

The Role of Work Engagement in Mediating the Effects of Leadership and Competence on Employee Performance at the Medan Barat District Office

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Abstract

This study aims to examine and analyze the role of work engagement in mediating the effects of leadership and competence on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office. The study employed a quantitative approach with a population of 60 civil servants at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office. A saturation sampling technique was used, meaning the entire population was included as the study sample. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method with the assistance of the SmartPLS software. The results indicate that leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance and work engagement. Competence also has a positive and significant effect on employee performance and work engagement. Furthermore, work engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. The results of the indirect effect test indicate that work engagement mediates the effect of leadership on employee performance and mediates the effect of competence on employee performance. The R-squared value for work engagement of 0.302 indicates that leadership and competence explain 30.2% of work engagement. Meanwhile, the R-squared value for employee performance of 0.518 indicates that leadership, competence, and job engagement account for 51.8% of the variance in employee performance. Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that leadership and competence enhance employee performance, both directly and through job engagement. Job engagement acts as a partial mediator in these relationships.

Keywords: Leadership, Competence, Work Engagement, Employee Performance.

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Introduction

Employee performance is one of the key factors determining an organization's success in achieving its established goals. In government agencies, employee performance is closely linked to the organization's ability to deliver public services effectively, efficiently, transparently, and accountably. Employees with high performance can complete their tasks in accordance with established standards, targets, and deadlines. Conversely, low employee performance can hinder the execution of government duties and reduce the quality of services received by the public.

The Subdistrict Office, as a government agency that interacts directly with the public, plays a crucial role in delivering administrative and governmental services at the subdistrict level. The Medan Barat Subdistrict Office is expected to provide prompt, accurate, and high-quality services to the public. This expectation requires every employee to possess the necessary skills and dedication in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Therefore, improving employee performance is a priority that deserves the organization's attention.

According to Armstrong (2021), performance is the result of the interaction between an individual's abilities, motivation, and opportunities in carrying out their work. Performance is not only measured by the volume of work completed but also encompasses work quality, timeliness, the effective use of resources, and employees' autonomy in carrying out their duties. In government organizations, employee performance reflects their success in delivering services and carrying out governmental duties in accordance with applicable regulations.

One factor that can influence employee performance is leadership. Leadership plays a crucial role in providing direction, fostering communication, coordinating work, and motivating employees to achieve organizational goals. According to Yukl (2020), leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how that work should be carried out effectively to achieve organizational goals.

Leaders who can provide clear direction, communicate effectively, make sound decisions, and supervise objectively can create a conducive work environment. Such conditions can encourage employees to work in a more focused and responsible manner. Conversely, ineffective leadership can lead to unclear task assignments, poor coordination, low employee morale, and hindered achievement of organizational targets.

Effective leadership is not only focused on achieving work results but also considers the relationship between leaders and employees. Northouse (2021) explains that effective leadership includes the ability to build relationships, empower employees, and create a supportive work environment. Leaders need to adapt their leadership approach to the characteristics of their employees and the conditions of the organization. The application of appropriate leadership can enhance employees' trust, morale, and willingness to actively engage in their work.

In addition to leadership, competencies are also a key factor in determining employee performance. Competencies reflect an individual's ability to perform their job, encompassing knowledge, skills, attitudes, experience, and adaptability. Armstrong (2021) states that competencies are the combination of knowledge, skills, and behaviors required for an individual to deliver effective performance.

Employees whose competencies align with the demands of their jobs will be better able to understand tasks, solve problems, use technology, and provide professional service. Adequate knowledge helps employees understand work procedures, while skills help them perform their jobs accurately and efficiently. A positive work attitude is also necessary so that employees can carry out their responsibilities with discipline, honesty, and a service-oriented mindset.

Changes in administrative systems and technological advancements in public service also require employees to continuously improve their competencies. Employees who are less able to adapt to changes may face difficulties in completing their work. Conversely, employees with high adaptability will find it easier to keep up with changes in policies, work systems, and

the use of technology. Thus, the better an employee's competencies, the greater their ability to achieve optimal performance.

