

The Influence of Leadership on Employee Morale with Work Motivation as Mediation Effect

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ABSTRACT

The essence of leadership in any organization is to carefully design work structures and systems. Leadership not only guides the company's vision and goals, but also plays an important role in shaping corporate culture, motivating employees, and influencing overall morale. In fact, the phenomenon of research results in the field still shows contradictions and gaps in research results between leadership, work motivation and morale. To overcome these problems, the authors conducted quantitative research using path analysis techniques and SmartPLS software version 4.0.8.8 and used purposive sampling to select samples. The results showed that leadership has a positive effect on work motivation, as well as leadership has a positive effect on morale. Furthermore, work motivation has no effect on work enthusiasm and has no mediating role on leadership with work enthusiasm. Researchers recognize the limitations in this study, which are limited to leadership, work motivation and morale in one company only. For future research, it is recommended to consider adding additional variables or modifying the research model through a moderation approach. In addition, it is recommended to conduct research involving more than one sector to increase the generalizability of the findings.



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INTRODUCTION

The essence of leadership in any organization is to carefully design work structures and systems. The role of leadership in a corporate context is crucial. Leadership not only guides the company's vision and goals, but also plays a vital role in shaping the company culture, motivating employees and influencing overall morale. An effective leader has the ability to

provide clear direction, inspire teams, and make strategic decisions that lead to organizational growth and success. Leadership aims to coordinate the diverse interests of the various aspects and parties involved. According to Terry (2019), leadership can be explained as an activity that aims to guide people towards achieving the ultimate goals of the organization. Everyone is aware that the success of a company can be influenced by a leader who occupies a strategic position and possesses relevant critical skills. Therefore, we now clearly understand that leadership quality and organizational culture have a very significant impact on organizational performance and achievement (Permadi et al, 2023). As a manager, it is expected to have the ability and responsibility to motivate and create a work environment that can encourage employees to be more motivated, creative, productive, and innovative.

Dubrin (2015) defines leadership as an attempt to influence a large number of individuals through communication with the intention of achieving targets, either through instructions or orders, actions that encourage responses and actions from others, and produce positive changes. Leadership is considered a dynamic force that has an important role in motivating and coordinating organizational efforts to achieve goals, while having the ability to build trust and support among subordinates to achieve organizational goals. Rather, as outlined by Robbins (2018), leadership involves the ability to guide a group toward the realization of a vision or the achievement of a set of goals within an organizational framework.

High morale from employees is essential in their collaboration to achieve organizational targets. With a burning work ethic, achieving company goals will become more efficient and effective. However, if employees lose motivation at work, their morale will plummet. When morale drops, the situation becomes even more unfavorable, as employees are more likely to give up when faced with obstacles rather than trying to overcome them.

Morale refers to the mental state that influences an individual's effort in carrying out his or her duties with a high level of activity and responsibility. In the context of employees, work spirit reflects the level of enthusiasm they show in carrying out their duties and obligations in the company environment where they work. In accordance with Hasibuan (2019), work enthusiasm refers to the drive and seriousness of individuals to carry out their work optimally and regularly with the aim of achieving maximum performance. On the other hand, Tohardi (2017) defines morale as the capacity of a group of individuals to work diligently and consistently towards a common goal.

In this study, work motivation is used as a mediator, meaning that it mediates between leadership and morale. Work motivation, according to Hamzah (2017), is a person's encouragement to carry out work optimally and try their best in completing their duties. Hasibuan (2015) revealed that work motivation is a condition or energy that drives employees with goals focused on achieving company goals. Employees' work motivation is strengthened by a positive mental attitude towards the work situation, which encourages them to achieve the best performance. In the same perspective, Robbins & Judge (2013) explain that work motivation is the desire to provide extra effort towards achieving organizational goals that are driven by the ability of these efforts to meet individual needs.

