

Bureaucratic Performance: Strategies for Improving the Performance of Employees in the State Secretariat for Secondary Education and Vocational Training in Timor-Leste

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Abstrak

This study examines the factors that influence employee performance in the State Secretariat for Secondary Education and Vocational Training in Timor-Leste, focusing on work motivation, competence, work environment, and organizational commitment as the main variables that interact and mediate performance achievement. In the context of bureaucratic reform and improving the quality of education services in developing countries, this study aims to identify obstacles in the implementation of performance improvement strategies and to design effective human resource management strategies to increase employee motivation and loyalty. The research approach used is qualitative with data collection through surveys, interviews, and observations, as well as data analysis using statistical and interpretive methods. The results show that work motivation, competency through training, a conducive work environment, and organizational commitment directly and indirectly have a significant effect on employee performance, with employee engagement acting as the main mediator. The main obstacles include an inadequate incentive system, a lack of continuous training, and an organizational culture that is not innovative and communicative, which leads to the ineffectiveness of existing performance improvement policies and programs. Recommended strategies include the development of a results-based incentive system, continuous competency training, and the development of an inclusive and transformational organizational culture. These findings make an important scientific and practical contribution as a basis for the design of adaptive and sustainable human resource management policies in an effort to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of educational services in Timor-Leste.

Kata Kunci: Work Motivation, Competency, Work Environment, Employee Performance

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1. Pendahuluan

In the global context, human resources (HR) are a key factor in achieving national development success and increasing a country's competitiveness amid the dynamics of international competition. Research shows that effective and efficient HR quality has a direct impact on a country's productivity, innovation, and economic growth (Amutabi & Wambugu, 2020). In the era of globalization and technological advancement, the success of national development is highly dependent on the ability of institutions, including government agencies, to manage human resources optimally.

Nationally, various countries are striving to improve the quality and performance of the civil service (ASN) as part of bureaucratic reform (Suzuki & Hur, 2020). This reform program is aimed at improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of public services. In Indonesia, for example, various policies have been implemented to strengthen human resource management in the government, particularly through competency development and innovation in public services (Amutabi & Wambugu, 2020). These efforts demonstrate the importance of developing adaptive and performance-based HR management strategies in order to improve employee professionalism and services to the community.

Specifically, Timor-Leste, as a small developing country, faces challenges in strengthening human resource capacity in the fields of government and education. The success of national development in Timor-Leste is greatly influenced by the quality of civil servants working in government institutions, including the Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training (SNUPMTV). In 2022, data showed that the performance level of employees in Timor-Leste was still relatively low, with 65% of employees stating that they did not feel sufficiently motivated and lacked loyalty to their institutions (Quinn & Buchanan, 2022). This condition contributed to the low effectiveness and efficiency of services in the secondary education sector, which had a direct impact on the quality of national education.

The development of human resource management strategies oriented towards increasing employee motivation and commitment is a strategic solution to overcome these challenges. This aspect is very important considering that motivation and commitment are the main determinants of employee performance (Afshari, 2020). If employees are highly motivated and feel emotionally attached and committed to their work, productivity and the quality of task performance in general will increase significantly.

In addition, this study also aims to assess the effectiveness of performance improvement policies and programs that have been implemented in the Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training in Timor-Leste. Previous studies have revealed that the success of performance improvement programs is highly dependent on policy design that is appropriate to the local context and organizational culture (Nguyen & Le, 2020). Therefore, evaluating existing programs is crucial to determine their relevance and impact on actual conditions in the field.

Furthermore, this study is expected to contribute both scientifically and practically. Scientifically, this study will add to the body of knowledge on employee performance improvement strategies in developing countries with different political and economic conditions. From a practical perspective, the results of this study can be used as a reference for policy makers at the Timor-Leste Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training in designing and implementing more effective and results-based HR management strategies.

In addition, the innovative aspect of this study is that it highlights the unique contextual factors in Timor-Leste, including cultural, political, and economic factors that influence the implementation of performance improvement strategies. This research will also utilize a holistic and evidence-based approach supported by empirical data from various data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation (Çetin & Topaloğlu, 2018).

Furthermore, this research will identify the main obstacles that have hampered the success of performance improvement programs and offer strategic solutions that are adaptive to local conditions. This is important considering that the success of human resource development in the government environment is closely correlated with the existence of a management system whose infrastructure supports the continuous development of employee competencies.

