

The Effect Of Work Discipline And Employee Competence On Civil Servant Performance With Employee Motivation As An Intervening Variable At The Regional Secretariat Of Cilegon City

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Abstract

This study addresses the declining performance of Civil Servants at the Regional Secretariat of Cilegon City, which is associated with low work motivation, inadequate discipline, and insufficient employee competence. These issues are reflected in the failure to achieve performance targets optimally, limited employee initiative, and recurring disciplinary violations. The study aims to examine the influence of work discipline and employee competence on employee performance, with work motivation acting as an intervening variable. A quantitative survey approach was employed involving 107 Civil Servants as respondents. Data were collected through questionnaires and analysed using Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that both work discipline and employee competence have a positive and significant effect on employee performance. In addition, work motivation strengthens the relationship between employee competence and performance, although it does not fully mediate the effect of work discipline on performance. These results emphasize the important role of motivation in improving employee performance through enhanced competence. Therefore, the Cilegon City Government is encouraged to strengthen discipline enforcement, expand competency development programs, and implement sustainable motivational strategies. Such efforts are expected to create a workforce that is disciplined, competent, and motivated, ultimately supporting the achievement of organizational goals and improving public service performance.

Keywords: Civil Servant Performance, Employee Competence, Regional Secretariat of Cilegon City, Work Discipline, Work Motivation

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INTRODUCTION

The performance of civil servants (PNS) is the main foundation for realizing responsive and effective public administration, and is a crucial indicator for the success of a quality government management system (good governance). In the context of a modern state, PNS not only function as policy implementers, but also play a role as agents of change and the main drivers of development (Noorbehbahani & Oyibo, 2026). The quality of PNS performance intrinsically influences the government's capacity to formulate and implement public policy, provide essential services to the public, and manage state resources efficiently and accountably. Therefore, optimizing PNS performance is not merely an internal

organizational goal, but an absolute prerequisite for achieving public welfare and national stability (Maulana et al., 2025).

Since the reform era, Indonesia has consistently committed to a bureaucratic reform agenda, one of the main pillars of which is improving the professionalism and integrity of the state civil service. Various regulatory frameworks have been enacted, including Law No. 5 of 2014 concerning the State Civil Apparatus, which aims to create a bureaucracy with integrity, competence, neutrality, and a focus on public service. However, despite these systematic efforts, the challenge of achieving optimal civil service performance remains a persistent and complex issue. Problems such as low productivity, resistance to innovation, irregularities (e.g., extortion or small-scale corruption), and the quality of public services that have not met expectations often come under the scrutiny of the public and the mass media. (Purwanto and Sugiyanto: 2020) in their study underscore that the gap between public expectations for excellent public services and the reality of civil service performance in various agencies remains frequent, indicating that improvements to performance management systems and organizational culture are a continuous necessity. Furthermore, this phenomenon can reduce public trust in government institutions, ultimately hampering the development process (Pandey et al., 2025).

In this digital era, the adoption and utilization of information technology are becoming increasingly crucial. (Kusumawardhani and Arifudin: 2023) highlight that the implementation of an integrated and effective information technology system in the bureaucracy can substantially improve operational efficiency, accountability, and transparency, which in turn contributes to improving the quality of public services and the overall performance of civil servants, particularly in optimizing digital-based services. However, the digital divide and the capacity to adapt to technology among civil servants also require attention (Retno et al., 2026).

Although there is a lot of literature and studies that examine the variables that influence the performance of civil servants in depth and comprehensively regarding the interaction and dominance of key variables in the specific context of Indonesian bureaucracy, especially at the local government level such as in Cilegon, Banten, it still requires further exploration (Zhang et al., 2026). Each region has unique characteristics in policy implementation, organizational structure, local work culture, and demographic characteristics of civil servants that can produce different performance dynamics. (Anggraeni and Putra: 2019) suggest that contextual and demographic factors of civil servants in a region can cause significant variations in performance drivers, so that the results of studies from one region cannot necessarily be generalized to other regions. This makes contextual research in Serang, Banten, relevant and important to provide deeper insights regarding the empirically most dominant elements influencing the performance of civil servants in the region (Zhu et al., 2025).

The performance of civil servants (PNS) is a fundamental aspect in ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of regional government administration. Achieving optimal performance depends on various factors, including motivation and work discipline.

