

The Effect of Competence and Job Placement Fit on Employee Performance, with Motivation as a Mediating Variable Among Employees of The Secretariat General, Ministry Of Villages

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Abstract

Indonesia's Golden Vision 2045 transformation is hindered by low Civil Service Apparatus performance quality, where 35 percent of civil servants perform poorly and only 19.82 percent work optimally. Employee Performance Target data at the Ministry of Villages and Disadvantaged Regions shows fluctuation in "Good" category from 93.17% (2022) to 68.46% (2023) and 70.60% (2024), reflecting performance development inconsistency. This study aims to analyze the influence of competence and work placement suitability on employee performance through motivation as a mediating variable at the Secretariat General of the Ministry of Villages and Disadvantaged Regions. The research employs a quantitative causal-associative approach with 120 civil servant respondents through convenience sampling and PLS-SEM analysis using SmartPLS 3.3. Results indicate competence significantly influences work motivation ($\beta=0.287$; $p=0.001$) and employee performance ($\beta=0.211$; $p=0.015$), work placement significantly influences work motivation ($\beta=0.500$; $p=0.000$) and employee performance ($\beta=0.295$; $p=0.005$), work motivation significantly influences employee performance ($\beta=0.418$; $p=0.000$). Motivation mediates the influence of competence ($\beta=0.120$; $p=0.005$) and work placement ($\beta=0.209$; $p=0.001$) on performance with model predictive capacity $R^2=0.623$ and $Q^2=0.803$. The study recommends implementing continuous competency development programs, periodic evaluation of work placement suitability based on education and expertise, improving proportional compensation systems according to workload, and developing objective and transparent performance appraisal systems to support bureaucratic reform and merit system implementation.

Keywords: Civil Service Apparatus; Competence; Employee Performance; Work Motivation; Work Placement.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation toward *Indonesia Emas 2045* requires a strong foundation in the form of high-quality human resources. President Joko Widodo emphasized that achieving this vision demands *the big leap* a significant breakthrough that can only be realized through enhancing human resource capacity, including physical aspects, skills, and productive and disciplined character. However, current realities indicate a concerning condition. Data from the National Civil Service Agency reveal that nearly 35 percent of Civil Servants are classified as low performers, while only 19.82 percent are able to work optimally. The issue of low performance quality among State Civil Apparatus has become a longstanding problem that frequently draws sharp criticism from the public as recipients of public services.

In line with the commitment of the current government, President Prabowo, through the fourth *Asta Cita*, emphasizes the importance of strengthening human resource development across various dimensions to face the challenges of *Indonesia Emas 2045*. The State Civil Apparatus plays a strategic role as the driving force of the bureaucratic system, functioning not only as an object that requires attention but also as a subject that determines the progress of government organizations. Handoko (2016) highlights the urgency of preparing competent civil servants, considering that the quality of human resources within the government environment remains far from ideal. The implementation of the merit system, as mandated by Law Number 5 of 2014 on the State Civil Apparatus, serves as a vital instrument

to ensure that every civil servant is recruited, placed, developed, and promoted based on measurable qualifications, competencies, and performance.

Although the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendesa PDT) has demonstrated significant improvement in the implementation of the merit system, a gap remains between human resource management policies and employee performance outcomes, as indicated by fluctuations in Employee Performance Targets and limitations in competency assessments that have not yet incorporated technical competencies. Meanwhile, prior empirical studies reveal inconsistent findings regarding the effects of competency and job placement suitability on employee motivation and performance, as well as differing conclusions concerning the mediating role of motivation. In addition, most previous studies have been conducted in the context of local governments or have focused on job promotion, thereby failing to fully capture the complexity of personnel management in central government institutions. Therefore, this study addresses empirical, conceptual, and contextual gaps by integrating competency and job placement suitability within a single model and examining the mediating role of work motivation on employee performance in the Secretariat General of the Ministry of Villages and PDT. The contribution of this study lies in strengthening empirical evidence in public sector human resource management, particularly within the context of bureaucratic reform and the merit system in central government, as well as providing an evidence-based foundation for human resource management policy recommendations.

