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The Effect of Work Discipline and Work Environment on Operational Performance through Work Motivation as a Mediating Variable in The Japanese Automotive Manufacturing Industry in Serang Regency

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Abstract

Employees in manufacturing companies play an important role in maintaining operational performance and achieving production targets. However, low work discipline, inadequate work environments, and weak employee motivation may reduce company performance. This study aims to examine the effect of work discipline and work environment on operational performance, both directly and indirectly through work motivation as a mediating variable. This research employed a quantitative survey method. Data were collected from 88 employees working at Japanese automotive manufacturing companies located in the Modern Industrial Area of Cikande, Serang Regency, including PT Yasunaga Indonesia, PT Nippon Seiki Indonesia, and PT Mitsuba Indonesia, using questionnaires. The analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software. The results indicate that work discipline has a positive and significant effect on operational performance. Work discipline and work environment also have a positive and significant effect on work motivation. However, work environment does not have a significant effect on operational performance, and work motivation does not significantly influence operational performance. Furthermore, work motivation was not proven to mediate the relationship between work discipline and work environment on operational performance. The study concludes that strengthening work discipline remains the most important factor in improving operational performance, while motivation programs and work environment improvements should be continuously evaluated to create stronger impacts on employee productivity.

Keywords: Work Discipline, Work Environment, Work Motivation, Operational Performance, PLS-SEM

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INTRODUCTION

Human resource management (HRM) has become a crucial aspect in determining organizational sustainability and competitiveness, particularly within manufacturing industries facing rapid industrial transformation. In today's competitive business environment, companies are no longer only required to strengthen production systems and technological capabilities, but also to optimize the quality and effectiveness of their human

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resources. Employee performance is considered one of the most important organizational assets because operational success largely depends on the ability of employees to maintain productivity, efficiency, and work quality consistently (Fan et al., 2025).

In manufacturing industries, operational performance is widely used as an indicator to evaluate the effectiveness of organizational activities. Strong operational performance reflects the organization's ability to achieve production targets efficiently, maintain product quality standards, minimize operational disruptions, and fulfill customer demands on time. For automotive manufacturing companies, operational stability is particularly important because production systems are highly interconnected, meaning that even minor operational disruptions may affect the entire production process (Owusu, 2025).

The importance of operational performance has become increasingly evident amid the transition of the automotive industry from conventional vehicles to electric vehicles. This industrial transformation has intensified competition among automotive suppliers because electric vehicles require fewer production components compared to conventional vehicles. As a result, manufacturing companies are under increasing pressure to improve efficiency, strengthen productivity, and maintain operational effectiveness in order to remain competitive in the market (Hai et al., 2025).

Supplier performance reports in 2025 show that although most automotive suppliers successfully achieved on-time delivery targets, delayed delivery cases still occurred in several companies. These delays created risks of production disruption, including the possibility of line-stop conditions and delayed manufacturing processes. This phenomenon indicates that maintaining operational performance remains a significant challenge for manufacturing companies, particularly in industries that rely heavily on production continuity and delivery precision (Peter & Tambo, 2025).

Besides external industrial pressures, several internal workplace problems were also identified in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies in Serang Regency. Preliminary observations revealed that some employees still violated work discipline regulations, such as returning late after break time, failing to comply with operational procedures, and placing work equipment improperly. In addition, operational obstacles related to employee transportation facilities and labor union activities were also found to potentially disrupt production activities and reduce operational effectiveness. These conditions suggest that operational performance is not solely influenced by production systems and technology, but is also strongly associated with employee discipline, workplace conditions, and motivational factors (Wang et al., 2025).

One important factor influencing operational performance is work discipline. In manufacturing industries, discipline reflects employees' commitment to complying with organizational rules, production procedures, and established work standards. High levels of discipline are essential because manufacturing activities require precision, punctuality, consistency, and adherence to operational procedures. Employees with good discipline tend to work more responsibly, minimize work errors, and contribute positively to organizational productivity. Conversely, poor discipline may create inefficiency, reduce production quality, and increase operational risks (Adesina et al., 2025).

In addition to work discipline, the work environment also plays an important role in shaping employee performance. A supportive work environment includes adequate facilities, safe and comfortable physical conditions, harmonious interpersonal relationships, and organizational systems that facilitate employee activities. Japanese manufacturing companies are generally recognized for implementing structured work systems and strong workplace management practices. However, the operational problems identified during preliminary observations indicate that maintaining a conducive work environment remains a

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continuous organizational challenge. Poor workplace conditions may reduce employee comfort, lower productivity, and negatively affect operational performance (Coelho-júnior & Marzetti, 2025).

Another factor considered essential in improving operational performance is work motivation. Motivation represents the internal drive that encourages employees to perform their responsibilities effectively and achieve organizational goals. Employees with strong motivation generally demonstrate higher levels of enthusiasm, commitment, and responsibility toward their work. In manufacturing companies, employee motivation becomes increasingly important because production activities often involve repetitive tasks, strict targets, and high work pressure. Therefore, organizations commonly provide incentives, rewards, recognition systems, and other motivational programs to maintain employee productivity and engagement (Dehghannejad et al., 2025).

Although numerous studies have examined the relationships between work discipline, work environment, motivation, and operational performance, previous findings remain inconsistent. Several studies reported that work discipline and work environment significantly influence employee performance, while other studies found insignificant or contradictory relationships. These inconsistencies indicate that the relationships among these variables may depend on specific organizational contexts, industrial characteristics, and employee conditions. Moreover, many previous studies focused primarily on direct relationships between variables and paid limited attention to the mediating role of work motivation in explaining how work discipline and work environment influence operational performance (Journal & Arti, 2025).

