

Exploring Work Design and Discipline in Shaping Employee Performance: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction among Non-Civil Servants in the Protocol and Communication Division of Medan City Government

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores how work design and work discipline influence employee performance through the mediating role of job satisfaction among non-civil servant staff in the Protocol and Communication Division of the Medan City Government. The research was motivated by the need to understand how organizational structures and behavioral patterns contribute to performance outcomes in the public sector, particularly among contractual employees. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis involving selected non-ASN employees and managerial staff. The findings reveal that a well-structured work design enhances role clarity, creativity, and efficiency, while work discipline fosters accountability and consistency in task completion. Job satisfaction emerges as a critical link that strengthens the relationship between work design and performance outcomes. Employees who perceive fairness, recognition, and meaningful task assignments tend to display higher motivation and productivity. This study contributes to public management literature by providing qualitative insights into how non-civil servants interpret and experience their work environment. The implications emphasize the importance of participatory job structuring, consistent supervision, and motivation strategies to enhance satisfaction and performance in local government institutions.

Keywords: *Work Design, Work Discipline, Job Satisfaction, Employee Performance*

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Introduction

Employee performance has become a central concern in public sector management, particularly in developing countries where administrative effectiveness determines the quality of public services [1]. In Indonesia, non-civil servants (Non-ASN) play an increasingly significant role in supporting governmental functions; however, their performance outcomes often vary due to differences in job design, discipline, and satisfaction levels [2]. The Medan City Government, particularly the Protocol and Communication Division, relies on non-ASN employees to ensure administrative coordination and leadership communication, making their performance a critical element in achieving organizational effectiveness.

Work design refers to how tasks, responsibilities, and workflows are structured to achieve efficiency and employee engagement [3]. A well-structured job design enhances autonomy, creativity, and task significance, which directly influence motivation and performance outcomes [4]. Meanwhile, work discipline—defined as adherence to organizational rules, punctuality, and task commitment—remains a vital behavioral factor in maintaining performance consistency [5]. Both factors are believed to shape the work experience of non-civil servants in the public sector.

Job satisfaction serves as a psychological mediator linking organizational structure and behavioral discipline to performance [6]. When employees perceive their roles as meaningful and fairly managed, satisfaction levels increase, leading to stronger work commitment and improved service quality [7]. However, in many public organizations, including local governments in Indonesia, non-ASN employees often face job insecurity, unclear role boundaries, and limited career development opportunities, which may reduce satisfaction and performance [8].

Previous quantitative studies have explored the correlation among job design, discipline, and performance [9], yet few have investigated the lived experiences and contextual meanings behind these variables within public institutions. Therefore, this research adopts a qualitative approach to explore how non-ASN employees interpret their work design, perceive discipline enforcement, and experience satisfaction in shaping their overall performance in the Protocol and Communication Division of the Medan City Government. The findings aim to contribute theoretical and practical insights to human resource management in the public sector, emphasizing participatory job structuring and motivational supervision as strategies to enhance organizational performance.

Literature Review

2.1 Work Design

Work design refers to the systematic arrangement of tasks, duties, and responsibilities that determine how work is performed and experienced by employees [1]. According to Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model, five core dimensions—skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—collectively influence motivation and job outcomes [2]. A well-structured work design allows employees to understand their roles clearly, exercise discretion, and experience meaningfulness in their tasks, which enhances intrinsic motivation and performance [3].

In the public sector, effective work design is crucial for improving operational efficiency and accountability [4]. Poorly defined roles or overlapping responsibilities, however, can lead to role ambiguity, stress, and decreased performance among non-civil servants who often face limited career mobility and unclear job expectations [5]. Therefore, understanding how work design shapes employee experience and performance becomes vital in public service contexts such as the Medan City Government.

2.2 Work Discipline

Work discipline encompasses adherence to organizational norms, punctuality, and compliance with established procedures [6]. It is a behavioral control mechanism that ensures employees act consistently with institutional expectations. Robbins and Judge [7] emphasize that discipline supports productivity by fostering responsibility and self-control, reducing workplace deviance, and promoting commitment to goals.

In public organizations, discipline plays an essential role in maintaining service quality and professional integrity [8]. A high level of work discipline among non-civil servants reflects organizational credibility and ensures that administrative tasks are executed timely and accurately. Conversely, the absence of discipline can lead to inefficiency, absenteeism, and low trust from leadership and the public [9].

2.3 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a psychological state reflecting how employees feel about their work, based on the perceived balance between expectations and actual experiences [10]. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between *motivators* (such as achievement and recognition) and *hygiene factors* (such as salary and job security) as determinants of satisfaction [11]. When employees perceive fair treatment, clear roles, and recognition, they are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes toward their jobs [12].

In the context of non-ASN employees, job satisfaction often depends on managerial support, equitable treatment, and perceived job stability [13]. Limited career progression and contractual uncertainty can weaken satisfaction and, consequently, reduce performance motivation. Thus, job satisfaction serves as a mediating mechanism linking organizational design and behavioral compliance to work outcomes [14].

