

The Influence of Organizational Culture and Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance: Work Motivation as an Intervening Variable in Higher Education Staff

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of organizational culture and transformational leadership on employee performance, with work motivation functioning as an intervening variable among higher education administrative staff. Using a quantitative approach with the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling technique, the analysis includes descriptive statistics, tests of convergent and discriminant validity, evaluation of composite reliability, and assessment of the structural model. All indicators meet the validity and reliability requirements, with loading values exceeding the threshold and composite reliability demonstrating strong consistency. The results indicate that organizational culture has a significant positive effect on employee performance, and transformational leadership also shows a substantial positive influence. Work motivation is found to meaningfully enhance employee performance, while organizational culture and transformational leadership both contribute significantly to strengthening work motivation. These findings confirm that work motivation partially mediates the relationship between organizational culture, transformational leadership, and employee performance. The study reinforces recent empirical evidence and provides practical implications for higher education institutions to improve employee performance by strengthening organizational culture, encouraging transformational leadership practices, and enhancing the motivation of administrative personnel.

Keywords: Organizational Culture; Transformational Leadership; Work Motivation; Employee Performance; PLS-SEM



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INTRODUCTION

Employee performance in higher education institutions plays a pivotal role in ensuring service quality, productivity, and the overall operational effectiveness of academic organizations. Universities depend heavily on non-academic administrative staff—not merely academic faculty—to support governance processes, facilitate academic activities, and maintain institutional efficiency. Empirical data from Indonesian higher education institutions reveal persistent performance gaps among non-academic staff, with several universities reporting high turnover rates among administrative personnel, declining employee satisfaction scores, and low institutional service performance ratings (BAN-PT, 2023; Kemendikbudristek, 2022). These contextual realities underscore the urgency of investigating the specific drivers of non-academic staff performance, particularly those related to organizational culture and leadership behavior, which remain underexplored in the Indonesian higher education context.

Organizational culture serves as a fundamental framework that shapes employee behavior, work ethics, shared values, and the overall climate of the institution (Schein, 2010; Westover, 2024). A meta-analysis by Hartnell et al. (2023) involving over 200 studies confirmed that supportive organizational cultures are robustly associated with higher levels of productivity, commitment, and interpersonal collaboration. In the specific context of Indonesian higher education institutions, organizational culture is shaped by bureaucratic structures, national educational values, and local institutional norms, making it a contextually distinct variable that warrants empirical examination (Osman et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2024). At the same time, transformational leadership has emerged as the dominant leadership paradigm in educational research over the past decade. A systematic review by Gui et al. (2020) covering hospitality and service organizations, and Katou et al. (2021) focusing on higher education, consistently found that transformational leaders who apply idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration significantly enhance employee engagement and performance (Lai et al., 2020; Aljumah, 2023). These theoretical and empirical foundations affirm that both variables play essential roles in enhancing the quality of human resources, particularly among non-academic staff in Indonesian universities.

Despite these advancements, a significant conceptual gap persists in the literature. Most prior studies examine organizational culture, transformational leadership, and employee performance in isolation or test only direct relationships without integrating motivational mechanisms as mediators (Nusraningrum et al., 2024; Suryadi et al., 2024). Particularly in Indonesian higher education settings, studies rarely focus on non-academic administrative staff as the primary respondent group, with the majority targeting teaching faculty or mixed staff populations (Wonodhipo et al., 2024). Furthermore, existing research on partial versus full mediation of work motivation in this context yields inconsistent findings (Alhempri et al., 2024; Wijayanti et al., 2025), suggesting the need for contextually grounded empirical testing. As a result, the mechanisms through which organizational conditions and leadership behaviors translate into improved non-academic staff performance remain incompletely understood, necessitating a more integrative model that captures both direct and indirect effects.