Motivation is the primary driving force behind employees' dedication in carrying out their duties, while work discipline reflects adherence to established organizational regulations and procedures (Keating et al., 2025).

Previous research indicates that motivation and work discipline have a positive impact on civil servant performance. Suparno (2019), in his research at the Subulussalam City Regional Secretariat, found that motivation and work discipline significantly impact civil servant performance. Similarly, research by Haryono et al. (2024) at the Tangerang City Population and Civil Registration Office indicates that motivation and work discipline positively impact employee performance (Maria, 2026).

As a regional government institution with strategic responsibilities in policy formulation and implementation, the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat must ensure that its employees perform optimally. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of work discipline and employee competence on civil servant performance, with employee motivation as an intermediary variable, at the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat and to provide recommendations that can improve the organization's effectiveness.

Based on the urgency of the problem and the identified research gaps, this research will focus on a comprehensive analysis of civil servant performance by considering several key variables that have been theoretically and empirically proven to have a significant influence, in line with the findings and recommendations from the current literature. These variables will be carefully selected based on their relevance to the local government context and their potential impact on civil servant performance (Rai & Koodamara, 2025). Thus, it is hoped that the results of this research will not only strengthen the literature in the field of public sector human resource management and public administration, but also can provide applicable and pragmatic policy recommendations for the local government in Serang, Banten. These recommendations are expected to serve as strategic guidelines in formulating programs to improve civil servant performance that are more targeted, effective, and sustainable, in order to realize responsive, accountable governance that is able to provide superior quality public services to the people of Cilegon, Banten.

Based on the context above, the formulation of the problem in this research is as follows: 1) Does Civil Servant Competence have a significant positive impact on the performance of Civil Servants at the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat?, 2) Does work discipline have a significant positive impact on the performance of civil servants at the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat? 3) To what extent do employees' work abilities have a meaningful positive impact on their motivational drive?, 4) To what extent does employee discipline have a meaningful positive impact on their work motivation? 5) To what extent does employee motivation drive have a meaningful positive impact on the work performance of state civil servants? 6) To what extent does employee motivational encouragement act as an intermediary in providing a meaningful positive impact on employee work ability on the performance of state civil servants? 7) Does Employee Motivation mediate a significant positive effect of work discipline on civil servant performance?

THEORITICAL REVIEW

The Relationship between Work Discipline and Employee Motivation

Work discipline, which includes adherence to regulations and scheduling, influences employee motivation. Employees' consistency in following regulations and maintaining accurate timekeeping can create an orderly and predictable work atmosphere (Rantschl et al., 2025). This systematic environment has the potential to minimize psychological stress and uncertainty, thereby optimizing employee internal motivation through a sense of control and capability in carrying out their duties. Furthermore, adherence to work procedures and ethics often receives appreciation from both leaders and colleagues, which acts as an external motivational stimulus. Employees who demonstrate high discipline generally have a greater sense of responsibility and dedication to the organization, which is a significant indicator of motivation. Therefore, an optimal level of work discipline is projected to positively contribute to increased employee motivation (Haag et al., 2025).

The Relationship between Employee Competence and Employee Motivation

Employee competence, which includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes, is closely related to motivation. When employees possess adequate knowledge and relevant skills for their tasks, they tend to feel more confident and capable of completing their work. This confidence can enhance intrinsic motivation, particularly achievement motivation, as employees feel competent to face challenges and achieve optimal results.¹ Furthermore, developing competence through training and experience can open up career opportunities and rewards, which are sources of extrinsic motivation. Competent employees are also more likely to perceive their work as meaningful and having a positive impact, an important dimension of meaningfulness. Therefore, improving employee competence is expected to enhance their motivation (Orkamo et al., 2025).

The Relationship between Work Discipline and Employee Performance

Work discipline directly impacts employee performance. Disciplined employees demonstrate adherence to rules and procedures, as well as punctuality in completing tasks (Zehnle et al., 2025). These behaviours fundamentally support work efficiency and effectiveness. Adherence to work schedules ensures that tasks are completed on time, avoiding delays that could hinder other work processes. Consistency in carrying out responsibilities and adhering to ethical standards also contributes to the quality and accuracy of work results. Therefore, strong work discipline will result in better quantity and quality of work, as well as increased overall productivity (Thilagavathy, 2025).

