



Explaining Employee Performance in Mid-Tier Hotels: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction between Leadership, Motivation, and Work Discipline

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ABSTRACT

Employee performance is a critical determinant of service quality and competitiveness in mid-tier hotels operating in dynamic environments. This study aims to explain employee performance by examining the effects of leadership, motivation, and work discipline, with job satisfaction positioned as a mediating mechanism. The study was conducted in mid-tier hotels in Batam City, Indonesia. The population comprised approximately 3,250 employees working in three-star hotels. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 98 employees selected through random sampling and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that leadership and work discipline have significant direct effects on employee performance, whereas motivation does not show a significant direct effect. However, leadership, motivation, and work discipline significantly influence job satisfaction, which in turn positively affects employee performance. Mediation analysis reveals that job satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between motivation and employee performance and partially mediates the effects of leadership and work discipline on performance. The structural model demonstrates substantial explanatory power for both job satisfaction and employee performance. These findings highlight job satisfaction as a key psychological mechanism linking managerial practices to employee performance in the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Leadership, Motivation, Work Discipline, Job Satisfaction, Employee Performance, Hospitality Industry

JEL Classifications: M12, M14, O32

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness in labor-intensive service industries such as hospitality. Performance reflects employees' ability to fulfill assigned tasks in accordance with organizational standards while adapting to changing work demands and managerial expectations (Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal, 2022). Employees who fail to meet these expectations are often perceived as exhibiting suboptimal performance, which may hinder organizational goal achievement and service quality (Arifuddin et al., 2023). Consequently, improving employee performance remains a central concern in hospitality management.

From an organizational perspective, performance appraisal and human resource management practices are designed to align employee contributions with organizational objectives while supporting career development and professional growth (Hidayati and Zulher, 2022; Torlak et al., 2022). Organizations seek optimal performance to enhance productivity and competitiveness, whereas employees expect fair evaluation, career opportunities, and supportive work environments (Saputra and Mahaputra, 2022). In practice, however, these objectives are not always achieved simultaneously. In three-star hotels in Batam City, employee performance has declined during periods of organizational and positional transformation, as many employees struggle to adapt to new roles and responsibilities.

Job satisfaction is widely recognized as a key attitudinal factor influencing employee behavior and performance. It reflects employees' affective evaluation of their work experiences and work environment (Hajiali et al., 2022; Pasaribu et al., 2022). Higher job satisfaction is generally associated with positive work attitudes, greater commitment, and stronger willingness to contribute to organizational goals. Enhancing job satisfaction requires organizations to respond effectively to employee needs through supportive human resource practices and improvements in the quality of working life (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2023; Gazi et al., 2022). Nevertheless, in the context of three-star hotels in Batam City, limited opportunities for career advancement and position mobility have constrained employees' job satisfaction, potentially weakening its role in sustaining performance.

Leadership, motivation, and work discipline constitute fundamental managerial factors shaping employee attitudes and behavior. Effective leadership provides direction, guidance, and support, thereby fostering trust, fairness, and employee engagement (Arifuddin et al., 2023; Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal, 2022). Motivation energizes employees to exert effort toward organizational goals, while work discipline ensures compliance with rules and standards that support consistent performance outcomes (Andreas, 2022; Nasution and Priangkatarata, 2022). However, empirical observations in three-star hotels in Batam City suggest persistent challenges related to limited employee voice, perceived favoritism, declining motivation, and inconsistent discipline enforcement, all of which may undermine performance.

The empirical setting of three-star hotels in Batam City offers a relevant yet underexplored context for hospitality research. As mid-tier service organizations operating within a rapidly transforming tourism and industrial environment, these hotels face unique challenges related to employee adaptability and managerial effectiveness. Unlike luxury hotels, three-star hotels typically operate with limited structural resources, making employee attitudes particularly job satisfaction more critical in sustaining performance.

