The Role of Work Motivation in Mediating the Influence of Leadership on Employees Performance at the West Medan District Office

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Abstract

Employee performance is an important factor in supporting the success of public services in government agencies, including the West Medan Sub-District Office. Variations in the quality of work output, timeliness of task completion, and the level of employee initiative indicate that employee performance still needs to be improved. One factor that is thought to influence employee performance is leadership, both directly and through work motivation. This study aims to analyze the influence of leadership on employee performance with work motivation as a mediating variable at the West Medan Sub-District Office. This study uses a quantitative approach with a census method of all 60 civil servants (PNS). Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using the Partial Least Square (PLS) method with the help of the SmartPLS application. The results show that leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance and work motivation. Work motivation is also proven to have a positive and significant effect on employee performance. In addition, the results of the indirect effect test show that work motivation acts as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between leadership and employee performance. These findings indicate that improving employee performance can be achieved through strengthening effective leadership and increasing employee work motivation. This study is expected to serve as a consideration for the leadership of the West Medan Subdistrict Office in formulating leadership development policies and work motivation enhancement strategies to improve the quality of public services.

Keywords: Leadership, Work Motivation, Employee Performance

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Introduction

Employee performance is a fundamental component that determines the success of public services in government agencies, including the West Medan Sub-District Office. As a subdistrict level government agency, the Sub-District Office has a strategic role in carrying out government coordination, community development, and administrative services to the community. According to Mangkunegara (2020), employee performance is the result of the quality and quantity of work achieved by an individual in carrying out their assigned responsibilities. In this context, the demand for improving the quality of public service is increasing, in line with the public's growing expectations for fast, accurate, transparent, and professional services. However, various internal reports and field observations show that there are still variations in employee performance, such as delays in completing administrative tasks, low initiative, and inconsistent service quality between sections. This condition shows that employee performance is not yet fully optimal, in line with Sedarmayanti's (2020) view that performance is influenced by the effectiveness of work processes and the ability of individuals to complete tasks on time.

One important factor that affects employee performance is leadership. Ridwan et al. (2020) emphasize that effective leadership will provide direction, guidance, and support for employees so that they are able to work in a more focused and productive manner. Leadership not only functions as a task controller, but also as a motivator and shaper of employee work character. Robbins and Judge (2020) assert that leaders who are able to set an example, communicate openly, and provide emotional encouragement can increase employee productivity and loyalty. At the West Medan Sub-District Office, leadership effectiveness is crucial to the smooth running of public services, given that leaders must coordinate employees from various sections. When leadership is less than optimal, for example, when it fails to provide clear direction or minimal recognition of employee efforts, employee performance tends to decline.

In addition to leadership, the reward system is also a significant factor that influences employee performance. Ridwan et al. (2020) explain that rewards in the form of compensation, recognition, and development opportunities have been proven to increase employee motivation and morale. Hasibuan (2021) states that fair and proportional rewards can foster a positive attitude, high productivity, and a desire among employees to work above the minimum standard. In the West Medan Sub-District Office, there is still a perception among employees that the reward system does not fully reflect work performance, so some employees feel less motivated to give their best performance. This is in line with Afandi's (2021) opinion, which emphasizes that unfairness in giving rewards can weaken motivation and have a negative impact on employee productivity.

These two factors do not always have a direct influence on employee performance, but they can also work through work motivation. Robbins and Judge (2020) define motivation as an internal drive that makes a person act to achieve certain goals. Vo et al. (2022) add that work motivation acts as a psychological motor that determines the intensity, direction, and persistence of an individual's work behavior. Employees who are well-led and receive adequate rewards will have higher work motivation, enabling them to achieve optimal performance. Conversely, even with leadership and rewards, employee performance will not improve if internal motivation is low. Therefore, work motivation is highly relevant as a mediating variable in the relationship between leadership and rewards on employee performance.

Given the important role of leadership, rewards, and work motivation in improving employee performance, this research is relevant and strategic for the West Medan Subdistrict Office. This research is expected to provide an empirical description of how leadership and rewards affect employee performance and the extent to which work motivation acts as a mediating variable. The results of this study can later be used as a basis for sub-district leaders in designing strategies to strengthen leadership, objective and transparent reward management, and employee work motivation improvement programs in order to realize more effective, responsive, and quality public services.