This study provides theoretical contributions as a reference for the development of human resource management scholarship, particularly in the areas of competency, job placement, motivation, and employee performance in the public sector. Practically, the findings offer insights and policy recommendations for personnel management aimed at enhancing competencies, optimizing job placement, and managing motivation to improve employee performance. Methodologically, this study verifies and extends the findings of Rismayadi and Maemunah (2016) regarding the effect of competency on performance through motivation by incorporating job placement suitability as an additional predictive variable. The inconsistencies in prior research findings indicate the need for more in-depth investigation that considers the mediating role of motivation in the relationship between competency, job placement, and employee performance. Most previous studies, such as Dasilfa et al. (2022), were conducted in local government settings with a focus on job promotion. This study addresses the contextual gap by being conducted in a central government institution, namely the Secretariat General of the Ministry of Villages and PDT, which has a more complex personnel management system encompassing bureaucratic reform, the merit system, and talent pool implementation. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of job placement suitability into the research model and the examination of the mediating role of motivation within the context of central government, which has been relatively underexplored in the existing literature.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is built upon four fundamental and interrelated constructs within the context of human resource management. The first construct is competency, which refers to the underlying characteristics of individuals—including motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skills—that facilitate the achievement of superior performance (Spencer, 2025). Boyatzis (1991) expands this perspective by emphasizing an individual's capacity to demonstrate behaviors that meet organizational expectations within specific job contexts. Robbins and Judge (2009) add an organizational dimension by asserting that competency is not merely an individual attribute but must be aligned with organizational needs, including work culture and long-term strategic objectives. Sedarmayanti (2018) operationalizes competency through four indicators: knowledge (understanding of facts and procedures), skills (ability to perform tasks), attitudes (behavioral tendencies), and values (moral principles influencing work behavior).

The second construct is job placement suitability, defined by Handoko (2000:69) as a condition in which employees are placed in positions that align with their expertise, experience, and educational background. Robbins and Judge (2009) further develop this concept through two dimensions of fit: *person-job fit*, referring to the compatibility between individuals and their jobs, and *person-organization fit*, which relates to the alignment between personal values and organizational culture. Hartatik (2014) identifies five indicators of effective job placement, including suitability of educational

background, skills, experience, interests, and personality. Inappropriate job placement may lead to job dissatisfaction, decreased motivation, and deterioration of employee performance.

The third construct is work motivation, which Youssef and Luthans (2007) define as a psychological condition that stimulates, directs, and sustains work-related behavior toward achieving organizational goals. Sedarmayanti (2018), through the two-factor theory, classifies motivational determinants into motivator factors (achievement, recognition, responsibility, and self-development) and hygiene factors (salary, policies, interpersonal relationships, and working conditions). Sedarmayanti (2018) also relates Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the work motivation context, suggesting that fulfillment of basic needs is a prerequisite for individuals to pursue higher-level needs such as esteem and self-actualization. Nahrisah et al. (2024) operationalize motivation through five levels of needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization.

The fourth construct is performance, defined by Mathis and Jackson (2010) as the level of achievement of work results related to specific tasks. Robbins and Judge (2009) extend this definition as an evaluation of individual work outcomes based on organizational standards, influenced by individual abilities, effort exerted, and organizational support. Mangkunegara (2016) adds that performance represents work outcomes achieved in terms of both quality and quantity in accordance with assigned responsibilities and is influenced by competency, motivation, and the work environment. Cooper and Dewe (2008) identify three categories of factors affecting performance: individual variables, organizational variables, and psychological variables. Sedarmayanti (2018) operationalizes performance through five indicators: quantity of work output, quality of work output, timeliness, attendance, and teamwork ability.