Although leadership, motivation, work discipline, job satisfaction, and employee performance have been widely examined in human resource management literature, prior studies predominantly adopt confirmatory approaches and often treat job satisfaction as a direct outcome or a generic mediator. Limited attention has been given to its role as a central psychological mechanism that explains how managerial practices are translated into performance outcomes, particularly in hospitality organizations undergoing organizational transformation. Addressing this gap, the present study positions job satisfaction as a key explanatory mechanism linking leadership, motivation, and work discipline to employee performance, thereby extending hospitality management literature beyond descriptive testing toward explanatory insight.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the effects of leadership, motivation, and work discipline on employee performance, with job satisfaction serving as a mediating mechanism. By focusing on three-star hotels in Batam City, this research provides theoretically grounded and contextually relevant contributions to hospitality

management literature while offering practical insights for improving employee performance in mid-tier hotel organizations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Employee Performance

Work is a tool used in improving accountability and decisions (Haryadi, 2022). Performance is the result of work that has a strong relationship with the strategic objectives of the organization, satisfaction, consumers, and contributes to the economy (Sutaguna et al., 2023). The performance appraisal process should be carried out measurably and objectively when collecting information and data on employee achievements and appraisals are only carried out by authorized people, namely the superiors of these employees (Andreas, 2022; Latifah et al., 2023). Performance appraisal includes work plans, implementation, supervision and coaching (Renn et al., 2023; Pawirosumarto et al., 2017). The purpose of performance appraisal is to review past performance, obtain systematic data and facts to determine assessments, identify company capabilities, analyze individual employee abilities, prepare future targets, see objective employee work performance, get fairness from the company in terms of wages, determine wage structures, negotiate management with labor unions, reinforce goals, duties, functions and authorities, minimizing employee turmoil and complaints and solving problems that occur (Andreas, 2022; Mishra et al., 2020; Hajiali et al., 2022; Irfan, 2022; Pasaribu et al., 2022; Sugiarti, 2022)

2.2. Leadership

Leadership is closely related to the organization. Whether or not organizational goals are achieved depends largely on the leadership carried out by the leader (Torlak et al., 2022; Junaidi, 2023). Whether an organization will succeed or even fail is largely determined by leadership (Singh et al., 2023). The leader is a shepherd and each shepherd will be asked about his pastoral behavior (Suhartono et al., 2023). Whether or not a leader is effective depends on how his ability to manage and apply his leadership pattern in accordance with the situation and conditions of the organization (Arifuddin et al., 2023; Shen et al., 2023). Leadership is a process of one's activities to move others by leading, guiding and influencing others, to do something in order to achieve the desired results (Pasaribu et al., 2022). It is not easy to give a definition of leadership that is universal and accepted by all parties involved in organizational life and including business organizations (Selvarajan et al., 2018; Moon and Jung, 2018).

- H_{1a} : Leadership influences job satisfaction
- H_{1b} : Leadership influences employee performance.

2.3. Motivation

Motivation is an encouragement to raise enthusiasm in carrying out work activities that are in line with the goals to be achieved (Hajiali et al., 2022). Success in influencing work principles depends on how a motivator carries out the motivation itself (Kim et al., 2023). Every leader must know what subordinates do, must be oriented to people's terms of reference, everyone is different in satisfying needs, each leader must set a good example for employees, leaders

are able to use skills in various forms, leaders must act and act realistically (Arifuddin et al., 2023; Irfan, 2022; Ismoyo et al., 2022; Nasution and Priangkatara, 2022; Liaquat et al., 2024).

- H_{2a} : Motivation influences job satisfaction
- H_{2b} : Motivation influences employee performance.

2.4. Work Discipline

Employee discipline is a form of training that seeks to improve and shape employee knowledge, attitudes and behavior so that these employees voluntarily try to work cooperatively with other employees and improve their work performance (Nasution and Priangkatara, 2022; Meyers et al., 2023). Discipline shows a condition or respectful attitude that exists in employees towards company rules and regulations (Lesmana and; Damanik, 2022). Discipline is an orderly state in which a person or group who is a member of the organization wants to obey and implement existing regulations, both written and unwritten (Sutaguna et al., 2023). Thus, if the rules or regulations in the company are ignored, or often violated, then employees have poor work discipline (Waris, 2015). Conversely, if employees are subject to company regulations, it illustrates the existence of good disciplinary conditions (Lesmana and; Damanik, 2022; Suhartono et al., 2023).

- H_{3a} : Work discipline influences job satisfaction
- H_{3b} : Work discipline influences employee performance.