Literature Review Employee Performance Definition of Employee Performance

Ridwan et al. (2020) define performance as the overall results or level of success of an individual in a certain period when carrying out tasks, compared to predetermined and agreedupon work standards, targets, and criteria.

Factors Affecting Employee Performance

Factors Affecting Employee Performance according to Ridwan et al. (2020):

1) Quality of Human Resources
   Leadership encompasses the knowledge, skills, abilities, and expertise possessed by employees. The higher the leadership, the greater the ability of employees to produce optimal performance.
2) Leadership
   The style, attention, support, and direction of leaders greatly determine the success of employees' work. Leaders who are able to motivate, set an example, and provide guidance can improve the performance of their employees.
3) Organizational Culture
   Values, norms, customs, and behavior patterns in the work environment influence employee behavior. A conducive organizational culture, such as values of hard work, discipline, and cooperation, will encourage better performance.
4) Reward System
   Rewards in the form of compensation, incentives, recognition, and promotions play a role in increasing work motivation. Employees who receive rewards commensurate with their achievements tend to perform better.

Employee Performance Indicators

According to Ridwan et al. (2020), employee performance indicators consist of:

1) Work Quality
   Describes the level of accuracy, precision, compliance with standards, and quality of employee work.
2) Work Quantity
   Describes the amount of work that employees are able to complete within a certain period.
3) Timeliness
   Assessing employees' ability to complete work within the specified time limit.
4) Responsibility
   Describes the seriousness of employees in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. 5) Teamwork
   Assessing employees' ability to work effectively with colleagues.
6) Initiative
   Assessing employees' internal drive to act without waiting for instructions.

Work Motivation Understanding Work Motivation

According to Vo et al., 2022, work motivation is a drive that stems from individual needs (competence, autonomy, social relationships) that encourage productive and effective individual work behavior.

Indicators of Work Motivation

Work motivation indicators according to Vo et al., 2022 are as follows:

1) Competence
   Refers to an individual's ability to perform tasks well and feel capable of mastering their job. In this study, competency was measured through "highest level of education achieved" as a proxy.
2) Autonomy

Refers to an individual's freedom and control over how they perform their work, namely the ability to make their own decisions and have choices in their work.

3 Social connectedness
Referring to the individual's need to feel connected, accepted, and have positive relationships with others in the work environment, for example, feeling that they belong to a group, are supported by colleagues, and have a sense of "social belonging."

Leadership Definition of Leadership

Robbins & Judge (2020) define leadership as the ability to influence a group to achieve goals. In essence: focus on influence and the achievement of organizational goals.

Leadership Indicators

Leadership indicators according to Robbins & Judge (2020):

1) Ability to Provide Direction
   Effective leaders are able to explain tasks, provide work structure, and clearly define goals.
2) Ability to Provide Support
   Demonstrated through attention, empathy, and good interpersonal relationships with subordinates.
3) Ability to Motivate Subordinates
   Leaders influence subordinates through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
4) Decision-Making Skills
   Leaders must be able to make fair, logical, and quick decisions.
5) Communication Skills
   Robbins & Judge emphasize the importance of two-way communication in effective leadership.
6) Influencing Skills
   Effective leaders use power positively to encourage the work behavior of subordinates.

Conceptual Framework

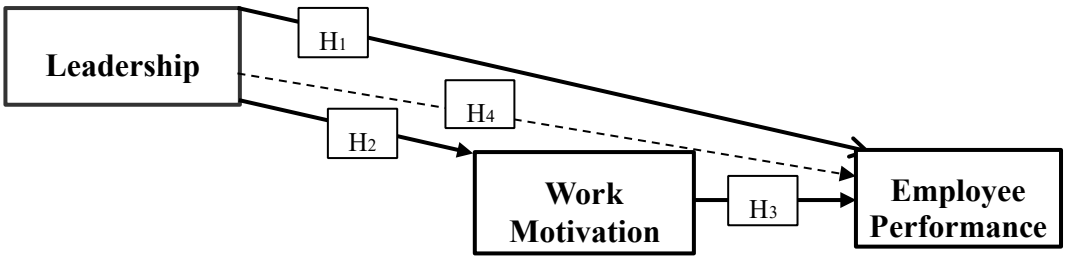

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Hypothesis

H_1 : Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the West Medan Subdistrict Office.