In general, improving employee performance in the State Secretariat for Secondary Education and Vocational Training in Timor-Leste is a very important and relevant issue in order to encourage improvements in the quality of national education. Suboptimal human resource management can hinder the achievement of national development targets, including achieving adequate and equitable education standards (Brumann & Gfeller, 2022). Therefore, this research is urgently needed, with the hope that it can provide real solutions that can be implemented effectively and sustainably.

Thus, a fundamental question arises regarding how HR management strategies can be designed appropriately to increase employee motivation and commitment, as well as improve the effectiveness of existing policies. This study is expected to address these gaps through empirical studies and in-depth analysis of the factors that influence employee performance at the Timor-Leste Secretariat of Secondary Education and Vocational Training, as well as the obstacles and opportunities that exist in efforts to improve performance.

2. Metode

In the context of this study, the most appropriate approach is a quantitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design, as the main objective is to identify factors that influence employee performance and assess the effectiveness of programs that have been implemented. This approach will enable researchers to collect quantitative data through survey instruments and provide an objective picture of the variables that influence employee performance at the Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training in Timor-Leste.

The type of research chosen is descriptive and explanatory research. Descriptive research aims to describe the factors that influence and the obstacles encountered in the implementation of employee performance improvement strategies. Meanwhile, explanatory research is conducted to test the cause-and-effect relationship between variables in the developed theoretical framework, particularly regarding the influence of work motivation, organizational commitment, competence, and environmental factors on employee performance, as

well as the mediating role of employee engagement. This type of methodological research is widely described in the literature, which emphasizes that this combination of approaches is effective in studies that aim to describe and measure the relationships between variables.

For this quantitative research, which aims to generalize the results statistically, probability sampling techniques are used, specifically simple random sampling. The sample taken will amount to approximately 30-50% of the entire population, with consideration given to obtaining representativeness and validity of statistical inference. Probability sampling was used so that each employee had an equal chance of being selected, thereby reducing bias in data collection and ensuring the validity of the results for the entire employee population within the SNUPMTV environment.

In this study, the data collection methods chosen were interviews, observation, and documentation. These three techniques are considered capable of providing a comprehensive picture of the factors that influence employee performance within the Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training of Timor-Leste, while also capturing the dynamics of the process and context of the implementation of performance improvement strategies. Interviews were used to obtain in-depth data from relevant parties, such as employees and decision-makers in the field, in order to reveal their perceptions, experiences, and subjective assessments of the internal and external factors that influence performance. Observations were made directly of employee activities and the work environment in order to obtain operational and organizational culture data that is not always recorded in documents or interviews. Meanwhile, documentation includes administrative data, policy reports, and relevant internal records, which can strengthen data validity and provide historical and administrative context to the phenomena being studied.

In this study, the main instruments used were interview guidelines and observation guidelines. In addition to interview and observation guidelines, this study also used documentation studies as supporting instruments, in the form of policy documents, performance improvement program reports, and archives relevant to the research context. The use of documentation aimed to obtain historical data and evidence to support the continuity of analysis and data triangulation.

In this study, the data analysis techniques used were quantitative statistical analysis and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Quantitative statistical analysis was performed to process numerical data obtained from questionnaires and hypothesis testing, in the form of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics include processing data on frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to provide an overview of the characteristics of respondents and the distribution of the main variable data. Meanwhile, inferential statistics include regression and correlation tests to determine the influence between variables and significant relationships among the factors that affect employee performance.

3. Hasil dan Pembahasan

The results of this study indicate that work motivation, competence, work environment, and organizational commitment have a significant influence on employee performance at the Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training in Timor-Leste. This phenomenon is in line with the theoretical framework developed in previous studies, which confirms that a combination of various internal and external variables will collectively determine the level of employee performance in the context of public organizations (Almawali, 2021) (X. Chen, 2024) (Roul & Dash, 2025) Empirical findings from data collected through direct interviews, observations, and questionnaires show that work motivation and competence are the dominant variables that directly affect the productivity and quality of work of employees in the SNUPMTV environment. In addition, a conducive work environment and the existence of an organization capable of building a positive, inclusive, and open work culture also indirectly increase performance levels by strengthening employee motivation and commitment.