2.5. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the result of employees' perceptions of how well their jobs deliver what is considered important (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2023). Employee job satisfaction is an important issue to be considered in relation to employee work productivity and dissatisfaction is often associated with high levels of job benefits and complaints (Gazi et al., 2022; Haque and Khan, 2023; Nurbaeti, 2022). Work entails interacting with colleagues and superiors, following organizational rules and policies, meeting performance standards, living with often less-than-ideal working conditions and the like (Siegel et al., 2022). Job satisfaction reflects attitudes and not behaviors (Lee and Raschke, 2016). Job satisfaction is a major dependent variable for two reasons, namely showing a relationship with performance factors, and is a value preference held by many organizational behavior researchers (Saputra and; Mahaputra, 2022).

- H_4 : Job satisfaction influences employee performance
- H_5 : Leadership influences employee performance through job satisfaction
- H_6 : Motivation influences employee performance through job satisfaction
- H_7 : Work discipline influences employee performance through job satisfaction.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationships among leadership, motivation, work discipline, job satisfaction, and employee performance. A causal research framework was adopted to test both direct and indirect relationships, with job satisfaction specified as a mediating mechanism linking managerial factors to employee performance. The population of this study consisted of

employees working in three-star hotels in Batam City, Indonesia, totaling approximately 3,250 individuals. Data were collected from 98 respondents using a random sampling technique. The sample size was considered adequate for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), given the predictive orientation of the study and the complexity of the proposed mediation model. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for studies aiming to explain variance and estimate indirect effects in situations where sample sizes are relatively limited.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture respondents' perceptions of the study variables. All constructs were measured using multi-item scales adapted from prior empirical studies and assessed on a Likert-type scale. The questionnaire was administered in person to reduce non-response and ensure clarity of responses. This approach was deemed appropriate given the attitudinal and behavioral nature of the constructs examined. To enhance data reliability, the data collection process was conducted over a six-month period in 2025, allowing sufficient time to reach respondents across different hotel departments. Prior to hypothesis testing, the data were screened to ensure suitability for multivariate analysis.

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Second, the structural model was assessed by examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes, and predictive relevance to test the proposed hypotheses and mediation effects. Multicollinearity issues were assessed to ensure that the structural model met the required assumptions. PLS-SEM was selected due to its robustness in handling complex models with mediating variables, its suitability for predictive and explanatory research, and its ability to provide reliable estimates under non-normal data conditions.

4. RESULTS

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Prior to hypothesis testing, the measurement model was evaluated to ensure the adequacy of construct reliability and validity. All indicator loadings exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold, indicating satisfactory convergent validity across all constructs. Inter-construct correlations were below the recommended threshold, suggesting the absence of discriminant validity concerns. In addition, no multicollinearity issues were detected, indicating that the measurement model was suitable for structural analysis.

The structural model was assessed by examining the path coefficients, t-statistics, and P-values obtained through the bootstrapping procedure. Figure 1 presents the estimated structural model, while Table 1 summarizes the direct effects among the study variables.

As shown in Table 1, leadership exerted a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.238$, $P < 0.05$) and employee

performance ($\beta = 0.348, P < 0.01$). Motivation also demonstrated a significant positive effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.340, P < 0.01$); however, its direct effect on employee performance was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.226, P > 0.05$). Work discipline exhibited significant positive effects on both job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.374, P < 0.001$) and employee performance ($\beta = 0.248, P < 0.05$). Furthermore, job satisfaction had a significant positive effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.262, P < 0.05$). These results indicate that while leadership and work discipline directly enhance employee performance, motivation alone does not directly translate into improved performance outcomes.

To examine the mediating role of job satisfaction, indirect effects were assessed using the bootstrapping approach. The results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 2.

The indirect effect of leadership on employee performance through job satisfaction was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.038, P < 0.01$), indicating that job satisfaction partially mediates this relationship. Similarly, job satisfaction significantly mediated the relationship between motivation and employee performance

($\beta = 0.067, P < 0.05$), despite the non-significant direct effect of motivation on performance. This finding suggests the presence of an indirect-only mediation pattern. In addition, the indirect effect of work discipline on employee performance through job satisfaction was also significant ($\beta = 0.082, P < 0.05$), confirming the mediating role of job satisfaction. Overall, these findings highlight job satisfaction as a central explanatory mechanism through which leadership, motivation, and work discipline influence employee performance.