H_2 Leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation at the West Medan Subdistrict Office.

H_3 H_5 : Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the West Medan Subdistrict Office.

H_4 : Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance through work motivation at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.

Research Methodology Type of Research

The type of research used by the researcher is quantitative research. According to Sugiyono (2022), quantitative research can be defined as a method based on positivism philosophy, used to study a specific population or sample, with sampling techniques generally conducted randomly, data collection using research instruments, and quantitative/statistical data analysis with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses. This type of quantitative research was conducted to create a study aimed at adjusting a study and analyzing leadership and employee performance rewards with work motivation as a mediating variable at the West Medan Sub-District Office.

Research Location and Time

The research location was at the West Medan Sub-District Office, located at Jalan Budi Pembangunan No.1, Pulo Brayan Kota, West Medan Sub-District, Medan City. The research was conducted over a period of 3 months, from October to December 2025.

Population and Sample

Sugiyono (2021) defines population as a generalization area consisting of objects or subjects that have certain qualities and characteristics determined by the researcher to be studied and then conclusions are drawn. The population and sample in this study are all employees with civil servant (PNS) status at the West Medan Subdistrict Office. There are 60 employees with PNS status. In this study, the entire population was used as the sample, which is known as a population study.

Research Data Sources

The data source used in this study is primary data.

Results Outer Model Analysis

Outer Model Analysis using the PLS Algorithm produced the following results: **Validity Test**

Table 1. Outer Loadings Values

	Employee Performance	Leadership	Work Motivation
X1.1		0.844	
X1.2		0.845	
X1.3		0.877	
X1.4		0.783	
X1.5		0.848	
X1.6		0.849	
Y.1	0.668		
Y.2	0.891		
Y.3	0.743		
Y.4	0.857		
Y.5	0.839		
Y.6	0.900		
Z.1			0.873
	Employee Performance	Leadership	Work Motivation
Z.2			0.773
Z.3			0.869

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

Based on the values in Table 1 above, which show the results of outer model testing through loading factor/outer loadings values, all indicators in each variable have a loading value ≥ 0.60. This indicates that each indicator is measured validly and strongly. Therefore, it can be concluded that all items in the questionnaire have met the validity criteria, as shown in the following figure.

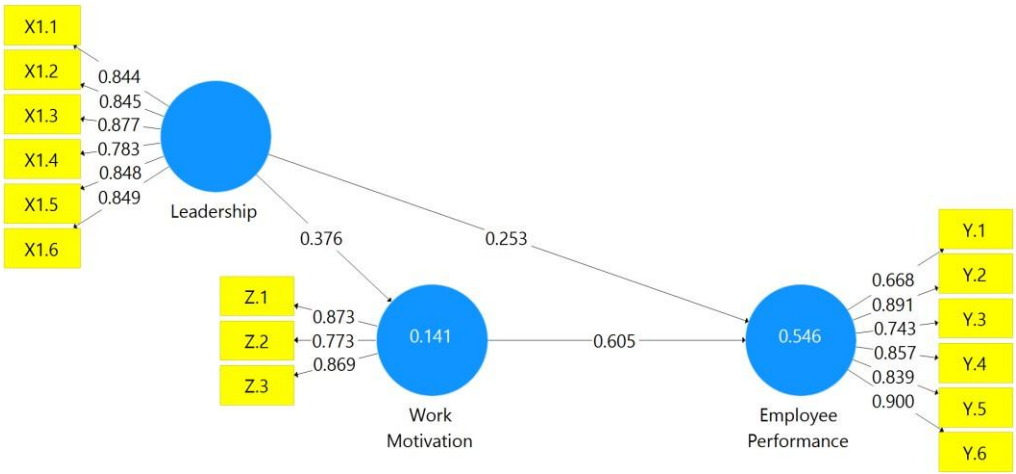

Figure 2. Outer Loading

Reliability Test

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Employee Performance	0.901	0.914	0.924	0.673
Leadership	0.918	0.928	0.936	0.708
Work Motivation	0.790	0.801	0.877	0.705