In a work environment, employee motivation plays a major role in driving outstanding achievements. When employees feel motivated, they have a strong internal drive to achieve their targets and carry out their tasks with great enthusiasm. Motivation can come from a variety of sources, such as a sense of personal accomplishment, satisfaction with recognized work, development opportunities, or recognition of their contributions. Smart management also plays a very important role in maintaining employee motivation levels. This is done by providing constructive feedback, challenging employees according to their capabilities, and ensuring employees feel involved in the decision-making process. When employees feel motivated, they tend to be more innovative, productive, and loyal to the company, creating a dynamic and productive work environment.

During the pre-observation phase, the data obtained showed that leadership seemed to be less prominent in terms of providing understanding, guidance and detailed explanations of the tasks assigned to employees, especially for those with low levels of development and work experience. The impact of this can be seen, for example, in employee morale and motivation in completing tasks that are not aligned with company expectations. Previous studies on the impact of leadership on employee morale are still limited, and some of them show varying results or have differences with existing concepts or theories. Research that has been conducted by a number of researchers, such as Fiona et al. (2015), Rawat (2015), Noor & Ampornstira (2019), Lesmana et al. (2019), Daminik (2019), Larasati & Martono (2020) which concluded the results that leadership has a positive effect on employee morale. Meanwhile, research conducted by Zakani et al. (2021) states the result that leadership has an insignificant effect on morale.

The above explanation reveals the phenomenon as well as the research gap between leadership and morale. This inspired researchers to investigate the relationship between leadership and morale once again, this time by including work motivation as a mediating variable. The researchers believe that work motivation can influence the relationship between leadership and morale.

Employee motivation is closely related to the way a leader leads his team. When a leader gives clear direction, provides appropriate challenges, and provides opportunities for employees to grow, employee motivation tends to increase. This motivation then becomes the main driving factor that encourages employees to achieve company goals and do their work with passion. Previous studies conducted by Rawung (2013), Noviyanti et al. (2019), Nalim et al. (2020) and Ibrahim et al. (2022) concluded that leadership has a significant impact on work motivation. However, in contrast to the research of Dwipayana et al. (2023) stated the result that leadership does not have an impact on work motivation. Based on the literature review, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Leadership has a positive influence on work motivation.

A leader who is able to provide clear direction, provide support, and create an environment that motivates employees will tend to increase their morale. High morale is often the key to achieving optimal productivity and satisfactory work results. Several studies conducted by Ngambi (2011), Fiona et al. (2015), Rawat (2015), Noor & Ampornstira (2019), Lesmana et al. (2019), Daminik (2019), Larasati & Martono (2020) which concluded the results

that leadership has a positive effect on employee morale. Meanwhile, research conducted by Zakani et al. (2021) states the result that leadership has an insignificant effect on morale. Based on the literature review and the results of the research, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Leadership has a positive influence on morale.

Work motivation refers to the internal drive that drives a person to achieve goals and give their best at work. Morale, on the other hand, is the level of enthusiasm, dedication, and passion that an individual has for their work. Employees who feel motivated and have high work motivation tend to be more energized in carrying out their tasks. They have an internal drive to achieve the best results, learn and grow in their work. This motivation creates a productive and positive work environment, which in turn increases employee morale. Several studies conducted by Churcher (2019), Afrina (2020), Syafrina and Manik (2020), Sari (2020), Pratiwi and Firgiyani (2021) state that work motivation has a significant positive effect on work enthusiasm. However, research conducted by Zakani, et al (2021) states that work motivation has an insignificant effect on employee morale. Based on the literature review and the results of the research, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Work motivation has a positive influence on work motivation.

The study examined how leadership affects morale, and how employee motivation plays a role in mediating the relationship. The proposed hypothesis states that when a leader is able to provide clear direction, provide support, and recognize employees' achievements, it will usually increase their work motivation. When employees feel valued and challenged according to their abilities, their motivation tends to increase. This motivation then becomes the main driver in shaping employee morale. Several studies conducted by Sujana & Ardana (2020) and Iskandar (2023) state that work motivation mediates the effect of leadership style on employee performance and employee morale. Based on the literature review and the results of the research, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Work motivation mediates the effect of leadership on morale.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at the company PT Bhawana Digital Nusantara located in Kerobokan, Badung - Bali. In this study using quantitative methods and using primary data collected directly from the source. The population in this study as a whole became a research sample of 42 people, in this study using nonprobability sampling method where sampling uses saturated sampling technique (census) which is the entire population.