In detail, quantitative data shows that 78% of respondents stated that their level of motivation had a significant effect on their performance. Intrinsic motivation, such as personal satisfaction and recognition of achievements, as well as extrinsic motivation, such as incentives and formal rewards, are known to have a positive correlation with their work performance. For example, one employee stated, "When I feel appreciated and recognized, I am more enthusiastic about completing my tasks" (interview, administrative employee, 2023). Statistics from the questionnaire results show that the average motivation score reached 3.4 on a scale of five, indicating that most employees feel that work motivation is an important factor that affects their performance.

On the other hand, competence and continuous training have been empirically proven to improve performance. Data shows that employees who participate in and complete competency improvement training directly experience an increase in productivity and work quality, with an average performance assessment score increase of 15-20%. An interview revealed that, "The training I attended enabled me to use new technology in data management, which I did not previously master, making my work more efficient" (technical employee, 2023). This finding reinforces the literature stating that competency training and development are key variables

in improving the quality of human resources in the public sector (Dangol, 2020) (X. Chen, 2024). These results also confirm that strengthening competencies through relevant and continuous training is an effective strategy that needs to be reinforced in HR policies within SNUPMTV.

In addition to individual internal factors, organizational culture and work environment also play an important role in building employee motivation and commitment. Interview data shows that a harmonious work atmosphere, open communication, and management support significantly motivate employees in carrying out their duties. As an illustration, one employee stated, "When I feel supported and have the opportunity to contribute, I feel more responsible and committed to the success of the activity" (managerial employee, 2023). These findings are consistent with the theory that a positive work environment and an inclusive organizational culture will increase employee engagement and loyalty (Roul & Dash, 2025) (Satoto, 2023). Perceptions of a fair, transparent, and participatory leadership system also show a positive correlation with increased employee motivation and performance (Kyaw & Keeratavisest, 2023).

Furthermore, the level of employee commitment and loyalty is an important indicator in predicting the success of achieving organizational targets. The survey results confirm that employees with high levels of commitment generally show greater dedication and have good relationships with their colleagues and superiors. Conversely, low loyalty is associated with a lack of pride in the organization and a lack of trust in the management system in place. One interview revealed, "My loyalty to SNUPMTV has declined due to a lack of attention from leadership and unclear career development paths" (administrative employee, 2023). This data is in line with the literature which states that organizational loyalty is a strong predictor of performance if the organization is able to maintain and strengthen it through sustainable human resource management (Kyaw & Keeratavisest, 2023) (Natasya et al., 2024).

The initial interpretation of these results shows that improving employee performance at SNUPMTV cannot be done partially, but must consider the integration of motivation, competence, work environment, and level of commitment. This is in line with the theoretical framework which emphasizes that performance improvement will be more optimal if all these variables are integrated into the design of a comprehensive human resource management strategy. These findings also confirm previous research results which state that a combination of internal and external factors supported by a good management system will result in increased productivity and work effectiveness (Almawali, 2021; Roul & Dash, 2025). Thus, the initial implication of these findings is the need to strengthen policies related to results-based incentives, improve relevant training, and develop an inclusive and participatory organizational culture as strategic steps in holistically improving employee motivation and performance.

Overall, the results of the study indicate that work motivation, competence, work environment, and commitment levels have a significant influence on employee performance in the State Secretariat for Secondary Education and Vocational Technical Affairs of Timor-Leste. The convergence of these various data confirms that the success of performance improvement strategies depends not only on formal policy aspects but also on the quality of implementation and employee perceptions of these programs. The discrepancy between policy and actual conditions highlights the importance of evidence-based adjustments through active employee participation in the policy evaluation and design process. Thus, developing adaptive and results-oriented HR management strategies is key to achieving long-term success in improving performance and service quality in Timor-Leste's education sector.

Discussion

Analysis of the Influence of Work Motivation on Employee Performance

The results of the study show that work motivation is one of the main factors that significantly affects the performance level of employees in the Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Technical Education in Timor-Leste. These findings confirm that the level of motivation, which is influenced by incentives, recognition, and job satisfaction, has a direct and indirect effect on employee performance, as previously identified in the literature. The quantitative data obtained shows that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation contribute to creating conditions that support employee productivity. Specifically, intrinsic motivation, such as a sense of achievement and self-development, plays a role in improving the quality and quantity of work, while extrinsic motivation, such as incentives and rewards, has an effect on driving medium- and long-term performance.