This research gap becomes increasingly relevant within Japanese automotive manufacturing companies in Serang Regency, where companies are simultaneously facing industrial transformation, operational efficiency pressures, and workforce management challenges. Understanding how work discipline and work environment influence operational performance through work motivation is important not only from a theoretical perspective but also from a practical standpoint. The findings of this study are expected to provide deeper insights for companies in developing effective human resource management strategies to improve employee productivity and maintain organizational competitiveness amid the changing dynamics of the automotive manufacturing industry (Leewis et al., 2025).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of work discipline and work environment on operational performance through work motivation as a mediating variable among employees working in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies in Serang Regency.

State of the art

Research on work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance has been widely discussed in the human resource management literature. Previous studies indicate that work discipline positively affects employee performance because disciplined employees tend to work more efficiently and comply with organizational standards (Kristanto et al., 2024; Sagala et al., 2023). Similarly, work environment is considered an important factor influencing employee productivity and comfort. A supportive work environment can improve employee morale, reduce workplace stress, and enhance operational effectiveness (Arianto & Ahmad, 2023; Purnamasari, 2021).

Several previous studies also indicate that work motivation plays an important role in improving employee performance and productivity. Employees with strong motivation tend to demonstrate higher commitment and better work outcomes (Darmanah, 2022; Nursiska et al., 2024). However, empirical findings regarding the

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relationships between work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance remain inconsistent. Some studies reported that work discipline significantly affects performance, while others found insignificant effects (Yani & Andini, 2024; Kale et al., 2023). Likewise, the effect of work environment on operational performance has shown varying results across studies (Cabarcos et al., 2021).

In addition, previous studies often examined these variables separately and did not integrate work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance into a comprehensive model (Kale et al., 2023). Most previous studies also focused on service or government sectors, while studies examining Japanese automotive manufacturing companies remain limited (Yani & Andini, 2024).

To better understand these inconsistencies and identify research gaps, a summary of previous studies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Research Gap in Previous Studies

No	Previous Research	Research Focus	Findings	Limitations	Identified Research Gap
1	Yani & Andini (2024)	Motivation, work discipline, job satisfaction, and employee performance	Work discipline did not significantly affect performance, while motivation and job satisfaction significantly affected performance	The study did not examine work environment variables and did not analyze mediation relationships	The mediating role of work motivation between work discipline and operational performance remains unclear
2	Cabarcos et al. (2021)	Work environment, leadership behavior, and employee performance	Work environment did not significantly affect employee performance	The study excluded work discipline variables and mediation analysis	Further studies are needed to integrate work discipline and work motivation into a comprehensive model
3	Kale et al. (2023)	Leadership style, work discipline, work environment, motivation, and performance	Leadership, discipline, work environment, and motivation significantly affected performance	The study used qualitative methods and lacked statistical mediation testing	Quantitative analysis using SEM-PLS is required to examine direct and indirect effects simultaneously
4	Previous studies in service and public sectors	Work discipline and employee performance	Findings varied across organizational contexts and sectors	Limited studies focused on manufacturing industries, especially Japanese automotive companies	Empirical evidence from Japanese automotive manufacturing industries is still limited
5	This study	Work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance	—	—	This study develops an integrated SEM-PLS model examining direct and indirect relationships in Japanese

		automotive manufacturing companies

Source: Yani & Andini (2024); Cabarcos et al. (2021); Kale et al. (2023).

As shown in Table 3, several important research gaps can be identified. First, there is inconsistency in the findings regarding the effect of work discipline and work environment on operational performance, where some studies report significant relationships while others find insignificant effects (Yani & Andini, 2024; Cabarcos et al., 2021). These inconsistent findings indicate that the relationships among the variables still require further investigation.

Second, many previous studies do not incorporate work motivation as a mediating variable, resulting in a limited understanding of the indirect effects of work discipline and work environment on operational performance (Kale et al., 2023). Most studies only examine direct relationships between independent and dependent variables without exploring the mediating mechanism of employee motivation.

Third, previous studies tend to examine work discipline, work environment, motivation, and performance separately rather than integrating them into a comprehensive research model (Yani & Andini, 2024). In addition, most previous studies were conducted in service or public sector organizations, while limited research focuses on Japanese automotive manufacturing industries with highly structured operational systems and unique organizational cultures.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by developing an integrated model examining the effect of work discipline and work environment on operational performance through work motivation as a mediating variable. This research is conducted in the context of Japanese automotive manufacturing companies located in Serang Regency, including PT Yasunaga Indonesia, PT Nippon Seiki Indonesia, and PT Mitsuba Indonesia. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of human resource management literature and provide practical insights for improving employee productivity and operational performance in manufacturing industries.

Novelty of the study

This study offers several novelties that contribute to the development of human resource management literature, particularly in the context of manufacturing industries. Previous studies generally examined work discipline, work environment, motivation, and performance separately and focused mainly on direct relationships among variables (Yani & Andini, 2024; Kale et al., 2023). In contrast, this study develops a more comprehensive and integrated research model by simultaneously examining the relationships between work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance.

Another novelty of this study lies in the use of work motivation as a mediating variable. Previous studies mostly focused only on the direct effects of work discipline and work environment on employee performance without exploring the mediating mechanism of employee motivation (Cabarcos et al., 2021). Therefore, this study provides a broader understanding of how work discipline and work environment indirectly influence operational performance through work motivation.

In addition, this study contributes empirical evidence from Japanese automotive manufacturing companies located in Serang Regency, including PT Yasunaga Indonesia, PT Nippon Seiki Indonesia, and PT Mitsuba Indonesia. Most previous studies were conducted in service organizations or public sector institutions, while studies focusing on Japanese manufacturing industries remain limited (Yani & Andini, 2024). Japanese manufacturing

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companies are known for implementing strict discipline systems, structured operational management, and productivity-oriented organizational cultures, making this research context unique and relevant.