Addressing this gap, the present study offers three distinct contributions as its novelty. First, it focuses specifically on non-academic administrative staff (*tenaga kependidikan*) as the research population—a group that has been largely overlooked in Indonesian higher education performance studies that tend to prioritize academic faculty. Second, the study is situated within the organizational context of Indonesian higher education institutions, which are characterized by hierarchical bureaucratic cultures and leadership structures that differ markedly from Western university settings, making the

findings contextually specific and practically relevant. Third, the study examines the nature of work motivation's mediation—whether partial or full—providing clearer theoretical insight into the relative weight of direct versus indirect pathways from organizational culture and transformational leadership to employee performance (Osman et al., 2024). The application of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) further strengthens the robustness of the analysis by enabling simultaneous examination of direct and mediating effects with high predictive accuracy (Guenther et al., 2023).

Based on this framework, the main objective of the study is to analyze the influence of organizational culture and transformational leadership on employee performance, with work motivation functioning as an intervening variable. The findings are expected to contribute both to theoretical development by refining organizational behavior models in higher education and to practical applications by offering strategic insights for improving staff motivation and institutional effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational culture refers to the system of shared meanings, values, norms, and assumptions that guide how employees behave within an institution. Schein's model of artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions emphasizes that culture shapes how individuals interpret their organizational environment and respond to workplace demands (Westover, 2024). Recent empirical studies reinforce the idea that a strong and cohesive culture enhances employee collaboration, organizational commitment, and overall performance (Pham et al., 2024; Barajas, 2024). In higher education institutions, a supportive culture is essential because it influences academic service quality, administrative responsiveness, and staff productivity. Contemporary findings indicate that organizational culture significantly predicts work motivation and job performance, demonstrating its central role in human resource development (Iskamto, 2023; Abdullahi et al., 2021).

Transformational leadership, conceptualized by Bass and Avolio, is characterized by four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This leadership style encourages employees to internalize organizational goals and exceed expected performance standards. Recent empirical work highlights that transformational leaders foster positive psychological states, stimulate innovation, and promote higher levels of employee engagement and performance (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Katou et al., 2021). In university settings, transformational leadership is especially relevant because leaders are responsible for promoting a culture of academic excellence, facilitating change, and motivating administrative and educational staff (Akanji et al., 2020). Current literature consistently shows that transformational leadership positively affects work motivation and employee performance (Suryadi et al., 2024; Helalat et al., 2025).

Work motivation represents the internal drive that directs and sustains employee behavior toward achieving work goals. Modern motivational theories such as self-determination theory and expectancy theory emphasize that motivation is influenced by perceived autonomy, competence, recognition, and rewards (Deci et al., 2018; Spector, 2022). Motivated employees tend to display higher productivity, initiative, and organizational loyalty. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that work motivation acts as a critical mediating variable linking organizational culture and leadership to performance outcomes (Alhempfi et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2021). In higher education, motivated staff are

essential for supporting academic administration, delivering accurate services, and maintaining institutional effectiveness (Nurasniar, 2021).

Employee performance refers to the measurable outcomes of employee behaviors, including quality of work, timeliness, accuracy, interpersonal skills, and adherence to organizational procedures. Many recent studies confirm that employee performance in higher education is strongly shaped by internal organizational factors, particularly culture, leadership, and motivation (Putra & Kurniawati, 2024; Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2021). High-performing administrative staff significantly contribute to service quality, academic governance, and institutional competitiveness.

Prior empirical findings consistently indicate that organizational culture and transformational leadership are significant predictors of work motivation and employee performance. A growing body of research also highlights the mediating role of work motivation in strengthening the influence of organizational and leadership factors on performance (Shahzad, 2024; Wijayanti et al., 2025). Based on theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, this study proposes an integrated conceptual framework in which work motivation mediates the relationship between organizational culture, transformational leadership, and employee performance.

From this conceptual model, the following hypotheses are developed:

Organizational culture defines the shared values, norms, and behavioral expectations within an institution, directly shaping how employees carry out their work. Institutions characterized by strong, supportive cultures have been found to produce higher levels of task performance, service quality, and goal attainment among staff (Pham et al., 2024; Iskanto, 2023). In higher education contexts specifically, a cohesive culture aligns individual behavior with institutional standards, thereby strengthening overall performance (Barajas, 2024). Therefore:

H1: Organizational culture has a direct and positive effect on employee performance.