Although leadership and competence are expected to improve performance, the influence of these two variables is not always direct. Leadership and competence can first foster positive psychological conditions within employees that encourage full engagement in their work. In this study, these conditions are explained through work engagement as a mediating variable.

Work engagement is a positive psychological state that indicates the level of an employee's physical, emotional, and cognitive attachment to their work. According to Bakker and Schaufeli (2020), work engagement is characterized by three main dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor indicates an employee's high energy and mental resilience at work. Dedication reflects a sense of pride, enthusiasm, and a sense of meaning in one's work. Meanwhile, absorption indicates the level of concentration and immersion an employee exhibits while performing their work.

Employees with high work engagement demonstrate enthusiasm, dedication, and concentration in completing tasks. These employees do not merely work to fulfill formal obligations but are also willing to give their best effort for the organization. Work engagement can motivate employees to complete their work with higher quality, on time, and responsibly.

Effective leadership can enhance job engagement by providing support, guidance, recognition, open communication, and involving employees in decision-making. When employees feel noticed, valued, and supported by their leaders, they are more likely to develop an emotional attachment to their work and the organization. These conditions can make employees more enthusiastic and willing to make greater contributions.

Competence can also boost work engagement. Employees with appropriate knowledge and skills will feel more confident when performing their duties. The ability to complete tasks and overcome challenges can foster a sense of pride and job satisfaction. Conversely, limited competence can lead to difficulties, stress, and low confidence in completing tasks, thereby reducing work engagement.

In the context of the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office, there are still several factors that need attention in efforts to improve employee performance. Leadership practices still need to be optimized, particularly in providing direction, communication, coordination, supervision, and employee involvement in task completion. Differences in ability, knowledge, experience, and adaptability among staff members also indicate that employee competencies are not yet fully consistent.

Furthermore, employee engagement still needs to be improved. This is evident from the varying levels of enthusiasm, dedication, and concentration among employees in performing their duties. If this situation is not managed properly, the execution of tasks and the delivery of services to the public may become suboptimal. Therefore, the organization needs to understand how leadership and competencies can enhance performance, both directly and through employee engagement.

Previous research has extensively examined the relationship between leadership, competence, and employee performance. However, research findings regarding the direct effect of leadership on performance remain inconsistent. Some studies have found that leadership has a positive and significant effect on performance, while others suggest that the effect of leadership on performance is stronger when mediated by psychological and behavioral factors among employees.

Research on competence has also largely emphasized the direct relationship between competence and performance. In reality, however, an employee's competence does not necessarily automatically result in high performance if the employee lacks enthusiasm, dedication, and commitment to their work. Therefore, work engagement needs to be examined to explain the mechanism by which competence can enhance employee performance.

Another gap is the limited number of studies that simultaneously analyze the effects of leadership and competence on performance through work engagement in the government sector. Most previous research has been conducted in private organizations, companies, educational institutions, or healthcare settings. Research on government agencies at the subdistrict level—particularly the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office—remains relatively limited.

Including job engagement as a mediating variable is crucial because it can elucidate the relationship between leadership, competence, and employee performance. Effective leadership and high competence are expected to boost employees' motivation, dedication, and commitment to their work. Furthermore, high job engagement can drive improvements in the quality, quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, and autonomy of work.

Based on this description, this study is important to obtain empirical evidence regarding the influence of leadership and competence on employee performance and to test the role of work engagement in mediating this relationship. The results of this study are expected to serve as a basis for the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office in formulating policies for leadership development, competence enhancement, strengthening work engagement, and improving the quality of public services.

Thus, the researcher is interested in conducting a study titled “The Role of Work Engagement in Mediating the Influence of Leadership and Competence on Employee Performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.”