Furthermore, this study applies the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach to analyze both direct and indirect relationships simultaneously. This analytical approach allows a more comprehensive understanding of the causal relationships among variables compared to conventional regression methods (Hair et al., 2019).

Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in the integration of work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance into a comprehensive SEM-PLS model within the context of Japanese automotive manufacturing industries. The findings are expected to enrich human resource management literature and provide practical insights for improving employee productivity and operational effectiveness in manufacturing companies.

THEORETICAL STUDY

Work Discipline

Work discipline refers to employees' awareness and willingness to comply with organizational rules, procedures, and standards established by the company. Discipline reflects employee responsibility, punctuality, obedience to regulations, and consistency in carrying out work duties. According to Sagala et al. (2023), work discipline is an important factor influencing employee productivity and organizational effectiveness because disciplined employees tend to perform tasks more efficiently and minimize operational errors (Zhang et al., 2025).

Similarly, Kristanto et al. (2024) stated that employees with high levels of discipline generally demonstrate stronger commitment toward organizational goals and are more capable of maintaining performance consistency. In manufacturing industries, work discipline becomes increasingly important because operational activities require strict compliance with production procedures, safety standards, and quality control systems (Ganji et al., 2025).

Therefore, work discipline is considered one of the fundamental determinants of operational performance, especially in industries with structured operational systems such as Japanese automotive manufacturing companies.

Work Environment

Work environment refers to all physical and nonphysical conditions surrounding employees while performing their work activities. The work environment includes workplace facilities, lighting, temperature, safety, organizational atmosphere, communication patterns, and interpersonal relationships among employees (Purnamasari, 2021).

A supportive work environment can improve employee comfort, morale, and productivity. Arianto and Ahmad (2023) explained that employees who work in comfortable and safe environments tend to experience lower stress levels and higher work enthusiasm. In addition, harmonious relationships among employees and supervisors can strengthen teamwork and organizational commitment (Steven, 2025).

In manufacturing companies, work environment management is essential because employees are directly involved in production processes requiring concentration, safety, and operational efficiency. Therefore, organizations need to maintain both physical and

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nonphysical workplace conditions to support employee performance and operational effectiveness (Nugroho, 2025).

Work Motivation

Work motivation refers to the internal and external forces that encourage employees to perform work activities and achieve organizational goals. Motivation influences employee enthusiasm, commitment, persistence, and willingness to improve performance (Darmanah, 2022).

According to Nursiska et al. (2024), motivated employees are more likely to demonstrate higher productivity, creativity, and responsibility in completing work tasks. Motivation can arise from financial rewards, career opportunities, recognition, supportive leadership, and positive organizational culture.

In manufacturing industries, employee motivation plays an important role in maintaining productivity and operational stability. Companies often implement incentive systems, bonuses, and employee recognition programs to improve employee morale and maintain organizational competitiveness (Unal, 2025).

Therefore, work motivation is considered an important factor influencing both individual and organizational performance outcomes.

Operational Performance

Operational performance refers to the effectiveness and efficiency of organizational activities in achieving operational targets and production objectives. Operational performance is generally reflected in productivity, product quality, timeliness, cost efficiency, and customer satisfaction (Khan & Abdullah, 2019).

According to Suseno et al. (2023), operational performance represents the organization's ability to optimize resources and maintain productivity in dynamic business environments. In manufacturing industries, operational performance becomes a critical indicator because companies must maintain production efficiency while ensuring product quality and timely delivery (Johnson & Barrett, 2025).

Japanese manufacturing companies are widely recognized for implementing disciplined operational systems and continuous improvement practices to maintain operational excellence. Therefore, improving operational performance requires strong employee discipline, supportive work environments, and effective motivational systems.

Relationship Between Variables

Work Discipline and Operational Performance

Work discipline is considered one of the important factors influencing operational performance in manufacturing companies. In production-based industries, employees are required to follow operational procedures, comply with company regulations, and complete tasks according to predetermined standards and schedules. Employees with strong discipline generally demonstrate greater responsibility toward their work, maintain punctuality, and perform tasks more consistently. These behaviors contribute to smoother operational processes and help organizations achieve production targets more effectively (Zhou et al., 2025).

In manufacturing activities, even minor disciplinary violations may create broader operational consequences, such as production delays, reduced efficiency, and increased operational errors. Sagala et al. (2023) explained that disciplined employees tend to utilize

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working time more effectively, minimize operational mistakes, and improve overall productivity. This indicates that work discipline not only affects individual employee behavior but also influences the continuity and effectiveness of organizational operations (Welsh et al., 2025).

Similarly, Kristanto et al. (2024) found that work discipline has a positive effect on employee performance because employees who comply with organizational regulations demonstrate stronger commitment, responsibility, and work consistency. Employees who consistently follow workplace standards are more capable of maintaining production quality and supporting operational stability. In manufacturing companies that prioritize precision and efficiency, disciplined employee behavior becomes increasingly important in maintaining operational effectiveness.

Based on the explanations above, it can be synthesized that work discipline plays a significant role in improving operational performance. Employees with high levels of discipline are more likely to work efficiently, comply with organizational standards, and minimize operational disruptions. Therefore, stronger work discipline is expected to contribute positively to the improvement of operational performance within manufacturing organizations.

Work Environment and Operational Performance

The work environment is an important factor that can influence operational performance within an organization. In manufacturing companies, employees spend long working hours in production areas that require concentration, precision, and consistency. Therefore, workplace conditions such as adequate facilities, proper lighting, workplace safety, air circulation, and harmonious relationships among employees can significantly affect how employees perform their duties. A supportive work environment enables employees to work more comfortably and efficiently while reducing the possibility of work-related stress and fatigue (Wicaksana et al., 2025).