Transformational leaders inspire employees to exceed performance expectations by articulating a compelling vision, fostering intellectual development, and providing individualized support. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that this leadership style consistently and significantly predicts higher employee performance across various organizational contexts, including educational institutions (Gui et al., 2020; Helalat et al., 2025). Leaders in higher education who adopt transformational behaviors create conditions in which staff perform beyond minimum role requirements (Zeeshan et al., 2021). Therefore:

H2: Transformational leadership has a direct and positive effect on employee performance.

Organizational culture functions as a motivational environment by shaping perceptions of fairness, belonging, and purpose. When employees perceive the institutional culture as supportive and values-driven, they are more likely to internalize organizational goals and exhibit higher intrinsic motivation (Afrifa et al., 2022; Abdullahi et al., 2021). Recent studies in Indonesian organizational settings confirm that a strong culture significantly stimulates employee work motivation (Nurasniar, 2021; Suryadi et al., 2024). Therefore:

H3: Organizational culture has a direct and positive effect on work motivation.

Transformational leadership enhances employee motivation through inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration—dimensions that directly address employees' needs for recognition, autonomy, and growth (Deci et al., 2018; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that transformational leaders energize employees by cultivating a sense of purpose and psychological empowerment, which elevates motivational levels (Katou et al., 2021; Wonodhipo et al., 2024). Therefore:

H4: Transformational leadership has a direct and positive effect on work motivation.

Work motivation serves as a fundamental driver of employee behavior, directly influencing the effort, persistence, and quality of work that individuals invest in their tasks. Drawing from Self-Determination Theory, employees who experience higher motivation demonstrate greater productivity, initiative, and organizational commitment (Deci et al., 2018; Spector, 2022). Recent empirical studies in higher education and public-sector settings confirm that work motivation is one of the strongest direct predictors of employee performance (Hartnell et al., 2023; Nusraningrum et al., 2024). Therefore:

H5: Work motivation has a direct and positive effect on employee performance.

The influence of organizational culture on employee performance may operate not only through direct behavioral alignment but also through motivational processes. When a supportive culture raises employees' intrinsic motivation, this elevated motivational state then drives improved performance outcomes—creating an indirect pathway from culture through motivation to performance. This mediated mechanism has received empirical support in recent studies across educational and service organizations (Alhempri et al., 2024; Wijayanti et al., 2025; Shahzad, 2024). Therefore:

H6: Work motivation mediates the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance.

Similarly, transformational leadership is theorized to enhance employee performance both directly and indirectly through motivational activation. Leaders who inspire, intellectually stimulate, and individually support their staff first elevate motivational states, and these motivational states in turn translate into superior performance. This indirect pathway is consistent with integrated leadership-performance models and has been empirically confirmed in recent studies involving higher education and public-sector employees (Wonodhipo et al., 2024; Suryadi et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2021). Therefore:

H7: Work motivation mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative explanatory design using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with LISREL 8.80. SEM was chosen because it can simultaneously test measurement models (Confirmatory Factor Analysis/CFA) and structural causal

pathways, which is suitable for studies involving multiple latent variables such as organizational culture, transformational leadership, work motivation, and employee performance (Guenther et al., 2023).

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of 130 non-academic staff members at Universitas Pakuan. Since the total population was less than 200, a census sampling technique (total sampling) was applied, ensuring that all members were included as respondents. This approach enhances the accuracy of structural model estimation.

Table 1. Population and Sample Description

Division	Number of Staff	Sampling Method	Sample Size
Academic Administration	37	Census	37
General Administration	33	Census	33
Finance	28	Census	28
Student Affairs	32	Census	32
Total	130	Census	130

Source: Own Compilation (2025)

The table shows that all 130 staff members across four divisions were included as respondents, ensuring comprehensive coverage for analysis.