The explanatory power of the model was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2). As shown in Table 3, leadership, motivation, and work discipline jointly explained 56.0% of the variance in job satisfaction (adjusted $R^2 = 0.560$). Furthermore, leadership, motivation, work discipline, and job satisfaction together accounted for 72.0% of the variance in employee performance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.720$). These values indicate substantial explanatory power, suggesting that the proposed model effectively captures key determinants of employee performance in the context of three-star hotels.

Figure 1: Path analysis results

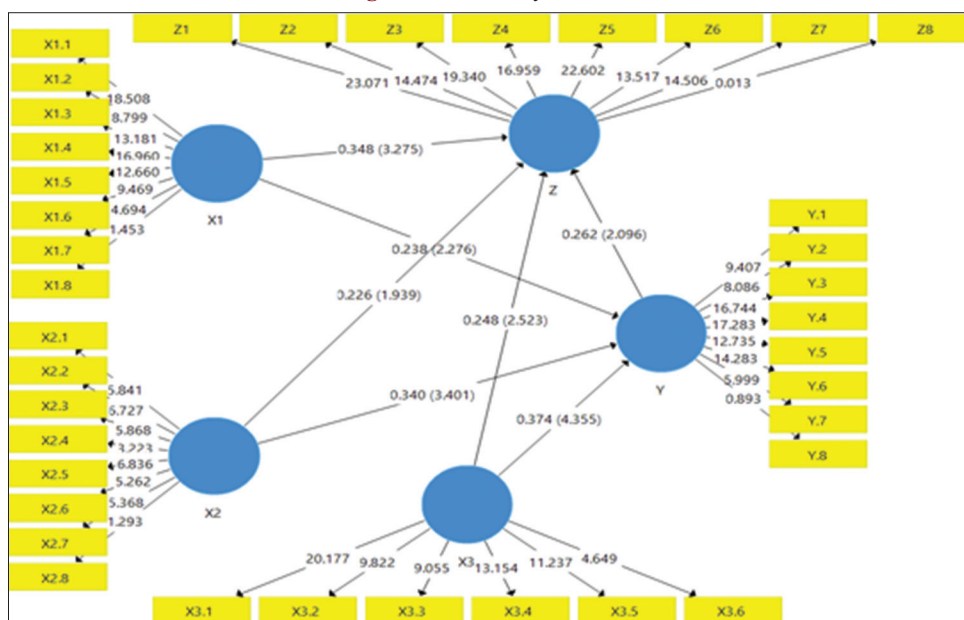


Table 1: Direct effect

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
X1 -> Y	0.238	0.134	0.238	2.276	0.010
X1 -> Z	0.348	0.245	0.236	3.275	0.001
X2 -> Y	0.340	0.457	0.237	3.401	0.001
X2 -> Z	0.226	0.235	0.134	1.939	0.020
X3 -> Y	0.374	0.623	0.240	4.355	0.000
X3 -> Z	0.248	0.134	0.373	2.523	0.012
Y -> Z	0.262	0.312	0.123	2.096	0.024

Table 2: Indirect EFFECT

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
X1 -> Y -> Z	0.038	0.034	0.034	3.650	0.004
X2 -> Y -> Z	0.067	0.083	0.028	2.322	0.030
X3 -> Y -> Z	0.082	0.072	0.025	2.871	0.026

Table 3: Coefficient determination

Model	R square	R square adjusted
Y	0.589	0.560
Z	0.773	0.720

5. DISCUSSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the mechanisms through which leadership, motivation, and work discipline influence employee performance in the context of three-star hotels, with job satisfaction functioning as a key explanatory mechanism. The findings demonstrate that leadership and work discipline have both direct and indirect effects on employee performance, while motivation influences performance primarily through job satisfaction. The significant effect of leadership on job satisfaction and employee performance underscores the importance of leadership behaviors that emphasize openness, approachability, and employee involvement. Leaders who provide opportunities for employees to express ideas and participate in decision-making foster a supportive work climate that enhances psychological comfort and positive work attitudes. Such leadership behaviors strengthen employees' emotional attachment to their work, which subsequently translates into higher performance levels. This finding aligns with contemporary leadership theories emphasizing relational and participative leadership as drivers of employee well-being and effectiveness (Shen et al., 2023; Suhartono et al., 2023). In labor-intensive service settings such as hotels, where interpersonal interactions dominate daily operations, leadership practices that prioritize inclusiveness and trust appear particularly critical.