A conducive workplace environment also contributes to maintaining employee focus and productivity during operational activities. Employees who work in safe and comfortable conditions are generally more motivated to complete tasks effectively and comply with organizational standards. Arianto and Ahmad (2023) stated that a comfortable and safe workplace can improve employee concentration, reduce fatigue, and support productivity. This suggests that the quality of the work environment has a direct influence on employees' ability to maintain stable operational performance (Koning, 2025).

In addition, supportive workplace conditions may strengthen employee morale and encourage positive work behavior. Purnamasari (2021) explained that a supportive work environment contributes positively to employee morale and organizational effectiveness. Employees who feel comfortable within their work environment are more likely to demonstrate stronger commitment, better cooperation, and higher responsibility toward organizational goals. As a result, organizations with supportive workplace conditions are generally more capable of maintaining operational stability and improving performance outcomes (George, 2025).

Based on the explanations above, it can be synthesized that the work environment plays an essential role in improving operational performance. A safe, comfortable, and supportive workplace helps employees maintain concentration, increase productivity, and perform their responsibilities more effectively. Therefore, organizations with better work environments are expected to achieve higher levels of operational performance.

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Work Discipline and Work Motivation

Work discipline is not only associated with employee behavior and operational effectiveness, but also closely related to employee motivation. In organizational settings, discipline reflects employees' willingness to comply with company rules, fulfill responsibilities, and maintain work consistency. Employees who work within structured organizational systems generally develop clearer work patterns and stronger awareness of their responsibilities. As a result, disciplined work behavior may encourage employees to become more committed and motivated in performing their duties (Mohammed et al., 2025).

In manufacturing companies, disciplined employees are more likely to demonstrate seriousness and responsibility toward organizational goals. Employees who consistently follow operational procedures and organizational standards tend to feel more involved in the achievement of company objectives. Kristanto et al. (2024) explained that employees working within structured organizational systems tend to develop stronger commitment and work responsibility. This condition indicates that work discipline can create a positive work attitude that supports the development of employee motivation.

Furthermore, organizations that implement strong disciplinary cultures often encourage employees to maintain productivity and organizational loyalty. A disciplined work environment may create a sense of order, fairness, and accountability, which can strengthen employees' motivation to work effectively. Employees who understand their responsibilities clearly and work within organized systems are generally more motivated to maintain performance and contribute positively to the organization (Fan et al., 2025).

Based on the explanations above, it can be synthesized that work discipline has an important role in influencing employee motivation. Strong work discipline can encourage employees to develop greater responsibility, commitment, and organizational loyalty. Therefore, higher levels of work discipline are expected to positively influence employee work motivation.

Work Environment and Work Motivation

The work environment is closely related to employee motivation because workplace conditions can influence employees' psychological comfort, enthusiasm, and willingness to perform their responsibilities. Employees who work in supportive environments generally feel more valued, secure, and comfortable while carrying out their duties. In organizational settings, a positive work environment not only supports physical activities but also affects employees' emotional and motivational conditions. Therefore, organizations are required to create workplace conditions that encourage employees to work more enthusiastically and productively (Owusu, 2025).

A conducive work environment may increase employee morale and encourage stronger engagement in organizational activities. Comfortable workplace conditions, adequate facilities, and positive interpersonal relationships help employees maintain concentration and reduce work-related stress. Arianto and Ahmad (2023) explained that comfortable workplace conditions and harmonious interpersonal relationships can improve employee morale and enthusiasm. This suggests that employees are more likely to develop positive work attitudes when they feel comfortable within their work environment.

In addition, supportive organizational environments may strengthen employees' sense of belonging and commitment toward the organization. Employees who perceive organizational support through good workplace conditions often demonstrate higher levels of motivation and responsibility. Purnamasari (2021) stated that employees working in supportive organizational environments tend to demonstrate stronger motivation and

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organizational commitment. This indicates that the quality of the work environment can influence employees' willingness to contribute positively to organizational goals (Hai et al., 2025) .

Based on the explanations above, it can be synthesized that the work environment has an important role in influencing employee motivation. A supportive, comfortable, and harmonious workplace can improve employee morale, strengthen organizational commitment, and encourage employees to work more enthusiastically. Therefore, better work environments are expected to positively influence employee work motivation (Peter & Tambo, 2025).

Work Motivation and Operational Performance

Work motivation is considered one of the key factors influencing operational performance within organizations. Employees with strong motivation generally demonstrate higher levels of enthusiasm, responsibility, and persistence in completing their tasks. In manufacturing companies, motivated employees are more likely to maintain productivity, comply with organizational standards, and contribute actively to achieving operational targets. As a result, employee motivation becomes an important element in maintaining organizational effectiveness and operational continuity (Wang et al., 2025).

Highly motivated employees tend to perform their duties more seriously and consistently because they possess stronger internal drives to achieve both personal and organizational goals. Employees who feel motivated are generally more willing to improve their performance, overcome work challenges, and maintain work quality. Darmanah (2022) explained that employee motivation influences work enthusiasm, responsibility, and persistence in achieving organizational targets. This indicates that motivation encourages employees to work more effectively and maintain positive performance outcomes (Adesina et al., 2025).

Furthermore, employee motivation may contribute to higher productivity and operational stability. Employees who are motivated often show greater initiative, better cooperation, and stronger commitment toward organizational objectives. Nursiska et al. (2024) also found that highly motivated employees are more productive and capable of maintaining operational effectiveness. In manufacturing industries that require efficiency and consistency, motivated employees play an important role in supporting smooth operational activities and minimizing performance disruptions (Coelho-júnior & Marzetti, 2025).