To obtain the research results, hypothesis testing was carried out with path analysis using the PLS approach with SmartPLS software version 4.0.8.8. After testing the data and analyzing the results by referring to the literature and related research, the next step is to draw conclusions and present some thoughts that can serve as guidance and recommendations for future research.

The variables used in this study are endogenous variables, namely work enthusiasm and exogenous variables, namely leadership (KEP), as well as mediating variables, namely work motivation (MK). Endogenous Variables: Endogenous variables are variables in a model or system whose values are determined by other variables in the model. In other words, endogenous

variables are dependent variables that are explained or influenced by other variables in the system or model. The endogenous variable in this study is employee morale (SK), with indicators such as: work productivity, work atmosphere, communication, absenteeism and human relations. Furthermore, exogenous variables, namely variables whose values are considered to be determined by factors outside the model or system. And the exogenous variable is leadership and its variable indicators, among others: ways of communicating, providing motivation, leadership skills and decision making.

Mediating Variables: A mediating variable is a variable that sits between the independent variable (cause) and the dependent variable (outcome) in a relationship or model. Mediating variables help explain the process or mechanism of how the independent variable affects the dependent variable. Mediating variables provide an understanding of what intermediaries or pathways may occur between the cause and outcome variables. The mediating variable in this study is work motivation with the following indicators: job satisfaction, achievements, opportunities for advancement, recognition of others, career development and responsibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the examination of the data utilizing the SmartPLS software, numerous discoveries were acquired, and these can be elucidated in the subsequent table.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Item Code	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
KEP	KEP1.1	2	5	3.762	0.750
	KEP1.2	2	4	3.238	0.781
	KEP1.3	2	5	3.476	0.763
	KEP1.4	1	4	3.095	0.868
MK	MK1.1	1	5	3.286	0.933
	MK1.2	1	5	3.095	1.042
	MK1.3	2	5	3.381	0.722
	MK1.4	1	5	3.643	0.811
	MK1.5	1	5	3.214	1.013
	MK1.6	1	5	3.167	0.974
SK	SK2.1	2	5	3.833	1.022
	SK2.2	3	5	3.881	0.730
	SK2.3	2	5	3.929	0.799
	SK2.4	3	5	4.071	0.737
	SK2.5	2	5	4.500	0.824

Source: Data Processed, 2023

Note. KEP = Leadership, MK = Work Motivation, SK = Employee Morale

The state and characteristics of the data related to the variables studied are summarized in the table above. This includes the item code which is an indicator of each variable, the minimum and maximum values, as well as the average and standard deviation.

Table 2. Convergent Validity and Internal Consistency Reliability

Construct	Item Code	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
KEP	KEP1.1	0.776	0.842	0.854	0.683
	KEP1.2	0.921			
	KEP1.3	0.731			
	KEP1.4	0.865			
MK	MK1.1	0.880	0.905	0.910	0.683
	MK1.2	0.894			
	MK1.3	0.815			
	MK1.4	0.681			
	MK1.5	0.863			
	MK1.6	0.805			
SK	SK2.1	0.799	0.859	0.863	0.640
	SK2.2	0.815			
	SK2.3	0.826			
	SK2.4	0.786			
	SK2.5	0.773			