The Relationship between Employee Competence and Employee Performance

Employee competence is an essential prerequisite for optimal performance. In-depth knowledge enables employees to correctly understand tasks and procedures, reduce errors, and improve the quality of work output.¹ Relevant skills, both technical and interpersonal, enable employees to carry out tasks efficiently, solve problems, and adapt to change (Jong-

kroon et al., 2025). Professional attitudes and behaviours, such as initiative, responsibility, and cooperation, also directly influence how employees interact and contribute within a team, which ultimately impacts individual and organizational performance.¹ Therefore, employees with high competence are expected to achieve better work results, both in terms of quality and quantity (Wang et al., 2025).

The Relationship between Employee Motivation and Employee Performance

Employee motivation has a direct and significant relationship to performance. Motivation is the driving force that triggers, directs, and sustains work behaviour to achieve optimal results (Bhatta et al., 2024). Motivated employees tend to exhibit high work ethic, a strong commitment to organizational goals, and a desire to excel. They are more proactive in taking initiatives, more persistent in facing challenges, and more consistent in maintaining work quality. The internal drive to achieve and the expectation of rewards, both financial and non-financial, will encourage employees to exert maximum effort, which will ultimately be reflected in their improved performance (Pozo-rico et al., 2024).

The Role of Employee Motivation as an Intervening Variable

In this study, employee motivation is hypothesized as an intervening variable mediating the relationship between work discipline and employee competence on civil servant performance. This means that work discipline and employee competence not only directly influence performance but also through increased employee motivation. When employees have high work discipline, they tend to create a structured and predictable work environment, which in turn can increase their sense of control and self-efficacy, thus triggering motivation (Shetty et al., 2026). Similarly, high competence provides a sense of confidence and ability to complete tasks, which directly increases intrinsic motivation and expectations of success. This increased motivation will then encourage employees to exert greater effort, exhibit more productive work behaviors, and ultimately achieve higher performance. Thus, motivation acts as a psychological mechanism that explains how discipline and competence translate into better performance (Olafsen & Carpini, 2026).

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a quantitative methodology with a survey approach (Sun & Zhao, 2025). The primary reason for selecting this method was to analyze the impact of work discipline and employee capacity on civil servant performance, with work motivation as an intermediary variable at the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat.

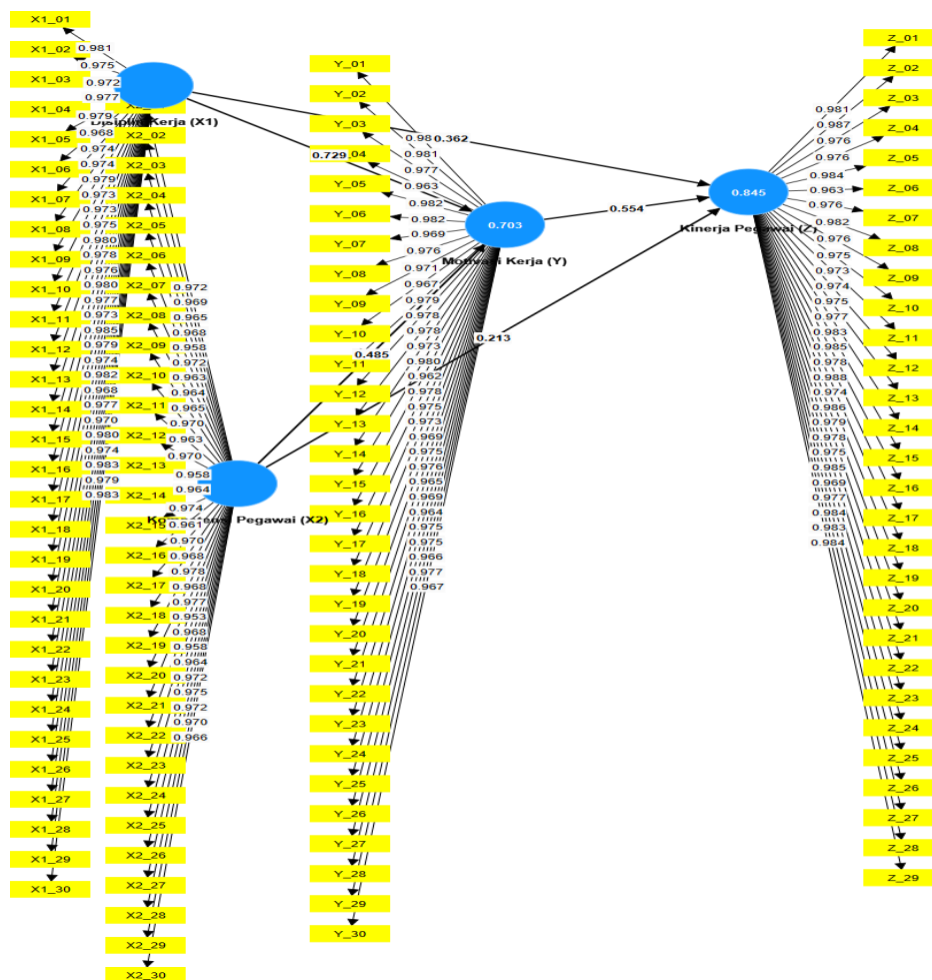
This research was conducted at the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat, located at Jalan Jenderal Sudirman No. 1, Cilegon City, Banten Province, Postal Code 42418 for 5 (five) months with a structured time span, starting from April to August 2025. In this study, the population consisted of all employees working in the Cilegon City Regional Government agency, namely the Regional Secretariat, totaling 145 people with a sample size of 107.