2.4 Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the level of achievement of assigned tasks and the effectiveness in realizing organizational goals [15]. Performance is influenced by individual competencies, work environment, and motivation [16]. In the public sector, performance is not only measured by productivity but also by service orientation, accountability, and adherence to governance standards [17].

Several studies have demonstrated that effective work design and high discipline contribute positively to performance outcomes by improving job satisfaction and work engagement [18]. Therefore, understanding performance determinants through a qualitative lens enables a deeper exploration of employee experiences, perceptions, and motivations in achieving organizational objectives.

2.5 Conceptual Linkages

Based on prior research, the relationships among work design, discipline, job satisfaction, and performance are interconnected. Work design provides structural clarity, discipline ensures behavioral alignment, and job satisfaction functions as an emotional bridge that transforms work experiences into performance outcomes [19]. A qualitative exploration in this study aims to uncover how these variables interact in real-world settings, particularly among non-civil servants in a government institution where structural and motivational challenges coexist [20].

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design, aiming to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of non-civil servant employees regarding work design, discipline, and job satisfaction in relation to their performance. A qualitative perspective allows the researcher to understand subjective meanings and social realities that shape employee behavior within the organizational setting [1]. The phenomenological approach is appropriate because it seeks to capture individual interpretations and emotional responses toward organizational practices [2].

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in the Protocol and Communication Division of the Medan City Government Secretariat, which manages official protocol activities, public communication, and leadership coordination. The division employs a number of non-ASN (non-civil servant) staff who assist in administrative and operational functions.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, focusing on individuals who have relevant experience and deep understanding of the work environment [3]. The study involved 10 key informants, consisting of non-ASN employees, supervisors, and administrative managers. The inclusion criteria included at least two years of employment experience and direct involvement in communication and protocol activities.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered through three primary methods:

1. In-depth interviews; Conducted semi-structurally to explore participants' perspectives on work design, discipline, job satisfaction, and performance outcomes. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes.
2. Participant observation; The researcher observed daily work routines, interactions, and disciplinary practices to capture behavioral consistency and contextual understanding [4].
3. Document analysis; Supporting documents such as job descriptions, attendance records, and performance evaluations were reviewed to triangulate interview findings [5].

The combination of these methods ensured data richness and reliability through methodological triangulation.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification [6]. The process began with transcribing interview data, coding meaningful statements, and categorizing them into emerging themes. Data interpretation focused on how participants perceived work design and discipline as factors shaping their satisfaction and performance.

To enhance analytical rigor, member checking was conducted by returning the interpreted findings to participants for validation. Additionally, peer debriefing was applied to minimize researcher bias and ensure analytical credibility [7].

3.5 Research Ethics

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, data confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at

any time without penalty [8]. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Pseudonyms were used to protect participant identities, and all data were securely stored for academic use only. The research protocol followed the ethical standards established by the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi.

Results

4.1 Overview of Findings

The qualitative analysis revealed three major themes reflecting the interaction between work design, work discipline, and job satisfaction in shaping employee performance among non-civil servant (non-ASN) staff in the Protocol and Communication Division. These themes are:

- (1) the importance of clear and participatory work design;
- (2) the role of discipline in establishing accountability and trust; and
- (3) job satisfaction as an emotional bridge enhancing performance outcomes.

Each theme represents a synthesis of interview insights, field observations, and document reviews, supported by theoretical interpretations and relevant literature.

Theme 1: Participatory and Structured Work Design

Most participants emphasized that a clearly defined work structure with transparent task division enhances their motivation and confidence. Employees who understood their roles felt more capable of managing time and priorities effectively. As one informant noted: “When my duties are clear, I can plan my work better. It helps me feel responsible and confident in completing the tasks.”

This finding aligns with Hackman and Oldham’s Job Characteristics Model, which suggests that job clarity, autonomy, and task significance positively influence employee engagement and performance [1]. The qualitative data indicate that participatory job design, where supervisors involve employees in planning or modifying task assignments, fosters a stronger sense of belonging and responsibility.

However, the study also found structural limitations in the work design of non-ASN employees, including repetitive tasks and limited job rotation. These constraints reduce creativity and opportunities for skill development factors that are vital in sustaining long-term motivation [2].

Theme 2: Discipline as the Foundation of Accountability

Discipline emerged as a central value within the Protocol and Communication Division, viewed not merely as rule enforcement but as a culture of responsibility. Informants consistently linked punctuality, attendance, and task commitment to professional identity and trustworthiness.

An administrative officer expressed: “We must maintain discipline because our work represents the image of the city government. Being late or careless affects the whole team.”

This reflects Robbins and Judge’s argument that organizational discipline enhances behavioral consistency and institutional credibility [3]. Observations confirmed that disciplined employees were more reliable in completing urgent communication tasks and event coordination, especially under time-sensitive conditions.