Based on the explanations above, it can be synthesized that work motivation has a significant influence on operational performance. Employees with high motivation are more likely to demonstrate productive behavior, maintain work consistency, and achieve organizational targets effectively. Therefore, higher levels of work motivation are expected to improve operational performance within manufacturing organizations (Dehghannejad et al., 2025)

Mediating Role of Work Motivation

Work motivation may function as an important mediating variable in explaining the relationship between work discipline, work environment, and operational performance. In organizational contexts, employees who work within disciplined systems and supportive workplace environments are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward their work. These conditions may strengthen employees' willingness to perform their responsibilities effectively and maintain organizational commitment. As a result, work motivation can become an important mechanism through which organizational conditions influence employee performance outcomes (Journal & Arti, 2025).

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Employees who experience clear organizational rules, structured work systems, and supportive workplace conditions generally feel more encouraged to work productively. Strong discipline may help employees develop responsibility and consistency, while supportive work environments may increase comfort and morale. These factors can stimulate employee motivation, which subsequently affects how employees perform their operational responsibilities. In manufacturing industries, motivated employees are more capable of maintaining productivity, minimizing work errors, and supporting operational continuity (Leewis et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the mediating role of motivation becomes increasingly important in organizations facing operational pressures and industrial competition. Employees who are motivated tend to respond more positively to organizational demands and demonstrate stronger persistence in achieving performance targets. Therefore, work motivation may strengthen the indirect influence of work discipline and work environment on operational performance by encouraging employees to perform more effectively and consistently (Zhang et al., 2025).

Based on the explanations above, it can be synthesized that work motivation plays an important mediating role in the relationship between work discipline, work environment, and operational performance. Employees who work within disciplined systems and supportive environments are likely to develop stronger motivation, which subsequently contributes to improved operational performance. Therefore, work motivation is expected to strengthen the indirect relationship between work discipline, work environment, and operational performance within manufacturing organizations (Ganji et al., 2025).

METHODOLOGY

Types of research

This study employed a quantitative research approach with an explanatory research design. Quantitative research is used to examine the relationships among variables through statistical analysis and numerical data processing (Sugiyono, 2019). The explanatory approach aims to explain causal relationships between independent variables, mediating variables, and dependent variables in the research model.

This research specifically examines the effect of work discipline and work environment on operational performance through work motivation as a mediating variable in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies located in Serang Regency. The quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focuses on measuring the influence among variables objectively using structured questionnaires and statistical testing.

The research utilized a survey method by distributing questionnaires to employees working in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies, including PT Yasunaga Indonesia, PT Nippon Seiki Indonesia, and PT Mitsuba Indonesia. The collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4 software. SEM-PLS was selected because it is capable of simultaneously analyzing direct and indirect relationships among variables and is suitable for predictive and exploratory research models (Hair et al., 2019).

In addition, SEM-PLS can effectively analyze complex models involving mediating variables and relatively small sample sizes. Therefore, this method was considered suitable for examining the relationships between work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance in the context of manufacturing industries.

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Population and sample

The population in this study consisted of employees working at Japanese automotive manufacturing companies located in the Modern Industrial Area of Cikande, Serang Regency. The companies involved in this research include PT Yasunaga Indonesia, PT Nippon Seiki Indonesia, and PT Mitsuba Indonesia. These companies were selected because they represent Japanese automotive manufacturing industries that implement structured operational systems, strict work discipline, and productivity-oriented organizational cultures.

The study focused on employees directly involved in operational and production-related activities because operational performance is closely associated with employee discipline, workplace conditions, and motivation within manufacturing processes.

Sampling in this study was conducted using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling. Convenience sampling was chosen because the respondents were selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate in the study during the research period (Sugiyono, 2019). This technique is considered appropriate for organizational research where access to respondents is limited by company operational policies.

The total sample consisted of 88 employees from the selected Japanese automotive manufacturing companies. The sample size was considered adequate for analysis using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), as Hair et al. (2019) explained that SEM-PLS can be effectively applied to studies with relatively small sample sizes and complex research models involving mediating variables.

Therefore, the selected sample was expected to provide sufficient empirical data to examine the relationships between work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance in Japanese automotive manufacturing industries.

Data analysis techniques

The data collection technique used a questionnaire through a survey method distributed to employees working at Japanese automotive manufacturing companies located in the Modern Industrial Area of Cikande, Serang Regency. The data analysis technique used the SmartPLS application version 4.1.1.4. This study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) for data analysis. SEM-PLS is suitable for analyzing complex relationships between variables, including mediation effects, and does not require strict assumptions regarding normal data distribution (Hair et al., 2019).

To ensure that the research instrument has an adequate level of reliability and validity, construct validity testing was conducted using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value, while construct reliability testing was conducted using the Composite Reliability (CR) value. An instrument is considered valid if the AVE value exceeds 0.50, indicating that the indicators are capable of adequately explaining the latent variable. Meanwhile, construct reliability is achieved if the CR value exceeds 0.70, indicating strong and reliable internal consistency among indicators in measuring the construct (Hair et al., 2019). The results of the AVE and CR tests are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 AVE and CR test results

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Description
Work Discipline	0.721	0.912	Valid and Reliable
Work Environment	0.694	0.901	Valid and Reliable
Work Motivation	0.738	0.918	Valid and Reliable
Operational Performance	0.705	0.909	Valid and Reliable

Source: Data processed using SmartPLS 4.1.1.4 (2025)