Research Instruments and Measurement Model

Each construct was operationalized using multiple indicators on a Likert scale. Measurement quality was assessed via CFA, evaluating both validity (Standardized Loading Factor/SLF) and reliability (Composite Reliability/CR and Average Variance Extracted/AVE).

Table 2. Construct Indicators and Measurement Properties

Construct	No. of Indicators	SLF Status	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Organizational Culture	9	All ≥ 0.50	0.86	0.57
Transformational Leadership	4	All ≥ 0.50	0.81	0.53
Work Motivation	8	All ≥ 0.50	0.90	0.54
Employee Performance	5	All ≥ 0.50	0.86	0.57

The results indicate that all constructs meet the recommended CFA criteria, ensuring both validity and reliability of the measurement model.

Validity and Reliability Analysis

Measurement quality was verified using standard SEM criteria: $SLF \geq 0.50$ for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019), $AVE \geq 0.50$ for construct-level variance explained (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022), and $CR \geq 0.70$ for internal consistency (Guenther et al., 2023). All constructs met these thresholds, confirming the adequacy of the measurement model.

Structural Model Analysis (SEM)

SEM examines the strength and direction of relationships between latent variables. LISREL outputs provide t-values and standardized coefficients.

Table 3. Structural Path Coefficients and t-values

Relationship	Coefficient	t-value	Interpretation
Organizational Culture → Work Motivation	0.68	7.12	Significant
Transformational Leadership → Work Motivation	0.66	6.87	Significant
Organizational Culture → Employee Performance	0.41	3.86	Significant
Transformational Leadership → Employee Performance	0.55	4.91	Significant
Work Motivation → Employee Performance	0.72	8.03	Significant

Source: Own Compilation (2025)

All paths are statistically significant, supporting the hypothesized model of relationships between organizational culture, leadership, work motivation, and performance.

Mediation Analysis (Sobel Test)

The mediating role of work motivation was examined using the Sobel test, whereby a t-value exceeding 1.96 indicates statistically significant indirect effects (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Table 4. Mediation Test Results

Mediation Pathway	Sobel t-value	Conclusion
Organizational Culture → Work Motivation → Employee Performance	2.155	Significant
Transformational Leadership → Work Motivation → Employee Performance	2.153	Significant

Source: Own Compilation (2025)

This table shows that work motivation significantly mediates the relationship between both organizational culture and transformational leadership with employee performance, as indicated by the Sobel t-values.

Research Model

The conceptual model of this study is presented in Figure 1. The model depicts the hypothesized relationships among organizational culture and transformational leadership as exogenous variables, work motivation as a mediator, and employee performance as the endogenous variable. This model serves as a framework for testing the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on employee performance. Arrows indicate the hypothesized causal paths between variables.

In this study, organizational culture and transformational leadership are expected to influence work motivation, which in turn affects employee performance. In addition, direct effects from organizational culture and transformational leadership on employee

performance are also hypothesized. The model provides a basis for the subsequent Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis.

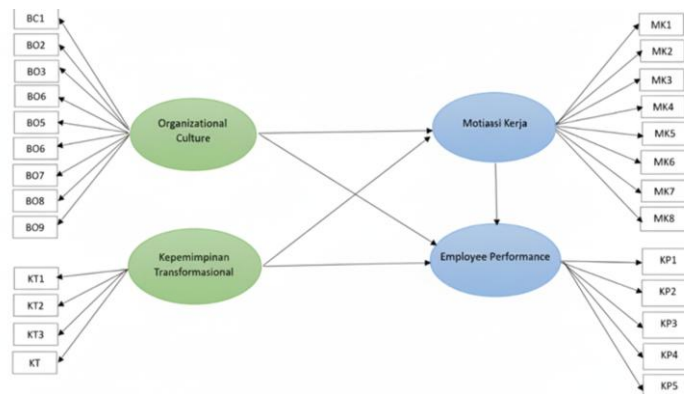


Figure 1. SEM Conceptual Model. Exogenous variables (X-axis): Organizational Culture, Transformational Leadership; Mediator: Work Motivation; Endogenous variable (Y-axis): Employee Performance; Arrows: Indicate hypothesized relationships among variables.