Nevertheless, excessive emphasis on procedural control without emotional support occasionally created stress among some employees. This highlights the need for balanced discipline, combining rule adherence with psychological appreciation [4].

Theme 3: Job Satisfaction as a Mediating Force

Job satisfaction was identified as a mediating factor that strengthened the impact of work design and discipline on performance. Employees who felt recognized, trusted, and involved in decision-making processes demonstrated higher levels of enthusiasm and work quality. Conversely, those perceiving job insecurity or unequal treatment reported diminished satisfaction and engagement.

The data echo Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, emphasizing that intrinsic factors such as recognition, achievement, and meaningful work enhance satisfaction more than external incentives alone [5]. One participant remarked: "When our efforts are appreciated, even a small acknowledgment makes us feel proud and eager to work harder."

This suggests that emotional satisfaction not only boosts morale but also mediates behavioral consistency. Consistent with findings by Ali and Ismail [6], the results indicate that job satisfaction bridges structural (work design) and behavioral (discipline) aspects, transforming them into higher performance outcomes.

4.2 Interrelationship among Variables

The integrated findings demonstrate a synergistic relationship:

- a) A well-structured work design provides clarity and autonomy, setting the foundation for effective performance.
- b) Work discipline ensures the stability of operational behavior and alignment with organizational goals.
- c) Job satisfaction acts as the emotional and psychological connector that amplifies the influence of structure and discipline on individual output.

This interplay supports the conceptual model suggesting that satisfaction mediates the relationship between organizational design and performance effectiveness [7]. The findings imply that enhancing both structural and psychological aspects of work can lead to sustainable performance improvement among contractual public employees.

Discussion

The results contribute to public management discourse by highlighting the human dimension behind administrative efficiency. While prior studies have quantitatively established the relationships among job design, discipline, and performance [8], this study provides a contextual and interpretive understanding of how these constructs are experienced by non-civil servants in a government setting.

The findings underscore the need for participatory management that integrates structural clarity, behavioral discipline, and emotional support. In practice, this means designing flexible work structures, providing mentoring, and recognizing contributions regardless of employment status. Such initiatives can strengthen institutional commitment and improve public service delivery.

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This study explored how work design and work discipline influence employee performance through the mediating role of job satisfaction among non-civil servants in the Protocol and Communication Division of the Medan City Government. Using a qualitative

phenomenological approach, the research uncovered the lived experiences and perceptions of employees regarding their work environment, management practices, and emotional engagement.

The findings indicate that well-structured and participatory work design enhances employee clarity, creativity, and commitment, leading to improved performance outcomes. Similarly, discipline acts as a behavioral framework that reinforces accountability, consistency, and trust within the organization. However, discipline must be balanced with empathy and recognition to avoid psychological fatigue.

Job satisfaction emerged as a pivotal mediating factor that translates structural and behavioral conditions into effective performance. When employees feel respected, involved, and fairly treated, their satisfaction increases, which in turn strengthens motivation and work quality. Conversely, unclear job roles, repetitive tasks, or unequal recognition tend to weaken satisfaction and diminish productivity.

In conclusion, the study highlights that employee performance is not solely a function of structure or control, but of the emotional connection between individuals and their work environment. A synergistic relationship between design, discipline, and satisfaction fosters a more productive and motivated public workforce. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how non-civil servants interpret and internalize their organizational experiences, expanding the discourse of human resource management in the public sector context.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this research extends the application of Job Characteristics Theory [1] and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory [2] within public institutions. It reinforces the notion that intrinsic motivators (such as meaningful work and recognition) are equally or more important than extrinsic controls (such as discipline and supervision). Moreover, by demonstrating job satisfaction as a mediating construct, the study enriches the conceptual framework linking work design and employee performance in public sector organizations [3].

6.3 Practical Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several practical recommendations are proposed:

1. **Participatory Job Structuring:** The Medan City Government should involve non-ASN employees in task planning and decision-making processes to enhance ownership and motivation. Participatory design fosters empowerment and clarity in task execution.
2. **Balanced Discipline Implementation:** Discipline should be applied consistently yet humanely. Supervisors are encouraged to pair corrective actions with motivational feedback and recognition to prevent demoralization.
3. **Recognition and Career Support:** Establishing a transparent reward and acknowledgment system for non-ASN employees can strengthen job satisfaction. Providing skill development opportunities and career mentoring would sustain long-term performance engagement.
4. **Continuous Feedback Mechanisms:** Regular feedback sessions and communication channels should be implemented to identify employee concerns early and adjust job designs accordingly.

By applying these recommendations, public organizations can nurture a culture of performance grounded in mutual respect, motivation, and accountability. Ultimately, this approach will enhance service quality and reinforce the organizational integrity of local government institutions.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to a single organizational division within one regional government, which may constrain the generalizability of its findings. Future research may expand to multiple departments or cross-regional contexts using mixed-methods approaches to validate the relationships between work design, discipline, satisfaction, and performance quantitatively. Exploring additional factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, and digital transformation may also provide deeper insights into contemporary public sector performance.

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