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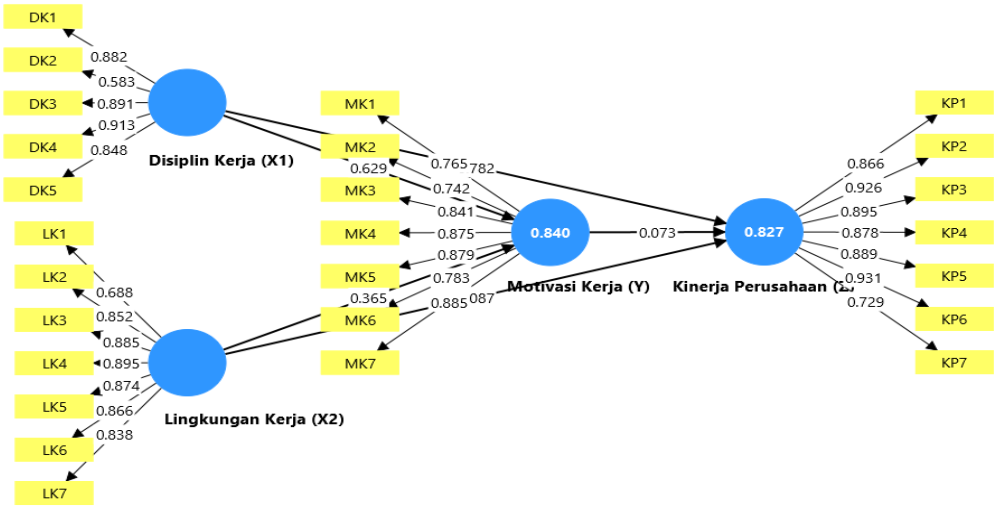
Based on Table 2, all variables have AVE values above 0.50 and Composite Reliability values above 0.70. Therefore, all constructs used in this study are considered valid and reliable for measuring the relationships between work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To ensure the relationship between the indicators and the constructs under study, an outer model analysis was conducted using the SEM-PLS approach. The outer model was used to evaluate the validity and reliability of the indicators that make up each latent variable. The data processing results produced an outer model diagram as shown in Figure 1 below.



Source: SEM PLS data processing results (2025)

Figure 1 Outer Model Analysis Results (PLS Algorithm)

After the research instrument was declared valid and reliable through outer model testing, the next step was to conduct hypothesis testing to examine the relationships between the variables proposed in the research model. The hypothesis testing was carried out by evaluating the path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values. A relationship is considered significant if the t-statistic is greater than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2019). The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 3

Table 3 Hypothesis Test Results

Variabel	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Work Discipline → Operational Performance	0.731	0.728	0.164	4,445	0,000
Work Environment → Operational Performance	0,201	0,208	0,132	1,519	0,129
Work Discipline → Work Motivation	0.682	0.675	0.227	3.005	0,003
Work Environment → Work Motivation	0.270	0.281	0.200	1.350	0,177
Work Motivation → Operational Performance	0.241	0.247	0.159	1.520	0,129
Work Discipline → Work Motivation → Operational Performance	0.164	0.171	0.115	1.426	0.154
Work Environment → Work	0.065	0.071	0.058	1.121	0.263

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Motivation	→	Operational Performance

Source: SEM PLS data processing results (2025)

Based on Table 3, the results of hypothesis testing indicate that work discipline has a positive and significant effect on operational performance, with a path coefficient value of 0.731, t-statistics of 4.445, and p-value of 0.000. This finding indicates that higher levels of employee discipline contribute significantly to improving operational performance in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies.

The results also show that work environment has a positive but insignificant effect on operational performance, with a path coefficient value of 0.201, t-statistics of 1.519, and p-value of 0.129. This indicates that workplace conditions and environmental factors do not directly contribute significantly to operational performance improvement.

Furthermore, work discipline has a positive and significant effect on work motivation, with a path coefficient value of 0.682, t-statistics of 3.005, and p-value of 0.003. This finding suggests that employees working within disciplined organizational systems tend to demonstrate stronger work motivation and organizational commitment.

Meanwhile, work environment has a positive but insignificant effect on work motivation, with a path coefficient value of 0.270, t-statistics of 1.350, and p-value of 0.177. This result indicates that supportive workplace conditions alone are insufficient to significantly increase employee motivation.

The results further indicate that work motivation has a positive but insignificant effect on operational performance, with a path coefficient value of 0.241, t-statistics of 1.520, and p-value of 0.129. This finding suggests that employee motivation does not directly contribute significantly to operational performance in the manufacturing context.

The mediation analysis also reveals that work motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between work discipline and operational performance, with a path coefficient value of 0.164, t-statistics of 1.426, and p-value of 0.154. Similarly, work motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between work environment and operational performance, with a path coefficient value of 0.065, t-statistics of 1.121, and p-value of 0.263.

Overall, these findings indicate that work discipline is the strongest factor influencing operational performance directly, while work environment and work motivation do not show significant direct or indirect effects on operational performance in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies.

Effect of Work Discipline on Operational Performance (Hypothesis 1)

The results show that work discipline has a positive and significant effect on operational performance ($\beta = 0.731$; $t = 4.445$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher levels of employee discipline contribute to improved operational performance. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

This finding is consistent with the respondent profile, where most respondents are employees working in operational and production divisions with working periods between 5–10 years. Employees with longer experience in manufacturing industries generally have better understanding of operational procedures, production standards, and organizational discipline systems. In Japanese automotive manufacturing companies, operational activities are highly dependent on punctuality, compliance with procedures, and consistency in maintaining productivity and quality standards.

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The findings indicate that disciplined employees tend to complete tasks more effectively, comply with organizational regulations, and minimize operational errors. In addition, Japanese manufacturing systems emphasize strict discipline, continuous improvement, and standardized operational processes, making work discipline a critical factor influencing operational performance.