The important implication of these findings is that motivation not only acts as an internal factor but also as an element influenced by external conditions such as incentive systems and formal recognition. High motivation can strengthen employees' emotional and cognitive engagement, which simultaneously improves their work efficiency and effectiveness. This is in line with the work motivation theory proposed by Almawali (2021) and Fatima (2023), which emphasizes that motivation is a major driving factor in increasing productivity, even in the context of public sector organizations that have formal rules and procedures. Both highlight the importance of providing fair incentives and appropriate recognition as part of a successful motivation strategy.

Analysis of the Role of Competence and Training in Performance Improvement

The results of the study show that competence development through training plays a significant role in improving the performance of employees in the Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training in Timor-Leste. Quantitative data indicates that training participants who took part in competency improvement programs experienced a noticeable increase in the quality of their work, including the ability to complete tasks more efficiently, generate innovation, and improve work accuracy and productivity. This reinforces the practice and theory that training and capacity building are key factors in improving employee work effectiveness, especially in the context of the public sector, which requires service quality improvement and adaptation to change.

From a scientific perspective, these findings support the theoretical framework proposed by Chen (2024) and Dangol (2020), which asserts that continuous competency development is a variable that positively contributes to innovation and performance improvement in the public sector. Considering that competency is a variable that can be developed systematically, the implementation of training programs must be strategically designed and oriented towards the real needs of employees and the obstacles they face in the field. This will ensure that training is not merely a formality, but actually has an impact on improving work performance and strengthening a culture of sustainable competency.

Analysis of the Impact of Work Environment and Leadership

The research findings show that a conducive work environment has a positive influence on the motivation, engagement, and loyalty of employees in the Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training of Timor-Leste. Empirical data indicates that a harmonious work atmosphere, a support system from superiors, and a transparent and participatory leadership style are significantly correlated with improved employee performance. A friendly and inclusive work environment can increase employees' emotional attachment to the organization, thereby strengthening their commitment and internal drive to achieve work targets more optimally. In particular, leadership that prioritizes transformational principles and a participative approach to decision-making has been proven to increase employee motivation, which ultimately contributes to their improved performance.

These results are consistent with the transformational leadership theory proposed by Roul and Dash (2025), which states that inspirational and empowering leaders can significantly foster employee motivation and loyalty. Furthermore, the positive organizational culture theory from (Almawali, 2021) reinforces these results by showing that an open, innovative, and collaboration-oriented work culture is the main foundation for achieving high performance in public organizations. Thus, the results of this study emphasize that aspects of the work environment and leadership style not only have a direct effect on employee performance but also act as mediating factors that strengthen the relationship between internal motivational factors and expected outcomes.

HR Management Strategies that Increase Employee Motivation and Commitment

The results of the study show that results-based incentive strategies play an important role in increasing employee motivation. The implementation of a fair and transparent incentive system can strengthen employees' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in achieving predetermined performance targets. For example, field data indicates that even though incentive policies have been implemented, many employees are aware of the lack of transparency in the distribution of incentives and the discrepancy between work achievements and the rewards given. Therefore, remedial measures to the incentive mechanism need to be taken so that the policy is not merely symbolic, but is truly capable of stimulating motivation and loyalty in an objective and fair manner. These findings are in line with the literature cited by (Kwon & Silva, 2020), which states that performance-based incentives have been empirically proven to be effective in motivating employees, especially when implemented transparently and oriented towards tangible results.

In addition to incentives, training and continuous career development have emerged as very important aspects in strategies to increase employee motivation and commitment. Survey results show that training that is relevant, continuous, and based on the actual needs of employees can improve competence and strengthen engagement with the organization. Training that develops skills not only improves the quality of work output, but also strengthens employees' perceptions of the personal and professional benefits of such development. A study (Dangol, 2020) reinforces this finding by stating that continuous professional development has a positive correlation with work motivation and perceptions of the usefulness of their jobs, thereby encouraging long-term dedication to organizational tasks. Furthermore, an open and transparent career development system also contributes to increasing employees' sense of fairness and trust in organizational management.

The formation of an inclusive and innovative organizational culture also plays an important role in strategies to increase employee motivation. Data shows that an open, fair, and communicative culture can

encourage a sense of belonging and loyalty. Employees feel valued and involved in the decision-making process, which indirectly motivates their sense of responsibility and loyalty to the organization. Schein and Schein (2018) emphasize that a positive organizational culture that supports innovation and active participation from employees is the main foundation for improving long-term performance and strengthening employees' emotional attachment to the organization's vision and mission. In the context of Timor-Leste, this inclusive organizational culture is considered an important factor in overcoming employees' reluctance to be fully involved, as well as a binding force that can strengthen their identification and commitment to the organization's success.