Literature Review

1. Employee Performance

a) Definition of Employee Performance

According to Armstrong (2021), performance is the result of the interaction between an individual's abilities, motivation, and work opportunities in achieving organizational goals. Thus, performance is not only related to the final outcome of the work but also encompasses the work processes employees undertake to achieve predetermined targets. Consequently, employee performance in public organizations such as the North Sumatra Regional Police also reflects the level of success in carrying out service duties, enforcing the law, and maintaining public safety and order in accordance with applicable standards of professionalism.

b) Employee Performance Indicators

Employee performance indicators (Armstrong, 2021):

1) Work Quality

Work quality describes the level of accuracy, neatness, and conformity of an employee's work results to the standards set by the organization. The higher the quality of work produced, the greater the employee's contribution to achieving the organization's goals.

2) Quantity of Work

Work quantity indicates the amount of work an employee is able to complete within a specific time period in accordance with the targets set by the organization.

3) Timeliness

Timeliness describes an employee's ability to complete work by the deadlines set by the organization.

4) Effectiveness

Effectiveness describes an employee's ability to optimally utilize available resources to achieve the results expected by the organization.

5) Independence

Independence indicates an employee's ability to carry out their duties and responsibilities without relying heavily on instructions or assistance from others.

2. Work Engagement

a) Definition of Work Engagement

According to Bakker & Schaufeli (2020), work engagement is a positive psychological state characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and full focus on work.

b) Indicators of Work Engagement

Indicators of Work Engagement (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2020)

- 1) Vigor (Enthusiasm)
Indicates an employee's level of energy, mental resilience, and strong desire to work.
- 2) Dedication
Describes employees' emotional engagement with their work, characterized by a sense of pride and enthusiasm.
- 3) Absorption (Immersion)
Indicates the level of an employee's full concentration on their work, making it difficult for them to detach from the task at hand.

3. Leadership

a) Definition of Leadership

According to Gary Yukl (2020), leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how to do it effectively to achieve organizational goals.

b) Leadership Indicators

Leadership Indicators (Yukl, 2020)

- 1) Direction
Demonstrates a leader's ability to provide clear direction to employees.
- 2) Communication
Describes a leader's ability to convey information effectively.
- 3) Motivation
Demonstrates a leader's ability to boost employees' morale.
- 4) Decision-Making
Describes a leader's ability to make sound and timely decisions.
- 5) Supervision
Demonstrates a leader's ability to monitor and evaluate employees' work.

4. Competencies

a) Definition of Work Motivation

According to Armstrong (2021), competency is the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that an individual possesses to perform work effectively.

b) Indicators of Work Motivation

Competency Indicators (Armstrong, 2021)

- 1) Knowledge-
Demonstrates the employee's understanding of the work under their responsibility.
- 2) Skill
Describes an employee's technical ability to perform tasks.
- 3) Attitude
Indicates an employee's work behavior in carrying out duties professionally.
- 4) Work Experience
Describes an employee's level of experience in completing work.
- 5) Adaptability
Indicates an employee's ability to adapt to changes in the work environment.