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

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. This indicates that all indicators have high internal consistency and are reliable in measuring their respective constructs. Thus, the research instrument is declared reliable and suitable for use in structural model testing.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

In assessing the model with PLS, we begin by looking at the R-square for each dependent latent variable. The table below shows the Rsquare estimation results using SmartPLS.

Table 3.R Square Results

	R Square	Adjusted R-Square
Work Motivation	0.141	0.127
Employee Performance	0.546	0.530

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

Table 3 shows the R square values for both dependent variables. For the work motivation variable, the R square value is 0.141, meaning that the influence of leadership is 0.141 or 14.1%, with the remainder attributable to other variables outside the model. The R-squared value for employee performance is 0.546, meaning that leadership and work motivation account for 0.546 or 54.6%, with the remainder attributable to other variables outside the model.

Structural Model Testing (Inner Model) Hypothesis Testing Direct Influence Between Variables

The direct effect between variables can be seen in the path coefficients. The data analysis results show the direct effect values in the following table.

Table 4. Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
Leadership -> Employee Performance	0.253	2.579	0.010	Accepted
Leadership -> Work Motivation	0.376	4.074	0.000	Accepted
Work Motivation -> Employee Performance	0.605	6,584	0	Accepted

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

The results in Table 4 show the following direct effect values:

1. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance with a t-statistic value of 2.579 above 1.96 and a significance of 0.010 below 0.05, meaning that leadership has a real effect on employee performance because the significance value is above 0.05 . The results of this study are in line with previous studies, namely that leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (Rahman et al., 2023; Fadillah & Mesra, 2024).
2. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation with a t-statistic value of 4.074 above 1.96 and a significance of 0.000 below 0.05, meaning that human resource quality has a significant effect on work motivation because the significance value is below 0.05. The results of this study are in line with previous studies, namely that leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation (Tarigan & Ferine, 2024).
3. Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance with a tstatistic value of 6.584 above 1.96 and a significance of 0.000 below 0.05, meaning that work motivation has a real effect on employee performance because the significance value is below 0.05. The results of this study are consistent with previous studies, namely that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (Pohan & Rizky, 2024; Yanti et al., 2025).

Indirect Influence Between Variables

The indirect effect between variables can be seen in the specific indirect effects value. The data analysis results show the indirect effect value in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Specific Indirect Effects (Indirect Effects)

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
Leadership -> Work Motivation -> Employee Performance	0.228	3.623	0.000	Accepted

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

Table 5 shows the indirect effect between variables, namely: leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance through work motivation with a t-statistic value of 3.623 above 1.96 and a significance value of 0.000 below 0.05, meaning that work motivation acts as an intervening variable between human resource quality and employee performance.

Conclusion

1. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.
2. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation at the West Medan Sub-District Office.
3. Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the West Medan Sub-District Office.
4. Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance through work motivation at the Medan Barat Subdistrict Office.

Recommendations

1. Employee performance with the lowest score was "I produce work that meets the established standards." Therefore, the recommendation is to improve work quality control by establishing more measurable work standards, providing regular feedback, and conducting continuous performance evaluations so that employees are able to produce consistent work that meets the established standards.
2. Work motivation with the lowest score was "I have the freedom to organize my work to complete tasks." The office is advised to maintain and direct employee freedom in organizing their work while still setting clear targets, authority limits, and monitoring mechanisms, so that work flexibility can promote efficiency without reducing the quality and accountability of work.
3. Leadership with the lowest value statement: "Leaders are able to make appropriate and fair decisions." Leaders need to maintain and improve the quality of decision-making through the application of the principles of transparency, objectivity, and openness to employee input, so that the decisions made can be perceived as appropriate, fair, and capable of increasing employee trust and performance.

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