The data collection technique in this study used a survey technique through a questionnaire and was supplemented by a documentation study. At this stage, two tests were carried out,

namely descriptive tests and statistical tests. The information analysis process was carried out gradually by utilizing two primary statistical applications, namely SPSS 25.0 for instrument testing and SmartPLS for structural model analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of measurement models or outer models become a fundamental step in the assessment process *Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling* (PLS-SEM). The main function of this measurement model is to examine the ability of research indicators to reflect the latent constructs being studied, Figure 1 shows a visual representation of the measurement model that describes the relationships between latent constructs.



Through the presentation of test results *data loading factor*, it can be seen that all the variable indicators in this research show a value *outer loading* which exceeds 0.7. On the other hand, not a single research variable indicator was found that showed a value *outer loading* below 0.7. Thus, it can be concluded that all indicators in this research variable meet the data validity criteria and are therefore suitable for use in this research and can be continued to the next stage of analysis.

Next, in this study, we compare the relationships between constructs, and the explanation is in table 1 below:

Table 1 Comparison of AVE with

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$
Work discipline	0,954	0.977
Employee competency	0,936	0.967
Employee Performance	0,958	0.979
Work motivation	0,948	0.974

sources: SmartPLS (2025)

Based on table 2 all constructs in this research have met the requirements for convergent and discriminant validity. This condition indicates that the instruments used in this study are adequate and reliable for measuring the variables studied.

Next, Composite Reliability which is a measurement test used to assess internal consistency of a series of indicators in measuring a latent construct in the research model. This will be explained in Table 2.

Table 2 Composite reliability test

Variable	Composite Reliability	Information
Work discipline (X1)	0,998	Reliabel
Employee performance (Z)	0,998	Reliabel
Employee competency (X2)	0,998	Reliabel
Work motivation (Y)	0,998	Reliabel

sources: SmartPLS (2025)

Based on Table 2 All variables in this study exhibited optimal composite reliability values, exceeding 0.9. The composite reliability value for the Work Discipline variable reached 0.998, followed by Employee Performance with a value of 0.998, Employee Competence with a value of 0.998, and Work Motivation with a value of 0.998. These figures significantly exceed the minimum standard of 0.7 recommended by Hair et al. (2022), therefore, it can be stated that all constructs in this study have very high internal consistency.

Next Testing inner model become a fundamental phase in the analysis process Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) which is designed to explore the strength and degree of significance of the causal relationship between latent variables contained in the structural model. Inner model or what is known as a structural model explains the pattern of cause-effect relationships that have been constructed based on theoretical foundations and research hypothesis propositions. This will be explained in Table 3 hypothesis test (direct effect)

Table 3 Hypothesis test (Direct effect)

No	Relationship between variables	Path coefficient	t-statistik	p-value	information
1	Work discipline → employee performance	0,362	5,137	0,000	Signifikan
2	Work discipline → work motivation	0,731	14,800	0,000	Signifikan
3	Employee competency → employee performance	0,213	4,099	0,000	Signifikan
4	Employee competency → work motivation	0,484	8,123	0,000	Signifikan
5	Work motivation → employee performance	0,555	7,977	0,000	Signifikan

Source: *Output* from SmartPLS (2025)

Based on table 4.18, the results of the hypothesis testing can be described as follows:

The first hypothesis tests whether Work Discipline has a significant effect on improving Employee Performance. The test results show that the path coefficient value (table 4.17) of Work Discipline on Employee Performance is 0.362 and the t-statistic is 5.137. From these results, a significant t-statistic is obtained, namely $5.137 > 1.96$ with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, thus proving that Work Discipline has a significant positive effect on Employee Performance.