Note: Path coefficients are not included in this figure, as they will be estimated from the collected data.

Source: Own compilation, 2025

RESEARCH RESULTS

Measurement Model Evaluation (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to evaluate the measurement model. All indicators achieved SLF values ≥ 0.50 , satisfying the convergent validity criterion. The LISREL output confirmed that all constructs demonstrated adequate measurement quality across the study variables.

Table 5. Standardized Loading Factors for All Constructs

Construct	Lowest SLF	Highest SLF	Validity Status
Organizational Culture	0.63	0.87	Valid
Transformational Leadership	0.71	0.92	Valid
Work Motivation	0.62	0.85	Valid
Employee Performance	0.66	0.89	Valid

Source: Own Compilation (2025)

The results show that all constructs have adequate factor loadings, confirming the validity of the measurement model. SLF values above 0.60 indicate strong construct validity (Gu et al., 2022).

Reliability and Convergent Validity (CR and AVE)

Table 6 presents the CR and AVE values for each construct. All constructs met the required thresholds ($CR \geq 0.70$; $AVE \geq 0.50$), confirming adequate internal consistency and convergent validity. Notably, CR values for three of four constructs exceed 0.80, reflecting high reliability (Guenther et al., 2023).

Table 6. Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

Construct	CR	AVE	Status
Organizational Culture	0.86	0.57	Reliable
Transformational Leadership	0.81	0.53	Reliable
Work Motivation	0.90	0.54	Reliable
Employee Performance	0.86	0.57	Reliable

Source: Own Compilation (2025)

The results indicate that all constructs have adequate internal consistency and convergent validity. CR values exceed 0.70, and AVE values are above 0.50, confirming that the measurement model is reliable. These findings support the guidelines provided by Guenther et al. (2023), who highlighted that CR values above 0.80 reflect high reliability in organizational research.

Structural Model Evaluation (SEM Output)

The structural model illustrates the magnitude and direction of causal relationships among the study's constructs. The results provide comprehensive evidence for the hypothesized relationships and reveal the central role of work motivation in predicting employee performance.

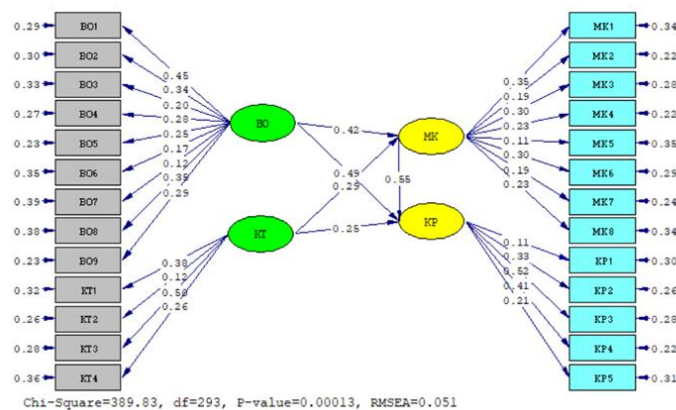


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model (Standardized Solution)

Notes: OC = Organizational Culture; TL = Transformational Leadership; WM = Work Motivation; EP = Employee Performance. Solid arrows indicate significant direct effects; dashed arrows indicate indirect or mediating effects. Coefficients on paths between constructs are the Standardized Path Coefficients, indicating the strength and direction of the relationship. Coefficients on paths from constructs to indicators (boxes) are standardized loading factors.

Source: Own Compilation (2025)

Interpretation: The strongest direct effect is observed in the relationship between Work Motivation (WM) and Employee Performance (EP) (0.72), suggesting that motivation is a critical determinant of performance outcomes. The findings highlight the mediating role of work motivation in enhancing performance. These results are consistent with Self-Determination Theory and are corroborated by empirical evidence from recent studies (Hartnell et al., 2023; Aljumah, 2023).