Previous Studies

A number of empirical studies have demonstrated significant relationships among competency, job placement, motivation, and performance. Hamdan et al. (2025) found that competency has a positive and significant effect on both work motivation and employee performance. Similar findings were reported by Nahrisah et al. (2024), who confirmed that motivation mediates the relationship between competency and employee performance. Ananta et al. (2023) and Sudiantini et al. (2023) also confirmed the positive and significant effects of competency and job placement on employee performance. Putri et al. (2021) demonstrated that job placement has a positive and significant effect on work motivation, while Dewi et al. (2021) and Mulyadi et al. (2021) showed that work motivation positively and significantly affects employee performance. Nevertheless, inconsistencies remain, as several studies found that competency does not have a significant effect on performance, and Putri et al. (2021) as well as Rahmawati et al. (2023) reported that job placement does not significantly influence employee performance.

Conceptual Framework

Employee performance is a crucial element in determining the effectiveness and productivity of government organizations. In the context of the Secretariat General of the Ministry of Villages and PDT, employee performance is influenced by competency, which reflects employees' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as job placement suitability, which represents the alignment between employees' backgrounds, expertise, and interests with their assigned positions. Work motivation serves as a mediating variable that can strengthen or weaken the relationship between competency and job placement on employee performance. Employees who possess high competency and are appropriately placed may still demonstrate low performance in the absence of strong work motivation. Therefore, this study examines the effects of competency and job placement on employee performance with work motivation as a mediating variable to provide a comprehensive understanding of strategies for improving performance through optimal human resource management.