Furthermore, strengthening the aspect of transformational leadership is also one of the strategic factors that significantly influence employee motivation and loyalty. Interviews and observations confirm that a leadership style that inspires, supports, and fosters innovation is key to creating a positive work climate and increasing employee engagement. Transformational leadership is not only oriented toward achieving short-term results, but also toward developing competencies and empowering employees as a whole. According to the theory proposed by Bass and Avolio (2019), this type of leadership can increase prospective motivation and strengthen employees' emotional attachment to the organization. Embracing innovation and empathy, as well as being able to create a shared vision, are the main characteristics of effective leadership to strengthen employees' pride, loyalty, and commitment in the long term.

Analysis of Policy Relevance to Field Conditions

The evaluation results show that the performance improvement policies and programs implemented in the East Timor Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training are not yet fully in line with the actual conditions and needs in the field. In general, these policies are designed based on international standards and best practices from developing countries, but there is still a significant imbalance with the local context. Findings from interviews and observations indicate that most respondents feel that these policies are not sensitive to the work culture, social conditions, and organizational dynamics in Timor-Leste, as stated by senior officials who said that international standards are difficult to apply directly without adjustments to the local social and cultural context.

Interpretation of these results shows that the relevance of policies is greatly influenced by the degree of adjustment to regional conditions and organizational culture in Timor-Leste. If policies are unable to adjust to the local context, their potential for success becomes limited, and they even risk resistance from employees who feel that the program is irrelevant or has no positive impact on their work. This assessment is in line with the study by Zhu et al. (2019), which emphasizes that the success of policy reform is highly dependent on a deep understanding of the cultural and contextual aspects of the organization concerned. Thus, the mismatch between policy and actual conditions can complicate the adaptation and implementation process, while reducing the long-term success rate of performance improvement programs.

Analysis of Program Impact and Employee Perceptions

Findings indicating the program's suboptimal impact on performance improvement and positive employee perceptions are crucial factors in assessing the policy's success. Quantitative and qualitative data from surveys and interviews show that, in general, the training and competency development programs implemented have resulted in improvements in employees' knowledge and work skills. Approximately 65% of training participants felt that the training had a positive impact on their work competencies, and some of them reported changes in their motivation and engagement. However, significantly, only about 35% of respondents stated that this increase in competency had a real impact on their productivity and work results.

These results show that technical skill improvements do not automatically lead to an overall increase in performance. This indicates that other reinforcing factors such as incentive systems, recognition, and working conditions must also be developed in order for the benefits of training to be realized optimally. In terms of employee perception, the majority still consider the program to be formal and unable to provide adequate recognition for their contributions. This recognition appears to be an important factor in increasing intrinsic motivation and a sense of ownership of the organization, as emphasized by work motivation theory, which places recognition and rewards as the main drivers in improving employee performance.

4. Kesimpulan

Based on empirical analysis and data interpretation, it can be concluded that the main factors affecting employee performance at the Secretariat of State for Secondary Education and Vocational Training in Timor-Leste include work motivation, competence through training, a conducive work environment, and the level of employee commitment and loyalty. Work motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, has been proven to significantly improve employee performance, with employee engagement playing an important mediating role

in the process. Competence gained through continuous training also increases productivity and work quality, while a supportive work environment and transformational leadership can strengthen employee motivation and engagement directly and indirectly.

Regarding obstacles in implementing performance improvement strategies, the study found that the sustainability of incentive and reward systems remains a major challenge, accompanied by a lack of continuous training programs and a work culture that does not support innovation and active employee participation. Policy systems that are not evidence-based and do not adapt to the local context are also major obstacles in ensuring the success of these performance improvement programs.

In general, the effectiveness of the performance improvement policies and programs that have been implemented shows progress but is not yet optimal. The mismatch between the policies designed and the actual conditions in the field is a major factor that reduces the positive impact of these programs. Therefore, the success of employee performance improvement is highly dependent on the adjustment of evidence-based policies in the field, the strengthening of incentive systems, and the improvement of competencies and an inclusive and innovative organizational culture.

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