Source: Data Processed, 2023

Note. KEP = Leadership, MK = Work Motivation, SK = Employee Morale

On the basis of the above table, the hypotheses have been tested through a two-step approach, namely the use of measurement models to assess the validity and reliability of the instruments, and the use of structural models to test the hypotheses formulated. In addition, in the measurement model stage, the assessment includes the evaluation of the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). Outer loadings should be > 0.4, AVE should be > 0.5, and CR should be > 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Confidence Interval		Decision
						5.00%	95.00%	
Direct Effect								
H1	KEP -> MK	0.897	0.022	40.625	0.000	0.846	0.925	Supported
H2	KEP -> SK	0.718	0.241	2.981	0.001	0.349	1.145	Supported
H3	MK -> SK	0.051	0.281	0.180	0.428	-0.472	0.459	Not Supported

Indirect Effect

H4	KEP -> MK -> SK	0.045	0.254	0.179	0.429	-0.431	0.412	Not Supported
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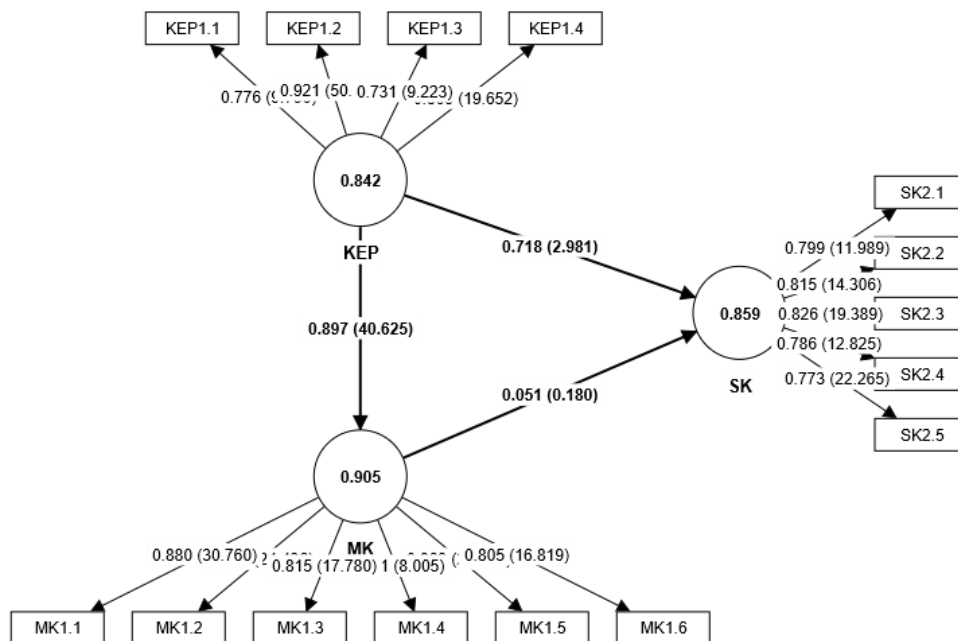
Source: Data Processed, 2023

Note. KEP = Leadership, MK = Work Motivation, SK = Employee Morale

The results of the direct effect test, as shown in Table 3, indicate that the leadership variable on work motivation supports the hypothesis, with a t-value of 40.62 and a p-value of 0.000. In this case, leadership on morale showed results that supported the hypothesis, with a t-value of 2.981 and a p-value of 0.001. On the other hand, with regard to work motivation, it was found that this variable did not support the hypothesis in relation to morale, with a t-value of 0.180 and a p-value of 0.428.

Furthermore, tests related to indirect effects, which consider the mediating role of work motivation in the relationship between variables, as presented in Table 3, indicate that work motivation variables are not effective as mediators in mediating the effect of leadership on morale. It can be concluded that the work motivation variable cannot be considered as a relevant mediating variable in this research framework, as the significance test shows that the construct t-value is 0.179 and the construct p-value is 0.429.

The next step is to check the coefficient of the parameter and the t-statistic significance value to see how significant the (hypothesized) influence is. Figure 1 illustrates the structural model of this study.