Conceptual Framework

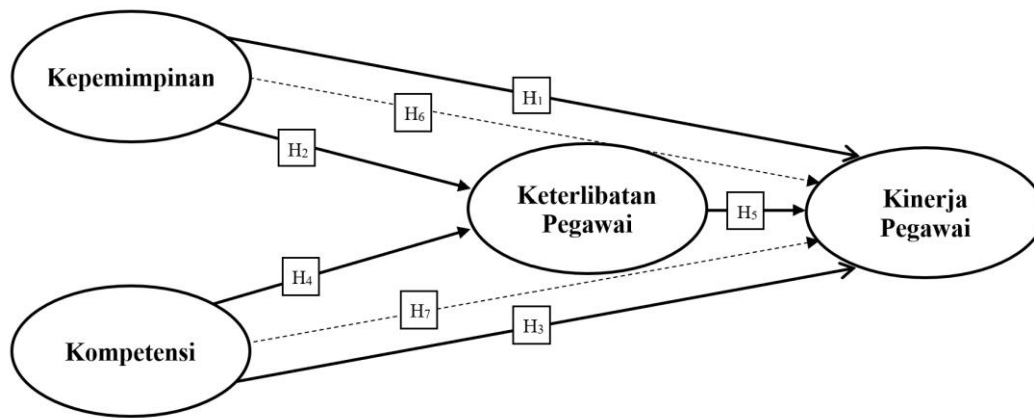


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Hypotheses

- H₁: Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
- H₂: Competence has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
- H₃: Leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
- H₄: Competence has a positive and significant effect on work engagement at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
- H₅: Work engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
- H₆: Work engagement mediates the effect of leadership on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
- H₇: Work engagement mediates the effect of competence on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.

Research Methodology

Type of Research

The type of research used is quantitative research. According to Sugiyono (2022), quantitative research is defined as a method based on the philosophy of positivism, used to study a specific population or sample; sampling techniques are generally conducted randomly; data collection uses research instruments; and data analysis is quantitative/statistical in nature, with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses. This quantitative research was conducted to examine the relationship between work discipline and work motivation and their impact on employee performance, with organizational commitment serving as an intervening variable, at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.

Research Location and Timeframe

The research was conducted at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office, Medan City, located at Jalan Budi Pembangunan No. 1, Pulo Brayan Village, Medan Barat Subdistrict, Medan City, North Sumatra. The research was conducted over a period of 3 months, from May to August 2026.

Population and Sample

According to Sugiyono (2025), a population consists of all objects or subjects that share specific characteristics identified by the researcher for study, from which conclusions are subsequently drawn. Based on this definition, the population in this study consists of all 60 employees at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office in the City of Medan, all of whom are civil servants.

The sample in this study consists of all 60 employees at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office in the City of Medan. The sampling technique used is saturation sampling, which involves selecting the entire population as the research sample.

Research Data Sources

The data source used in this study is primary data.

Results

Outer Model Analysis

The *Outer Model* analysis, using the *PLS algorithm*, yielded the following results:

Validity Test

Table 1. Outer Loadings Values

	Leadership	Work Engagement	Employee Performance	Competence
X1.1	0.745			
X1.2	0.732			
X1.3	0.761			
X1.4	0.715			
X1.5	0.734			
X3.1				0.659
X3.2				0.727
X3.3				0.728
X3.4				0.677
X3.5				0.751
Y.1			0.771	
Y.2			0.792	
Y.3			0.799	
Y.4			0.782	
Y.5			0.784	
Z.1		0.791		
Z.2		0.833		
Z.3		0.748		

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2026

Based on the values in Table 1 above, the results of the outer model test using factor loadings/outer loadings show that all indicators for each variable have loadings ≥ 0.60 . This indicates that each indicator is measured validly and reliably. Therefore, it can be concluded that all items in the questionnaire meet the validity criteria, as shown in the following figure.

