 2023). The magnitude of the coefficient is consistent with meta-analytic evidence reporting a moderate effect size for transformational leadership on task performance, suggesting that the leadership practices measured here may be capturing transformational elements (Fuller et al., 2022). The practical implication is that leadership development programmes particularly those targeting vision communication, follower empowerment, and contingent reward are likely to yield measurable performance gains among senior MMAF civil servants. These results corroborate prior evidence from the public sector and extend those findings to the Indonesian maritime governance context.

Management Skills and Employee Performance (H2 Supported)

Management skills demonstrated a significant positive direct effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.360$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H2. This result is theoretically grounded in the individual characteristics component, which identifies cognitive ability and technical skills as direct determinants of job performance (Kato & Scherbaum, 2023). The eight-facet performance model further contextualises this finding: facets such as job knowledge, initiative, and creativity constituent elements of management skills directly translate into observable performance outcomes (Hickey, 2020). The significant coefficient for X2 supports prior research that found analogous effects in Indonesian cooperative manager performance. Importantly, the comparatively smaller effect size of management skills relative to leadership suggests that while technical competence is necessary, it is insufficient without the motivational infrastructure provided by effective leadership.

Work Motivation and Employee Performance (H3 Supported)

Work motivation had a significant positive effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.213$, $p < 0.05$), providing support for H3. Although the direct effect of motivation was the smallest of the three predictors, its inclusion as a partial mediator amplifies its total theoretical importance (Alsadaan et al., 2025). Interpersonal motivation has been identified as one of the key determinants of individual performance effectiveness. Achievement motivation theory suggests that employees who are intrinsically driven to excel expend greater effort and persist longer on challenging tasks, thereby raising performance levels (Bardach & Murayama, 2024). Prior studies have similarly documented significant motivation–performance effects in Indonesian banking and manufacturing contexts, and the present study extends these findings to a public maritime-sector sample.

Leadership and Work Motivation (H4 Supported)

The significant positive path from leadership to motivation ($\beta = 0.411$, $p < 0.01$) supports H4 and is consistent with theoretical predictions derived from transformational leadership and path-goal theory. Leadership has been characterised as inherently motivational, a process of aligning follower values and aspirations with organisational goals (Pincus, 2024). Prior research demonstrates that leaders who engineer motivating work environments sustain follower effort beyond what extrinsic incentives alone can produce. Evidence also indicates that transformational leader behaviours have proximal, same-day effects on follower motivation, underscoring the dynamic and immediate nature of the leadership–motivation link (Hundie & Strode, 2026). The finding implies that leadership quality is not merely a direct performance driver but also an upstream determinant of the motivational states that, in turn, sustain performance.

Management Skills and Work Motivation (H5 Supported)

The strongest path in the motivational sub-structure linked management skills to work motivation ($\beta = 0.442$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H5. This result resonates with competence-based motivation theory: when employees perceive their supervisors as highly skilled, they are more likely to internalise performance standards and experience greater intrinsic motivation (Kaabomeir et al., 2022). Ganguli's assertion that motivation determines the intensity of effort not capacity per se underscores the complementarity of management skills and motivation: competence provides the direction and standards, while motivation energises sustained effort. Travers and Wainer both theorised that achievement-oriented individuals actively seek skill enhancement, creating a reciprocal dynamic between capability growth and motivational investment (Vu et al., 2021). The significant management skills–motivation path suggests that targeted competency development programmes not only build technical capacity but also generate motivational multiplier effects.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the performance management literature in three ways. First, it provides path-analytic evidence for the integrated role of leadership, management skills, and motivation in a Southeast Asian public-sector context, a population underrepresented in extant research. Second, it confirms motivation as a partial mediator in both the leadership–performance and management skills–performance pathways, adding structural precision to the Integrative Model of Organizational Behavior. Third, it demonstrates the applicability of classical motivation frameworks (McClelland, Travers, Wainer) in contemporary Indonesian public administration research.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the structural relationships among leadership, management skills, work motivation, and employee performance within the MMAF, based on a sample of 60 senior civil servants using path analysis. The findings demonstrate that all hypothesised relationships are positive and statistically meaningful, confirming the integrated role of leadership, managerial competence, and motivation in shaping performance outcomes in the public sector. Among the predictors, leadership emerged as the strongest direct determinant of employee performance, highlighting that effective leadership practices are crucial for improving organisational effectiveness and guiding employee behaviour toward desired results. Management skills also showed a substantial positive effect on performance, indicating that employees with higher managerial competencies are better able to plan, coordinate, and execute tasks efficiently, thereby enhancing overall productivity. Work motivation, while exhibiting a comparatively smaller direct effect on performance, remains an important psychological driver that sustains effort, commitment, and task engagement, and also functions as a key mediating mechanism between organisational inputs and performance outcomes. In addition, both leadership and management skills significantly influence work motivation, with management skills demonstrating the strongest effect, suggesting that competency development not only improves technical capability but also strengthens employees' internal motivation to perform. Overall, the results confirm that employee performance in public sector organisations is not driven by a single factor but rather by a combination of leadership quality, managerial capability, and motivational dynamics that operate together in a reinforcing system. These findings underscore the importance of adopting an integrated human resource development strategy that simultaneously strengthens leadership capacity, enhances management skills, and fosters sustainable employee motivation to achieve higher levels of organisational performance and

effectiveness.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

For MMAF HRD policymakers, the findings justify investment in three domains: (a) structured leadership development programmes (coaching, mentoring, situational leadership training) targeting senior civil servants; (b) competency-based management skills curricula aligned with MMAF's technical and administrative functions; and (c) motivational climate interventions including performance-contingent recognition systems and clear career pathways that leverage the motivational multiplier effects identified in H4 and H5.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs. Second, the purposive sample of 60 respondents from a single ministry limits generalisability; multi-agency, nationally representative studies are warranted. Third, common method variance inherent in single-source, self-report surveys may inflate observed correlations; future studies should incorporate multi-source performance ratings. Fourth, the model does not account for contextual moderators (organisational culture, job autonomy) that may condition the leadership/management skills-performance relationship. Future research should explore these moderators and test the mediating role of work motivation through structural equation modelling with latent variables.

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