Source: Data Processed, 2023

Figure 1
Initial PLS-Path Model

The Influence of Leadership on Work Motivation

The first hypothesis test shows that the P value of 0.001 is less than the significant level (0.05), which indicates that the first hypothesis is accepted. This means that leadership has an impact on employees' work motivation. Effective leaders can play a key role in motivating people to work better, contribute maximally, and achieve common goals. Leaders' support, whether in overcoming work obstacles, resolving conflicts, or providing resources, reflects concern for the well-being of the team. Recognizing accomplishments is key to motivating employees, creating a sense of pride, and encouraging positive contributions. Building good relationships with team members through open communication, cooperation, and mutual trust is the foundation of an effective team that encourages them to contribute enthusiastically and optimally to the success of the team or organization. This finding is similar to studies conducted by Rawung (2013), Noviyanti et al. (2019), Nalim et al. (2020), and Ibrahim et al. (2022) who found that leadership has a significant impact on work motivation.

The Influence of Leadership on Employee Morale

The second hypothesis test shows that the P-value of 0.000 is less than the significant level (0.05), which indicates that the second hypothesis is accepted. This means that leadership has an impact on the morale of the employees. Leaders play an important role in shaping the level of morale, which may influence various aspects of employee performance and satisfaction in an organization. Leaders who are able to provide clear direction, support, recognize achievement, and build good relationships with team members tend to create a positive work atmosphere, which in turn can increase employee morale. High morale can have positive effects such as increased productivity, quality of work, and employee involvement in achieving organizational goals. This finding is similar to studies conducted by Fiona et al. (2015), Rawat (2015), Noor & Ampornstira (2019), Lesmana et al. (2019), Daminik (2019), and Larasati & Martono (2020), who found that leadership has a positive effect on morale.

The Influence of Work Motivation on Employee Morale

The third hypothesis test shows that the P-value is 0.428 which is more than the significant level (0.05), which indicates that the third hypothesis is rejected. This means that work motivation does not have any effect on the morale of the employees. Work motivation alone does not always lead to high morale if it is not accompanied by other supporting factors. Such a situation may arise if the work motivation provided by the leader or the organization does not match the needs or expectations of the individual, or if there are other factors that are more significant in influencing morale, such as an uncondusive work environment, lack of clarity in the direction or goals of the organization, or lack of support from leadership. This finding is similar to research conducted by Zakani, et al (2021), which states that work motivation has no effect on employee morale.

The Mediating Effect of Work Motivation on Leadership on Employee Morale

The fourth hypothesis test shows that the P-value is 0.429, which is more than the significant level (0.05), indicating that the fourth hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that work

motivation could not play a mediating role in the relationship between leadership and morale. Leadership has a central role in the shaping of work conditions and work atmosphere. Effective leadership should motivate employees to work with passion by providing clear direction, support, and recognition. However, work motivation does not seem to be the most important factor that explains how leadership effects lead to higher work ethic. In addition, certain individual characteristics or organizational dynamics may also play a role in influencing morale, so work motivation may not adequately mediate the relationship between leadership and morale. It may also be the case that in certain situations or contexts, leadership style has a significant direct impact on morale, such that work motivation is not needed as a strong mediator. This finding is not consistent with the research conducted by Sujana & Ardana (2020) and Iskandar (2023), which states that work motivation is able to mediate the influence of leadership on employee morale.

CONCLUSION

Based on data analysis and empirical research, the following conclusions can be drawn: 1) leadership has a positive effect on work motivation, 2) leadership has a positive effect on employee morale, 3) work motivation has no effect on employee morale, 4) work motivation was unable to mediate the effect of leadership on employee morale.

Several limitations were encountered during the conduct of this study. These limitations can serve as guidelines for future research focusing on similar topics. The two main limitations identified in this study include, first, the limitation of the sample size, which may affect the ability to generalize the research findings to the broader population. Second, the presence of incomplete data not included in the research sample could limit the analysis and formulation of conclusions drawn from the study.

There are several limitations to this study, and it is recommended that future researchers address these by including additional variables, such as control variables, in their research designs. Furthermore, it is hoped that future researchers can increase the number of observations and the duration of the study. It is also suggested that researchers modify the research model by including moderating variables.

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