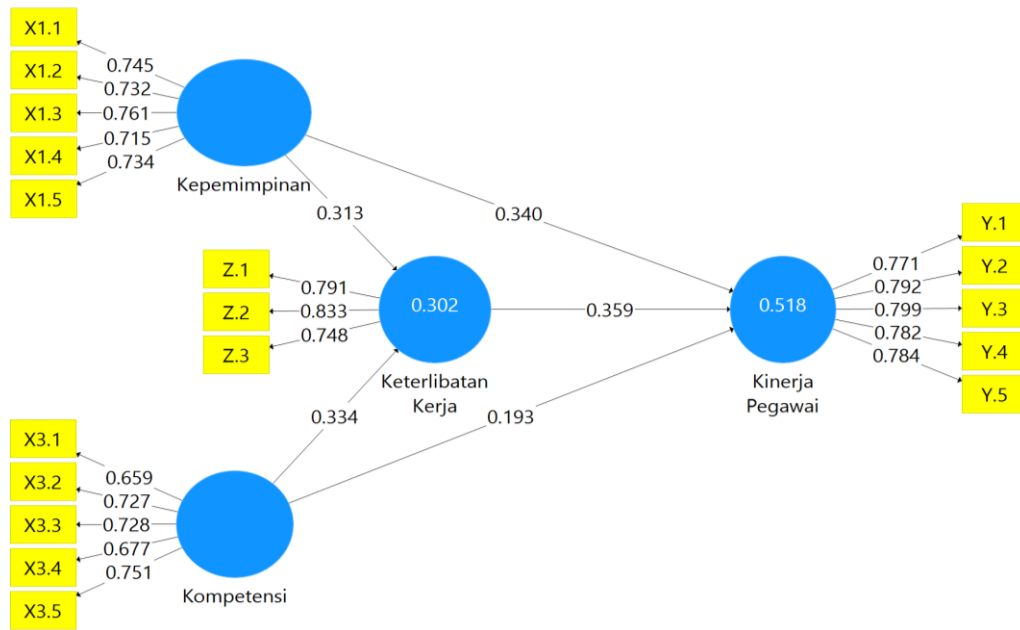


Figure 2. Outer Loadings

Reliability Test

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Leadership	0.790	0.791	0.856	0.544
Work Engagement	0.703	0.717	0.834	0.626
Employee Performance	0.845	0.846	0.890	0.617
Competence	0.753	0.760	0.835	0.503

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2026

From Table 2 above, the reliability test results show that the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all constructs are above 0.70 and the AVE values are above 0.05. This indicates that all indicators have high internal consistency and are reliable in measuring their respective constructs. Therefore, the research instrument is deemed reliable and suitable for use in structural equation modeling.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

When evaluating a model using PLS, we begin by examining the R-squared value for each latent dependent variable. The table below shows the estimated R-squared values obtained using SmartPLS.

Table 3. R-Square Results

	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square
Work Engagement	0.302	0.295
Employee Performance	0.518	0.511

Source: Smart PLS, 2026

Table 3 shows the R-squared values for both dependent variables. For the work engagement variable, the R-squared value is 0.302; this means that leadership and competence account for 0.302, or 30.2%. The remainder is attributed to other variables outside the model. The R-squared value for employee performance is 0.518, meaning that leadership, competence, and work engagement account for 0.518 or 51.8%; the remainder is attributed to other variables outside the model.

Structural Model Testing (Inner Model)

Hypothesis Testing

Direct Effects Between Variables

Direct effects between variables can be seen in the *path coefficient* values. The data analysis results show that the direct effect values are presented in the following table.

Table 4. *Path Coefficients* (Direct Effects)

	Original Sample	T-Statistics	P-Values	Conclusion
Leadership -> Employee Performance	0.340	6.487	0.000	Accepted
Leadership -> Work Engagement	0.313	4.479	0.000	Accepted
Competence -> Employee Performance	0.193	3.293	0.001	Accepted
Competence -> Work Engagement	0.334	4.786	0.000	Accepted
Work Engagement -> Employee Performance	0.359	6.021	0.000	Rejected

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2026

Table 4 shows the following direct effect values:

1. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a t-statistic of 6.487 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that leadership has a significant effect on employee performance because the significance level is below 0.05 . These findings are consistent with previous research, which found that leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (Astuty et al., 2022).
2. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement, with a t-statistic of 4.479 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that leadership has a significant effect on work engagement because the p-value is below 0.05. These findings are consistent with previous research, which also found that leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement (Kusuma et al., 2026).
3. Competence has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a t-statistic of 3.293 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.001 (below 0.05). This means that competence has a significant effect on employee performance because the p-value is below 0.05. These findings are consistent with previous research, which also found that competence has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (Sofyan & Mesra, 2024).
4. Competence has a positive and significant effect on work engagement, with a t-statistic of 4.786 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that competence has a significant effect on work engagement because the p-value is below 0.05. These findings are consistent with previous research, which also found that competence has a positive and significant effect on work engagement (Elshifa et al., 2020).
5. Competence has a positive and significant effect on work engagement, with a t-statistic of 6.021 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that competence has a significant effect on work engagement because the p-value is below 0.05. These findings are consistent with previous research, which also found that competence has a positive and significant effect on work engagement (Kusuma, 2024; Fitriadi et al., 2022).