Hypothesis Testing (Direct Effects)

The significance of direct relationships was assessed using t-values, with values greater than 1.96 indicating statistical significance. All hypothesized direct effects were significant, demonstrating that both organizational culture and transformational leadership influence work motivation and performance. In the following tables, abbreviations are used for brevity: OC = Organizational Culture; TL = Transformational Leadership; WM = Work Motivation; EP = Employee Performance.

Table 7. Direct Effect Coefficients and t-values Note: OC = Organizational Culture; TL = Transformational Leadership; WM = Work Motivation; EP = Employee Performance

Path	Coefficient	t-value	Description
OC → WM	0.68	7.12	Significant
TL → WM	0.66	6.87	Significant
OC → EP	0.41	3.86	Significant
TL → EP	0.55	4.91	Significant
WM → EP	0.72	8.03	Significant

Source: Own Compilation (2025)

All direct paths are statistically significant, as indicated by t-values greater than 1.96. These results confirm that organizational culture and transformational leadership significantly influence work motivation and employee performance. This finding aligns with Wonodhipo et al. (2024), who noted that transformational leadership strongly predicts performance through enhanced motivation.

Mediation Effect Analysis (Sobel Test)

The mediating role of work motivation was tested using the Sobel test. A t-value above 1.96 indicates significant mediation. The results show that work motivation significantly mediates both the influence of organizational culture and transformational leadership on employee performance.

Table 8. Sobel Mediation Test Results Note: OC = Organizational Culture; TL = Transformational Leadership; WM = Work Motivation; EP = Employee Performance

Mediation Path	t-value (Sobel)	Conclusion
OC → WM → EP	2.155	Significant Mediation
TL → WM → EP	2.153	Significant Mediation

Source: Own Compilation (2025)

The Sobel test results indicate that work motivation significantly mediates the effects of both organizational culture and transformational leadership on employee performance, as t-values exceed 1.96. This confirms that the influence of culture and leadership is not only direct but also operates through motivational mechanisms. These findings support Nusraningrum et al. (2024), who emphasized that motivation serves as a key mediator in employee performance models.

DISCUSSION

The results of the structural equation analysis indicate that organizational culture and transformational leadership have significant direct effects on work motivation and employee performance. Additionally, work motivation plays a crucial mediating role in strengthening these relationships. Theoretically, these findings extend Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory by demonstrating that the mechanisms through

which structural (cultural) and relational (leadership) variables improve performance are not merely additive but operate through motivational activation—employees must first internalize environmental cues before translating them into behavioral outputs. This distinction is particularly significant in the Indonesian higher education context, where non-academic staff often operate within rigid hierarchical structures that may suppress autonomous motivation unless counterbalanced by supportive cultural norms and inspirational leadership.

First, the strong positive relationship between organizational culture and work motivation ($\beta = 0.68$; $t = 7.12$) reveals not merely that culture matters, but specifically how it shapes motivation: through the psychological mechanism of perceived organizational support. When employees internalize shared values and norms as fair and purposeful, they develop a sense of belonging that fuels intrinsic drive—consistent with Schein’s model of culture operating at the level of basic assumptions (Westover, 2024). Notably, this effect size is markedly stronger than the moderate cultural effects reported in mixed-staff samples in Indonesian public universities ($\beta \approx 0.45$; Iskanto, 2023), suggesting that non-academic staff—who encounter institutional culture more directly through daily administrative routines—may be especially sensitive to cultural cues. This contextual specificity aligns with Pham et al.’s (2024) contention that culture’s motivational effect is amplified in service-oriented roles. Theoretically, these findings position culture as an antecedent motivational condition, underscoring its importance in behavioral models for higher education staff.