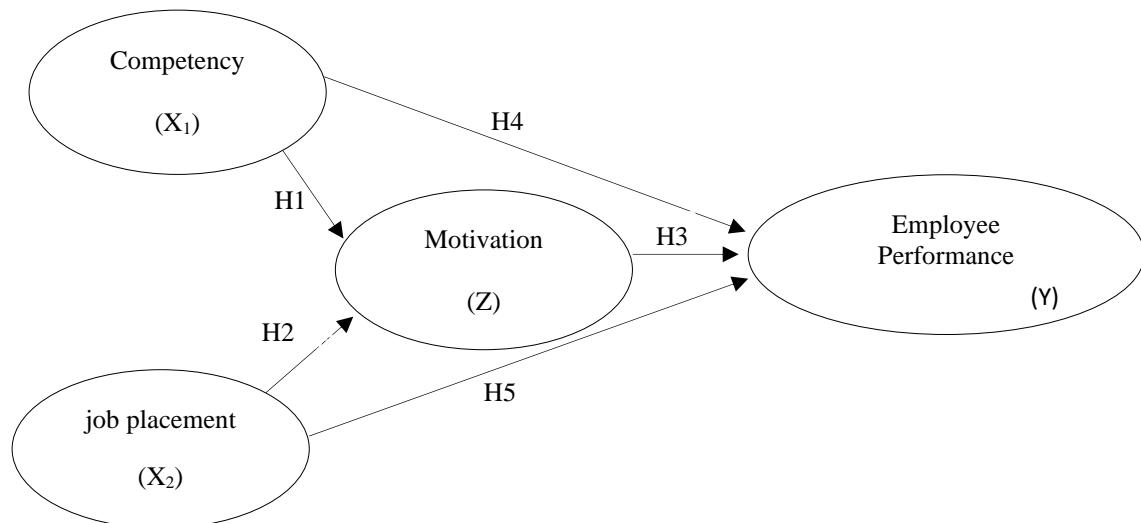


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Hypotheses

Based on theoretical and empirical studies, this research proposes five hypotheses. **H1:** Competency has a positive effect on work motivation, referring to the findings of Nahrisah et al. (2024) and Wanma et al. (2023). **H2:** Job placement has a positive effect on work motivation, based on the study by Putri et al. (2021). **H3:** Work motivation has a positive effect on employee performance, as supported by Dewi et al. (2021) and Mulyadi et al. (2021). **H4:** Competency has a positive effect on employee performance, in line with the findings of Ananta et al. (2023) and Sudiantini et al. (2023). **H5:** Job placement has a positive effect on employee performance, referring to the study by Hamsal et al. (2023).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach using causal and associative methods to identify cause–effect relationships among variables through statistical analysis of numerical data. The causal method is applied to examine the effects of competency and job placement on employee performance with work motivation as a mediating variable, while the associative approach is used to explore both direct and indirect relationships among the research constructs (Pasaribu et al., 2022). The study was conducted at the Secretariat General of the Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions in July 2025. The research population consisted of 473 civil servants who met the research criteria (Pasaribu et al., 2022). The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 10% margin of error, resulting in a minimum sample of 83 respondents. To enhance data representativeness, the study employed 120 respondents using a convenience sampling technique.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, employing a five-point Likert scale (1–5) to measure respondents' perceptions of competency, job placement (Hartatik, 2014), work motivation, and employee performance (Pasaribu et al., 2022). The questionnaire was systematically designed to minimize ambiguity and maximize response reliability. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize respondent characteristics and Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS version 3.3 (Pasaribu et al., 2022). PLS-SEM was selected due to its ability to analyze latent variables without requiring data normality assumptions through bootstrapping procedures.

Model evaluation consisted of outer model assessment to test convergent validity (factor loadings > 0.70), discriminant validity, composite reliability (> 0.70), Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50), and Cronbach's alpha (> 0.60). The inner model was evaluated to analyze causal relationships among latent variables by examining the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2), calculated using the formula $Q^2 = 1 - (1 - R1^2)(1 - R2^2)$, to assess the model's predictive power (Ghozali & Latan, 2015; Hair et al., 2019). Hypothesis testing was conducted to examine both direct and indirect effects, including mediation effects.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 120 civil servants employed at the Secretariat General of the Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions. Data were collected through an online questionnaire to obtain information on respondents' demographic profiles. Based on gender composition, the respondents were predominantly female, totaling 73 individuals (60.83%), while male respondents numbered 47 individuals (39.17%).

The age distribution indicated the highest concentration in the productive age group of 26–40 years, comprising 86 respondents (71.67%), followed by the 41–55 age group with 22 respondents (18.33%), the 18–25 age group with 10 respondents (8.33%), and those aged 56 years and above with only 2 respondents (1.67%). In terms of educational background, the respondents demonstrated adequate qualifications, with the majority holding undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral) totaling 96 respondents (80.00%), followed by Diploma graduates with 15 respondents (12.50%), and senior high school/vocational high school graduates with 9 respondents (7.50%). Regarding work experience, most respondents had more than 10 years of service, amounting to 47 respondents (39.17%). This was followed by those with 3–5 years of experience totaling 35 respondents (29.17%), 6–9 years of experience with 30 respondents (25.00%), and 0–2 years of experience with 8 respondents (6.67%).

Evaluation Outer Model

Indicator and Convergent Validity

The indicator validity test using outer loading values shows that all indicators meet the required threshold (> 0.70). The **Competency** variable consists of three indicators with loading values ranging from 0.843 to 0.901. The **Job Placement** variable comprises three indicators with loading values between 0.820 and 0.886. The **Work Motivation** variable includes five indicators with loading values ranging from 0.715 to 0.901. Meanwhile, the **Employee Performance** variable consists of five indicators with loading values between 0.710 and 0.836.

Tabel 1. Indicator Validity (Outer loadings)

| Laten Variabel | Indicator | Loading (>0.70) | Conclusion |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------------------|------------|
| Competency (X1) | K1 | 0,901 | Valid |
| | K2 | 0,883 | Valid |
| | K3 | 0,843 | Valid |
| Job Placement (X2) | PK1 | 0,82 | Valid |
| | PK2 | 0,824 | Valid |
| | PK3 | 0,886 | Valid |
| Motivation (Z) | MK1 | 0,859 | Valid |
| | MK2 | 0,772 | Valid |
| | MK3 | 0,715 | Valid |
| | MK4 | 0,751 | Valid |
| | MK5 | 0,901 | Valid |
| Employee Performance (Y) | KP1 | 0,726 | Valid |
| | KP3 | 0,803 | Valid |
| | KP4 | 0,836 | Valid |
| | KP5 | 0,782 | Valid |
| | KP6 | 0,71 | Valid |

The convergent validity test based on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values indicates satisfactory results. The Competency variable records the highest AVE value at 0.767, followed by Job Placement at 0.712, Work Motivation at 0.644, and Employee Performance at 0.597. All AVE values

exceed the minimum threshold of 0.50, indicating that the indicators adequately explain the variance of their respective latent variables.