Indirect Effects Between Variables

The indirect effects between variables can be seen in the *specific indirect effects* values. The data analysis results show that the indirect effect values are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. *Specific Indirect Effects*

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
Leadership -> Work Engagement -> Employee Performance	0.112	3.639	0.000	Accepted

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
Competence -> Work Engagement -> Employee Performance	0.120	3.698	0.000	Accepted

Source: Smart PLS, 2026

Table 5 shows the indirect effects between variables, namely:

1. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance through employee engagement, with a t-statistic of 3.639 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that employee engagement acts as an intervening variable between leadership and employee performance.
2. Competence has a positive and significant effect on employee performance through employee engagement, with a t-statistic of 3.698 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that employee engagement acts as an intervening variable between competence and employee performance.

Conclusion

1. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
2. Competence has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
3. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
4. Competence has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
5. Work engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
6. Work engagement mediates the effect of leadership on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
7. Work engagement mediates the effect of competence on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.

Recommendations

1. Leadership
It is recommended that the leadership of the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office improve their ability to provide clear direction, establish two-way communication, make sound decisions, and provide supportive supervision. Leaders should also give employees the opportunity to express their opinions and participate in resolving work-related issues. These steps are expected to enhance trust, work motivation, work engagement, and ultimately, employee performance.
2. Competencies
The Medan Barat Subdistrict Office is advised to enhance employee competencies through education and training, technical guidance, on-the-job coaching, job rotation, and improved proficiency in using public service technology. Competency development programs should be designed based on job requirements and the results of each employee's performance evaluation. By improving their knowledge, skills, attitudes, experience, and adaptability, employees are expected to be able to complete their work more effectively and professionally.
3. Work Engagement
The Medan Barat Subdistrict Office is advised to create a work environment that fosters staff morale, dedication, and a sense of purpose in their work. These efforts can be achieved by assigning meaningful responsibilities, involving employees in decision-making, fostering cooperation among colleagues, and providing support and recognition from

leadership. Work engagement must be a top priority, as it has been proven to influence performance and acts as a mediator for the effects of leadership, work motivation, and competencies on employee performance.

4. Employee Performance

The Medan Barat Subdistrict Office is advised to conduct periodic employee performance evaluations based on work quality, work quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, and autonomy. The results of these evaluations can serve as the basis for awarding incentives, determining training needs, assigning tasks, and improving public service systems. Additionally, clear and measurable performance targets should be established so that employees can understand the performance standards they must achieve.

5. For Future Researchers

Future researchers are advised to include additional variables that are suspected to influence employee engagement and performance, such as work discipline, work environment, organizational culture, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, compensation, workload, and career development. The inclusion of these variables is necessary because 63.5% of the variation in employee engagement and 47.6% of the variation in employee performance remain unexplained by factors outside the research model.

Future researchers are also advised to expand the scope of the study to include several subdistrict offices or other government agencies with a larger number of respondents so that the research results have a broader level of generalizability. In addition, the use of a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods can be considered to obtain a more in-depth explanation of leadership, motivation, competence, work engagement, and employee performance.

Future research could employ more up-to-date analytical tools, increase the number of indicators, and conduct additional tests such as predictive relevance, effect size, discriminant validity, and model fit. Researchers could also compare respondent characteristics based on age, length of service, educational level, position, or work unit to obtain more comprehensive results.

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