The second hypothesis tests whether Work Discipline has a significant effect on increasing Work Motivation. The test results show that the path coefficient value (table 4.17) of Work Discipline on Work Motivation is 0.731 and the t-statistic is 14.800. From these results, a significant t-statistic is obtained, namely $14.800 > 1.96$ with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, thus proving that Work Discipline has a significant positive effect on Work Motivation.

The third hypothesis tests whether Employee Competence has a significant effect on improving Employee Performance. The test results show that the path coefficient value (table 4.17) of Employee Competence on Employee Performance is 0.213 and the t-statistic is 4.099. From these results, a significant t-statistic is obtained, namely $4.099 > 1.96$ with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, thus proving that Employee Competence has a significant positive effect on Employee Performance.

The fourth hypothesis tests whether Employee Competence has a significant effect on increasing Work Motivation. The test results show that the path coefficient value (table 4.17) of Employee Competence on Work Motivation is 0.484 and the t-statistic is 8.123. From these results, a significant t-statistic is obtained, namely $8.123 > 1.96$ with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, thus proving that Employee Competence has a significant positive effect on Work Motivation.

The fifth hypothesis tests whether Work Motivation has a significant effect on improving Employee Performance. The test results show that the path coefficient value (table 4.17) of Work Motivation on Employee Performance is 0.555 and the t-statistic is 7.977. From these results, a significant t-statistic is obtained, namely $7.977 > 1.96$ with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, thus proving that Work Motivation has a significant positive effect on Employee Performance.

Next, hypothesis test (indirect effect), The sixth hypothesis tests whether there is an indirect effect of Work Discipline on Employee Performance through Work Motivation as a mediating variable. The test results show that the original sample value is 0.406 and the t-statistic is 7.412. From these results, it can be concluded that the t-statistic is significant, namely $7.412 > 1.96$ with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, so the sixth hypothesis can be accepted. This means that Work Discipline is proven to have a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance through Work Motivation as a mediating variable.

The seventh hypothesis tests whether there is an indirect effect of Employee Competence on Employee Performance through Work Motivation as a mediating variable. The test results show that the original sample value is 0.269 and the t-statistic is 5.824. From these results, it can be concluded that the t-statistic is significant, namely $5.824 > 1.96$ with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, so the seventh hypothesis can be accepted. This means that Employee Competence is proven to have a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance through Work Motivation as a mediating variable.

Referring to the data analysis output through the application of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) supported by the SmartPLS application version 3.29, this study successfully identified significant findings related to the relationships between the studied variables. The discussion of the research results will be outlined based on the verification of the implemented hypotheses.

Direct Influence

The results of the direct influence hypothesis test show that all variables have a positive and significant influence on the dependent variable. Work Discipline has a significant influence on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.362$; $t = 5.137$; $p < 0.05$) and Work Motivation ($\beta = 0.731$; $t = 14.800$; $p < 0.05$). Employee Competence also has a significant influence on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.213$; $t = 4.099$; $p < 0.05$) and Work Motivation ($\beta = 0.484$; $t = 8.123$; $p < 0.05$). Meanwhile, Work Motivation has a significant influence on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.555$; $t = 7.977$; $p < 0.05$).

An interesting finding is that Work Discipline has the strongest influence on Work Motivation ($\beta = 0.731$), indicating that the discipline aspect is more dominant in generating motivation than competence. This is in line with the goal setting theory which states that the structure and habits of discipline create a strong foundation for motivation. In contrast, the influence of Employee Competence on Employee Performance is relatively small ($\beta = 0.213$), indicating that competence needs to be activated through other factors to produce optimal performance. Work Motivation is proven to be the main driver of performance ($\beta = 0.555$), confirming the motivation theory that emphasizes the importance of internal drive in achieving work performance.