Discriminant Validity and Reliability

The discriminant validity test using the Fornell–Larcker criterion shows that the square root of the AVE for each construct is higher than its correlations with other constructs, confirming that each variable demonstrates adequate discriminant validity. Reliability testing indicates that Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.798 to 0.861, while composite reliability values range from 0.881 to 0.908. Both measures exceed the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency of the research instrument.

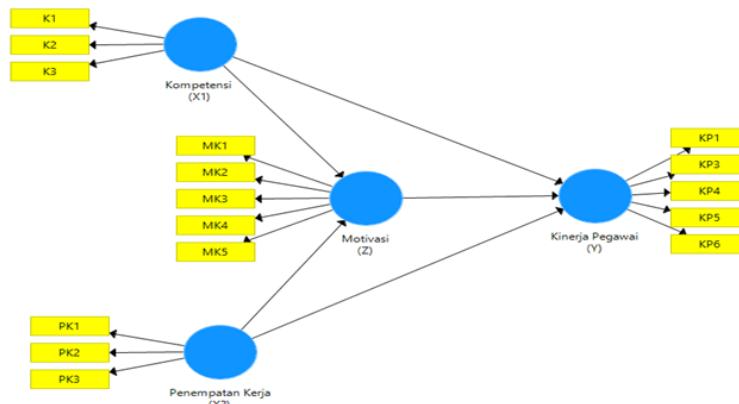


Figure 2. Research Path Analysis Model

The outer model evaluation was conducted through indicator testing, focusing on convergent validity and discriminant validity.

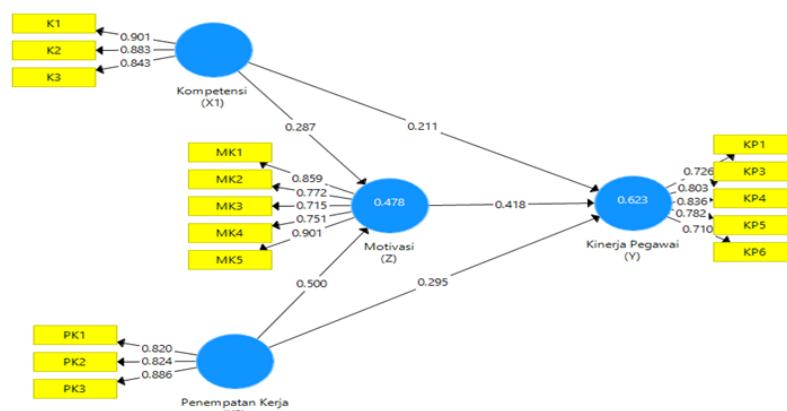


Figure 3. Results of the Outer Model Path Analysis

Structural (Inner) Model Evaluation

Direct Effect Testing

The results of the path coefficient analysis indicate that all hypotheses related to direct effects are supported with adequate levels of significance ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$). Competency has a positive and significant effect on Work Motivation, with a coefficient of 0.287 ($p\text{-value} = 0.001$). Job Placement demonstrates a positive and significant effect on Work Motivation, with the highest coefficient of 0.500 ($p\text{-value} = 0.000$). **Work Motivation** also has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance, with a coefficient of 0.418 ($p\text{-value} = 0.000$).