Interestingly, motivation did not exhibit a significant direct effect on employee performance, although its indirect effect through job satisfaction was statistically significant. This finding suggests that motivation alone is insufficient to directly enhance performance unless it is accompanied by a sense of satisfaction derived from the work environment. In the context of three-star hotels in Batam City, motivational efforts may be perceived as partial or procedural, such as fairness in treatment, but not strong enough to generate immediate performance outcomes. Instead, motivation contributes to performance only when it enhances employees' affective evaluation of their jobs. This indirect-only mediation pattern reinforces the argument that job satisfaction represents a psychological conversion mechanism through which motivational inputs are transformed into productive behavior, particularly in service organizations undergoing structural or positional changes.

Work discipline was found to exert a strong influence on both job satisfaction and employee performance. This finding indicates that clear rules, consistent enforcement, and fair disciplinary practices create a sense of order and predictability that employees perceive as organizational support rather than control. When discipline is implemented fairly and transparently, employees are more likely to internalize organizational norms, develop self-discipline, and experience satisfaction in their roles. Such conditions encourage timely task completion and sustained performance. This result supports prior studies emphasizing that discipline, when balanced with fairness, contributes positively to both attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Gazi et al., 2022; Selvarajan et al., 2018).

The significant mediating role of job satisfaction across all indirect relationships highlights its central position within the proposed model. Job satisfaction serves as a psychological bridge that explains how managerial practices translate into performance outcomes. This finding extends existing hospitality management literature by moving beyond direct-effect models and demonstrating that employee performance improvements are contingent upon employees' affective evaluations of their work. In mid-tier hotels, where material incentives and structural resources are limited, job satisfaction becomes a crucial lever for sustaining employee effectiveness.

Overall, the findings are consistent with and extend prior research in human resource management and hospitality studies (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2023; Lesmana and Damanik, 2022; Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal, 2022; Saluy et al., 2022; Siegel et al., 2022; Torlak et al., 2022). By empirically demonstrating the mediating role of job satisfaction, this study provides a more nuanced explanation of employee performance formation in three-star hotels and offers theoretical insight into the behavioral processes underlying service performance.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of leadership, motivation, and work discipline on employee performance, with job satisfaction positioned as a mediating mechanism, within the context of three-star hotels in Batam City. The findings confirm that leadership, motivation, and work discipline significantly influence job satisfaction. Furthermore, leadership, work discipline, and job satisfaction were found to have significant direct effects on employee performance, while motivation did not exert a direct influence on performance outcomes.

Importantly, the results demonstrate that job satisfaction plays a central mediating role in translating leadership, motivation, and work discipline into employee performance. Motivation contributes to performance only when it enhances employees' affective evaluations of their work, highlighting job satisfaction as a critical psychological mechanism rather than a peripheral outcome. These findings extend existing hospitality and human resource management literature by providing explanatory insight into how managerial practices shape employee performance in mid-tier service organizations.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that hotel management should prioritize leadership practices that emphasize openness and participation, implement fair and consistent disciplinary systems, and design motivational strategies that meaningfully enhance employees' job satisfaction. Such an integrated approach is especially relevant for three-star hotels, where structural and financial resources are limited, making employee attitudes a key driver of performance sustainability.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the empirical setting was limited to three-star hotels in Batam City, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to other hotel categories or geographic contexts. Second, the study

did not incorporate recursive or longitudinal testing to examine the stability of the proposed constructs over time. Future research is encouraged to expand the sample to include hotels with different star ratings, apply longitudinal designs, and incorporate additional explanatory variables such as job autonomy or work authority to further enrich understanding of employee performance mechanisms in the hospitality industry.

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