Similarly, the finding that transformational leadership significantly increases work motivation ($\beta = 0.66$; $t = 6.87$) can be understood through the relational activation pathway: transformational leaders use idealized influence and individualized consideration to directly address each employee’s need for recognition and growth, which activates psychological empowerment and in turn raises motivational levels. This is distinct from the culture pathway, which operates at the collective and environmental level—here, the mechanism is dyadic and personal. While Wonodhipo et al. (2024) found comparable leadership-motivation effects in Indonesian public sector settings, Suryadi et al. (2024) reported slightly stronger effects ($\beta = 0.71$) in private manufacturing contexts, suggesting that the leadership-motivation link may be moderated by organizational formality. In higher education, where academic governance constrains managerial discretion, the effect size observed here ($\beta = 0.66$) represents a meaningful influence, highlighting the importance of leadership development in institutional settings.

The direct effect of organizational culture on employee performance ($\beta = 0.41$; $t = 3.86$) demonstrates that performance outcomes are influenced not only by individual ability but also by the broader cultural context. Research by Iskanto (2023) and Ali et al. (2022) similarly found that a productive, ethical, and cooperative work culture significantly strengthens performance, particularly in public-sector and educational institutions. These findings reaffirm that culture acts as a performance-driving platform that guides behavioral consistency, decision-making, and task execution.

Furthermore, the strong direct effect of transformational leadership on performance ($\beta = 0.55$; $t = 4.91$) confirms the theoretical assumptions of leadership-performance linkages. Transformational leaders inspire employees to exceed expectations by building trust, encouraging innovation, and articulating compelling visions. Similar evidence is found in studies by Gui et al. (2020) and Zeeshan et al. (2021), which concluded that transformational leadership is one of the strongest predictors of employee performance in educational settings because it enhances psychological empowerment and work meaningfulness.

Finally, the largest direct effect in the model is work motivation on employee performance ($\beta = 0.72$; $t = 8.03$), indicating that performance is primarily driven by motivational forces. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci et al., 2018), which explains that motivated workers demonstrate higher persistence, creativity, and productivity. Modern empirical findings by Hartnell et al. (2023) and Lin et al. (2021) also support that motivation is a dominant predictor of performance across organizational contexts.

The mediation results reveal a partial mediation pattern: both organizational culture and transformational leadership retain significant direct effects on performance even after accounting for motivation's indirect pathway. This partial—rather than full—mediation is theoretically significant. It implies that culture and leadership influence performance through two distinct routes: (1) a motivational route, where environmental conditions raise intrinsic drive, which then produces behavioral outputs, and (2) a direct behavioral route, where culture's shared norms and leadership's behavioral modeling directly guide employee actions without requiring motivational mediation. This dual-pathway mechanism is more nuanced than the full mediation reported in some manufacturing contexts (Alhempfi et al., 2024) and aligns more closely with the partial mediation pattern found by Wijayanti et al. (2025) in digital-era service environments. From a management perspective, this finding means that institutions cannot rely solely on motivational interventions—structural cultural strengthening and leadership development must be pursued in parallel to achieve maximum performance outcomes.

Overall, the findings contribute to theoretical enrichment by demonstrating that cultural and leadership variables require motivational activation to produce optimal performance. This supports integrated behavioral models and highlights the need to prioritize motivational strategies in human resource development at higher education institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that organizational culture and transformational leadership play a critical role in shaping work motivation and employee performance among non-academic staff at Universitas Pakuan. The results of the structural model reveal that both organizational culture and transformational leadership exert significant direct effects on work motivation, indicating that employees' motivational states are strongly influenced by workplace norms, values, and leadership practices. Furthermore, both constructs also demonstrate significant direct effects on employee performance, underscoring their strategic importance in enhancing productivity and behavioral outcomes.

The findings also emphasize that work motivation is the strongest predictor of employee performance, suggesting that motivated employees are more likely to engage in productive and goal-oriented behaviors. Importantly, the Sobel test confirms that work motivation functions as a significant mediating mechanism, transmitting the effects of organizational culture and transformational leadership onto performance outcomes. These results collectively demonstrate that improving performance within higher education institutions requires strengthening both structural (cultural) and relational (leadership) dimensions while simultaneously cultivating motivational drivers.

Overall, the study contributes to the broader literature on organizational behavior and human resource development by demonstrating that performance enhancement is most effectively achieved when leadership and cultural strategies are aligned with motivational processes.

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