Table 2. Path Coefficient Testing Results

| Path Coefficient | Original Sample (O) | T Statistics | P Values | Conclusion |
|--|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Competency (X1) → Work Motivation (Z) | 0,287 | 3,476 | 0,001 | Significant |
| Job Placement (X2) → Work Motivation (Z) | 0,500 | 6,438 | 0 | Significant |

| | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Work Motivation (Z) → Employee Performance (Y) | 0,418 | 4,199 | 0 | Significant |
| Competency (X1) → Employee Performance (Y) | 0,211 | 2,446 | 0,015 | Significant |
| Job Placement (X2) → Employee Performance (Y) | 0,295 | 2,825 | 0,005 | Significant |

The direct effect of Competency on Employee Performance yields a coefficient of 0.211 (p-value = 0.015), while Job Placement has a direct effect on Employee Performance with a coefficient of 0.295 (p-value = 0.005). These findings confirm that improvements in competency and job placement suitability directly contribute to enhanced employee performance. Pengujian Pengaruh Tidak Langsung

The analysis of indirect effects confirms the mediating role of work motivation in the causal relationships among the variables. The indirect effect of competency on employee performance through work motivation yields a coefficient of 0.120 (p-value = 0.005), indicating significant partial mediation. Meanwhile, the indirect effect of job placement on employee performance through work motivation demonstrates a larger coefficient of 0.209 (p-value = 0.001).

Tabel 3. Specific Indirect Effects

| Path Coefficient | Original Sample (O) | T Statistics | P Values | Conclusion |
|---|---------------------|--------------|----------|-------------|
| Competency (X1) → Work Motivation (Z) → Employee Performance (Y) | 0,120 | 2,795 | 0,005 | Berpengaruh |
| Job Placement (X2) → Work Motivation (Z) → Employee Performance (Y) | 0,209 | 3,327 | 0,001 | Berpengaruh |

Predictif Power Of The Model

The evaluation of the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that the research model demonstrates substantial predictive power. The variables competency and job placement explain 47.8% of the variance in work motivation ($R^2 = 0.478$), indicating a moderate to strong level. Simultaneously, competency, job placement, and work motivation explain 62.3% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.623$), reflecting a strong predictive capacity.

Tabel 4. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

| Laten Variable | R Square | R Square Adjusted |
|--------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Employee Performance (Y) | 0,623 | 0,613 |
| Work Motivation (Z) → | 0,478 | 0,469 |

The predictive relevance test using the Stone–Geisser Q^2 procedure yields a value of 0.803, which substantially exceeds the threshold of 0.35 for a large predictive relevance category. This result confirms that the developed structural model has excellent predictive capability and is suitable for further inference, allowing the research findings to be generalized with a high level of confidence.

Discussion

This study involved 120 civil servants working at the Secretariat General of the Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions. The research model consists of two independent variables (Competence and Job Placement), one mediating variable (Work Motivation), and one dependent variable (Employee Performance). The model has fulfilled the requirements of validity and reliability through both outer and inner model evaluations. The analysis results indicate that all five direct causal paths are statistically significant. The original sample values demonstrate that all relationships among variables are positive, indicating that improvements in the independent variables are followed by increases in the dependent variable.

Effect of Competence on Work Motivation

The findings indicate a significant effect of competence on work motivation among civil servants at the Secretariat General. The ability of employees to adequately understand their job duties and institutional responsibilities contributes to the enhancement of individual competence, which in turn has a positive impact on their level of work motivation. Employees

with higher levels of competence tend to demonstrate greater enthusiasm and commitment in carrying out their tasks.

This result is supported by the study of Fu'ad and Aminnudin (2021), which confirms that competence has a significant influence on motivation. In this context, motivation reflects employees' efforts to perform their duties optimally in accordance with institutional responsibilities, including their willingness to undertake tasks beyond their formal job descriptions to ensure smooth organizational operations. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2017), which emphasizes that employee competence represents a key job resource capable of enhancing work motivation and work engagement.

Effect of Job Placement on Work Motivation

The analysis indicates that job placement has a significant effect on the work motivation of civil servants. Employees who possess adequate knowledge and capability to perform their tasks tend to receive compensation that is proportional to their duties and responsibilities, which in turn stimulates higher levels of motivation. This finding is supported by Hamdan et al. (2025), who argue that employees demonstrate stronger motivation when they are able to complete tasks efficiently and on time. In this context, higher competence enhances self-confidence and encourages greater work motivation. These results are consistent with the concept proposed by Hamdan et al. (2025), which emphasizes that appropriate job placement is achieved when employees are assigned to positions that match their expertise, experience, and educational background, enabling them to perform optimally.