Indirect Influence

Indirect hypothesis testing proves the crucial role of Work Motivation as a mediator variable. Work Discipline has an indirect effect on Employee Performance through Work Motivation ($\beta = 0.406$; $t = 7.412$; $p < 0.05$), and Employee Competence also has an indirect effect on Employee Performance through Work Motivation ($\beta = 0.269$; $t = 5.824$; $p < 0.05$).

Both indirect paths are significant, indicating that motivation acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between work discipline and competence on performance.

This mediation finding has important theoretical implications, confirming that the relationship between individual factors (discipline and competence) and performance is not always direct, but rather through a psychological mechanism in the form of motivation. Work Discipline has a stronger indirect effect ($\beta = 0.406$) than Employee Competence ($\beta = 0.269$), indicating that the discipline \rightarrow motivation \rightarrow performance pathway is more effective than the competence \rightarrow motivation \rightarrow performance pathway. This indicates that in an organizational context, developing a culture of discipline can be a more effective strategy for improving employee performance than simply focusing on improving competence without considering motivational aspects.

CONCLUSION

Referring to the findings of data analysis through the application of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) methodology, it can be concluded that all the hypotheses proposed in this study have empirical support. 1) Employee competency refers to the abilities, knowledge, skills, and attitudes an employee possesses in carrying out their duties. The impact of competency on civil servant performance can be explained by the fact that employees with high competency tend to be more capable of completing tasks effectively, efficiently, and with high quality, thus positively impacting civil servant performance at the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat. 2) Work discipline encompasses employee compliance with regulations, procedures, and work schedules. Strong discipline enables employees to work more consistently and punctually. Therefore, good work discipline significantly impacts the performance of civil servants within the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat. 3) Employee competencies can boost self-confidence and motivation at work. Employees who feel capable of performing their duties effectively tend to be more motivated to achieve performance targets, so employee competency directly impacts their work motivation. 4) Good work discipline can create an orderly and organized work environment, which in turn increases employee motivation. Disciplined employees typically have a strong sense of responsibility, thus being motivated to perform better to achieve organizational goals. 5) Work motivation plays a crucial role in determining employee performance levels. Motivated employees tend to be more enthusiastic, creative, and productive in carrying out their duties. Thus, employee motivation has a significant influence on improving the performance of civil servants at the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat. 6) Work motivation can be a mediating variable between civil servant competence and performance. This means that employee competence not only directly impacts performance but also increases work motivation, which in turn strengthens employee performance. 7) In addition to competence, work discipline can also influence performance through employee motivation. Strong discipline can increase work motivation, which in turn positively impacts employee performance. Thus, work motivation acts as a link between work discipline and civil servant performance.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its results. First, the scope of the study was limited to Civil Servants (ASN) within the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat, so the results cannot be directly generalized to other local government agencies that may have different characteristics, organizational cultures, and workloads.

Second, the data collection method entirely utilized a Likert-scale-based questionnaire that was self-reported, thus creating the potential for perception bias and social desirability bias that could influence the objectivity of respondents' responses. Third, the research design employed a cross-sectional approach, or data collection within a specific time period, which resulted in limitations in identifying the dynamics of the longitudinal evolution of relationships between variables and reduced the capacity to comprehensively explain causal relationships.

Fourth, the research model only focuses on three main variables: Work Discipline, Employee Competence, and Work Motivation, while other factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, financial reward systems, and the physical work environment also have the potential to influence employee performance. Finally, because the respondents are active employees at the institutions studied, there is a possibility that they provide answers that tend to be positive to maintain their personal and institutional image, which ultimately can affect the purity of the research data.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study reinforce theories of work motivation and organizational behavior, which suggest that internal factors such as discipline and competence play a crucial role in shaping effective work behavior. The finding that work motivation acts as a partial mediator contributes to the development of a conceptual model of the relationship between individual factors and employee performance in the context of local government bureaucracy.

Practical Implications

For the Cilegon City Government, the results of this study provide input that improving work discipline through strengthening regulations, fostering punctual behavior, and adherence to procedures can improve employee motivation and performance. Furthermore, improving employee competency through training, continuing education, and challenging assignments also has the potential to improve performance, especially when accompanied by a motivating non-financial reward system. Therefore, human resource management policies within the local government environment need to integrate discipline development, competency development, and strengthening work motivation as complementary strategies.

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