These findings are supported by previous studies. Sagala et al. (2023) found that work discipline significantly improves employee productivity and organizational performance because disciplined employees are more responsible and efficient in carrying out work activities. Similarly, Kristanto et al. (2024) reported that employees with high levels of discipline demonstrate better work consistency and stronger commitment toward organizational goals.

Effect of Work Environment on Operational Performance (Hypothesis 2)

The results show that work environment has a positive but insignificant effect on operational performance ($\beta = 0.201$; $t = 1.519$; $p > 0.05$), indicating that improvements in the work environment do not significantly increase operational performance. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

This finding suggests that operational performance in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies is more strongly influenced by work discipline and operational systems than by workplace environmental conditions alone. Although employees work in relatively supportive environments with structured facilities and safety systems, these conditions may already be considered standard operational requirements and therefore do not directly contribute to performance improvement.

The respondent profile also indicates that most employees work in operational and production divisions where performance is highly determined by production targets, discipline, and compliance with standard operating procedures. As a result, workplace comfort and environmental conditions may not become the primary determinants of operational outcomes.

In addition, Japanese manufacturing industries are widely recognized for implementing standardized workplace management systems, including safety procedures, cleanliness, and operational efficiency. Because these systems are already consistently maintained, variations in employee perceptions regarding work environment may not significantly affect operational performance.

These findings are consistent with previous studies. Cabarcos et al. (2021) found that work environment does not always significantly influence employee performance, particularly in organizations with highly structured operational systems. Similarly, several studies reported that operational discipline and management systems often play more dominant roles than environmental factors in determining employee productivity and operational effectiveness.

Effect of Work Discipline on Work Motivation (Hypothesis 3)

The results show that work discipline has a positive and significant effect on work motivation ($\beta = 0.682$; $t = 3.005$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher levels of employee discipline contribute to stronger work motivation. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

This finding indicates that employees who comply with organizational rules, maintain punctuality, and follow operational procedures tend to demonstrate stronger commitment and enthusiasm toward their work. In Japanese automotive manufacturing companies, discipline is closely associated with organizational culture, responsibility, and productivity-oriented work systems. Employees who are accustomed to disciplined work environments are more likely to develop positive work attitudes and higher motivation levels.

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The respondent characteristics also support this finding, where most employees have working experience ranging from 5–10 years. Employees with longer experience in manufacturing operations generally adapt better to organizational systems and are more motivated to maintain productivity and work performance.

In addition, Japanese manufacturing companies emphasize continuous improvement, teamwork, and operational consistency, which may encourage employees to maintain discipline as part of their professional responsibility. This condition strengthens employee motivation to achieve organizational targets and maintain operational effectiveness.

These findings are supported by previous studies. Kristanto et al. (2024) found that work discipline positively influences employee motivation because disciplined employees tend to have stronger organizational commitment and better work responsibility. Similarly, Sagala et al. (2023) reported that disciplined work cultures contribute positively to employee morale, productivity, and work motivation.

Effect of Work Environment on Work Motivation (Hypothesis 4)

The results show that work environment has a positive but insignificant effect on work motivation ($\beta = 0.270$; $t = 1.350$; $p > 0.05$), indicating that improvements in the work environment do not significantly increase employee motivation. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

This finding suggests that although employees perceive the workplace environment positively, these conditions are not sufficient to significantly enhance work motivation in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies. Employees working in manufacturing industries may place greater emphasis on operational discipline, production targets, compensation systems, and job security rather than environmental factors alone.

The respondent profile indicates that most employees work in operational and production divisions where work activities are highly structured and target-oriented. As a result, employee motivation may be more strongly influenced by organizational systems and performance expectations than by workplace comfort or physical facilities.

In addition, Japanese manufacturing companies generally implement standardized workplace management systems, including safety procedures, cleanliness, and organized operational environments. Since these conditions are already maintained consistently, employees may perceive them as normal operational standards rather than motivational factors that directly influence their work enthusiasm.

These findings are partially inconsistent with previous studies. Arianto and Ahmad (2023) explained that supportive work environments can improve employee morale and motivation. However, the findings of this study indicate that in manufacturing industries with highly structured operational systems, work environment alone may not significantly determine employee motivation. Other factors such as compensation, organizational culture, leadership, and career opportunities may have stronger influences on employee motivation levels.

Effect of Work Motivation on Operational Performance (Hypothesis 5)

The results show that work motivation has a positive but insignificant effect on operational performance ($\beta = 0.241$; $t = 1.520$; $p > 0.05$), indicating that higher employee motivation does not significantly improve operational performance. Thus, Hypothesis 5 is not supported.

This finding suggests that operational performance in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies is more strongly influenced by structured operational systems, discipline, and production standards than by employee motivation alone. Although motivated

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employees tend to demonstrate positive work attitudes, motivation may not directly translate into improved operational outcomes within highly standardized manufacturing environments.

The respondent characteristics indicate that most employees work in production and operational divisions where job performance is closely monitored through operational targets, work procedures, and productivity standards. In such conditions, employees are required to maintain performance consistency regardless of their motivational levels because operational activities are system-driven and highly regulated.

In addition, Japanese automotive manufacturing companies are known for implementing strict operational procedures, quality control systems, and efficiency-oriented production management. These organizational systems may reduce the direct influence of personal motivation on operational performance because employees must follow predetermined work standards and procedures.

These findings differ from several previous studies. Darmanah (2022) explained that employee motivation positively influences productivity and work performance because motivated employees tend to demonstrate stronger commitment and responsibility. Similarly, Nursiska et al. (2024) found that motivated employees generally achieve higher productivity levels. However, the findings of this study indicate that in highly structured manufacturing industries, operational performance may depend more on organizational systems and discipline than on motivational factors alone.