Effect of Work Motivation on Employee Performance

The study finds that work motivation has a significant effect on the performance of civil servants. The provision of compensation that is aligned with workload and responsibilities is proven to be effective in enhancing employee motivation. As motivation increases, employee performance also improves, as reflected in their ability to collaborate effectively within teams. This finding is supported by Hamdan et al. (2025), who suggest that organizations should pay close attention to competence development through relevant and engaging training programs, as well as educational initiatives aimed at improving employee skills. This is further reinforced by the two-factor theory discussed by Hamdan et al. (2025), which identifies motivator factors and hygiene factors as the main categories influencing work motivation. Motivator factors—such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for self-development—directly enhance job satisfaction and encourage individuals to achieve higher performance outcomes.

Effect of Competence on Employee Performance

The results reveal that work competence has a significant effect on the performance of civil servants. Employees who possess a strong understanding of their job duties are able to enhance their individual competence, which subsequently has a positive impact on their performance. This finding is supported by Ananta et al. (2023), who show that employees exhibit values aligned with competence indicators that influence performance, such as high levels of competence, the ability to perform tasks effectively, positive work behavior, and strong interest in their jobs. These findings are further reinforced by the theory presented by Ananta et al. (2023), which states that competence represents a fundamental characteristic that affects individual effectiveness at work and has a positive and significant influence on both work motivation and employee performance.

Effect of Job Placement on Employee Performance

The analysis demonstrates that job placement has a significant effect on the performance of civil servants. Employees who possess sufficient knowledge to carry out their tasks are able to improve their performance and work effectively within teams. This result is supported by Ananta et al. (2023), who indicate that employees have values aligned with job placement indicators that influence performance, such as the ability to complete assigned tasks, possession of skills consistent with their educational background, and effective communication abilities. This finding is strengthened by the theory proposed

by Pongoh et al. (2018), which emphasizes that job placement is a critical stage in acquiring competent employees who are capable of achieving organizational goals.

The Mediating Role of Work Motivation

Based on the indirect effect analysis, work motivation plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between competence and employee performance. Employee competence enhances work motivation, and this increased motivation subsequently contributes to improved performance. This finding is supported by Pongoh et al. (2018), who state that key motivator factors—such as opportunities for self-development—contribute to achieving strong performance outcomes. In addition, appropriate job placement that aligns with employees' abilities, interests, and expertise is also proven to enhance work motivation. Employees who are placed in suitable positions tend to experience higher motivation and achieve more optimal performance. This is consistent with the theory proposed by Pongoh et al. (2018), which asserts that inappropriate job placement can lead to dissatisfaction, low motivation, and declining performance. Overall, work motivation plays a crucial role in mediating the relationship between both competence and job placement with employee performance, thereby strengthening the overall influence of these variables on performance outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study involving 120 civil servants at the Secretariat General of the Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions demonstrates that competence and job placement have a significant effect on employee performance, both directly and indirectly through the mediation of work motivation. Competence has a positive effect on work motivation (coefficient = 0.287) and employee performance (coefficient = 0.211), while job placement shows a stronger influence on work motivation (coefficient = 0.500) and employee performance (coefficient = 0.295). Work motivation is proven to be a significant mediating variable, with a coefficient of 0.418 on employee performance. The indirect effect of competence on performance through work motivation reaches 0.120, whereas the indirect effect of job placement reaches 0.209.

The research model exhibits strong predictive capacity, as indicated by an R^2 value of 0.623 for employee performance and 0.478 for work motivation, as well as a Q^2 value of 0.803, which reflects very high predictive relevance. These findings confirm that enhancing employee competence and ensuring appropriate job placement in accordance with individual expertise are effective strategies for improving organizational performance through increased work motivation.

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