Effect of Work Discipline on Operational Performance Through Work Motivation (Hypothesis 6)

The results show that work discipline has a positive but insignificant indirect effect on operational performance through work motivation ($\beta = 0.164$; $t = 1.426$; $p > 0.05$). This indicates that work motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between work discipline and operational performance. Thus, Hypothesis 6 is not supported.

This finding suggests that work discipline directly influences operational performance without requiring mediation through work motivation. Employees in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies are expected to comply with operational procedures, production standards, and organizational regulations regardless of their motivational conditions. Therefore, discipline itself becomes the primary factor affecting operational performance.

The respondent profile indicates that most employees have considerable experience in operational and production activities, enabling them to adapt to structured work systems and standardized operational procedures. As a result, disciplined work behavior may already be embedded in the organizational culture and directly contribute to operational effectiveness.

In addition, Japanese manufacturing industries are widely recognized for implementing strict operational systems emphasizing punctuality, consistency, quality control, and continuous improvement. Under such systems, employees are required to maintain productivity and performance standards even when motivational levels vary. Consequently, work motivation does not play a significant mediating role in strengthening the relationship between work discipline and operational performance.

These findings indicate that operational performance in manufacturing industries depends more on compliance with organizational systems and operational procedures than on motivational mechanisms. Therefore, strengthening work discipline remains a more effective strategy for improving operational performance than relying primarily on employee motivation programs.

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The findings are partially inconsistent with previous studies suggesting that employee motivation can mediate the relationship between organizational factors and performance outcomes. However, this study demonstrates that in highly structured manufacturing environments, work discipline directly contributes to operational performance without significant mediation effects from work motivation.

Effect of Work Environment on Operational Performance Through Work Motivation (Hypothesis 7)

The results show that work environment has a positive but insignificant indirect effect on operational performance through work motivation ($\beta = 0.065$; $t = 1.121$; $p > 0.05$). This indicates that work motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between work environment and operational performance. Thus, Hypothesis 7 is not supported.

This finding suggests that workplace environmental conditions do not indirectly improve operational performance through employee motivation in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies. Although supportive workplace conditions may contribute to employee comfort and organizational stability, these factors are not sufficient to significantly improve operational outcomes through motivational mechanisms.

The respondent characteristics indicate that most employees work in operational and production divisions where performance is highly determined by operational procedures, productivity targets, and compliance with organizational standards. Therefore, operational performance may depend more on technical systems and production discipline than on employees' motivational responses toward workplace conditions.

In addition, Japanese automotive manufacturing companies generally implement standardized workplace systems related to safety, cleanliness, operational efficiency, and production management. Because these workplace conditions are already maintained consistently, employees may perceive them as standard organizational requirements rather than motivational factors influencing performance.

The findings also indicate that employee motivation does not play a significant role in strengthening the relationship between work environment and operational performance. This condition may occur because operational performance in manufacturing industries is largely system-driven and controlled through standardized production processes.

These findings are partially inconsistent with previous studies suggesting that supportive work environments can improve employee motivation and performance. However, this study demonstrates that within highly structured Japanese manufacturing systems, workplace environmental factors alone are insufficient to indirectly improve operational performance through work motivation.

Therefore, organizations should not rely solely on workplace environmental improvements to enhance operational performance. Instead, companies should strengthen operational discipline, production systems, employee competencies, and organizational effectiveness to achieve sustainable performance improvements.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the study concludes that work discipline is the strongest factor influencing operational performance in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies. Employees who comply with organizational rules, maintain punctuality, and follow operational procedures tend to demonstrate better operational performance and stronger work motivation. Meanwhile, work environment and work motivation were found to have positive but insignificant effects on

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operational performance, indicating that operational effectiveness in highly structured manufacturing systems is more strongly influenced by discipline and organizational systems than by motivational factors alone. The study also found that work motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between work discipline, work environment, and operational performance. Therefore, companies should prioritize strengthening disciplinary systems, operational procedures, employee compliance, and production management to improve productivity and operational effectiveness. Theoretically, this study contributes to human resource management literature through the use of an integrated SEM-PLS model, while practically providing useful insights for manufacturing companies in developing effective human resource management strategies.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the development of human resource management literature by explaining the relationships between work discipline, work environment, work motivation, and operational performance within manufacturing industries. The findings indicate that work discipline is a dominant factor influencing operational performance, emphasizing the importance of employee compliance, organizational discipline, and operational standards in highly structured industrial environments. In addition, this study found that work motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between work discipline, work environment, and operational performance, suggesting that operational effectiveness in Japanese automotive manufacturing companies is more strongly influenced by organizational systems and discipline-oriented work cultures than by motivational factors alone. Furthermore, by applying the SEM-PLS approach to analyze both direct and indirect relationships simultaneously, this study provides additional insight into employee behavior and operational effectiveness within manufacturing organizations characterized by standardized production systems and strong workplace discipline.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study suggest that Japanese automotive manufacturing companies should prioritize strengthening work discipline systems to improve operational performance. Companies need to maintain strict operational procedures, punctuality standards, employee compliance, and consistent supervision to support productivity and operational effectiveness. Although work environment and work motivation were found to have insignificant effects on operational performance, organizations should still maintain supportive workplace conditions and harmonious relationships to ensure employee comfort and organizational stability. In addition, manufacturing companies are encouraged to focus more on improving operational systems, production efficiency, and employee competencies because operational effectiveness in highly structured industries tends to depend more on systematic management practices and discipline-oriented organizational cultures.

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