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Job Satisfaction as a Selective Mediator of Employee Performance: The Roles of Performance Appraisal, Work Motivation, and Competence at KPP Pratama Kepanjen

Anita Yushardini¹, Siwi Dyah Ratnasari²

¹STIE Malangkuçęwara, Malang, Indonesia

email: siwiratna@stie-mce.ac.id

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menguji apakah kepuasan kerja berperan sebagai mediator selektif yang menghubungkan penilaian kinerja, motivasi kerja, dan kompetensi dengan kinerja pegawai di KPP Pratama Kepanjen. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif eksplanatori dengan 76 pegawai yang dilibatkan melalui pendekatan sensus. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner terstruktur berskala Likert lima tingkat dan dianalisis dengan Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Penilaian kinerja ($\beta = 0,746$; $p = 0,001$) dan motivasi kerja ($\beta = 0,576$; $p < 0,001$) berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kepuasan kerja, sedangkan kompetensi tidak berpengaruh signifikan ($\beta = -0,473$; $p = 0,061$). Kepuasan kerja berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kinerja pegawai ($\beta = 0,326$; $p = 0,034$), sementara pengaruh langsung penilaian kinerja, motivasi kerja, dan kompetensi terhadap kinerja tidak signifikan. Pengaruh tidak langsung hanya signifikan pada jalur motivasi kerja melalui kepuasan kerja ($\beta = 0,188$; $p = 0,039$). Dengan demikian, kepuasan kerja bukan mediator universal, melainkan jalur psikologis tidak langsung yang mengubah motivasi kerja menjadi kinerja. Temuan ini membedakan dampak sikap dari sistem penilaian formal dan mekanisme motivasional yang mendukung kinerja pegawai sektor publik.

ABSTRACT

This study examines whether job satisfaction acts as a selective mediator linking performance appraisal, work motivation, and competence to employee performance at KPP Pratama Kepanjen. A quantitative explanatory design was used with 76 employees included through a census approach. Data were collected using a structured five-point Likert questionnaire and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Performance appraisal ($\beta = 0.746$; $p = 0.001$) and work motivation ($\beta = 0.576$; $p < 0.001$) significantly increased job satisfaction, whereas competence did not ($\beta = -0.473$; $p = 0.061$). Job satisfaction significantly improved employee performance ($\beta = 0.326$; $p = 0.034$), while the direct effects of performance appraisal, work motivation, and competence on performance were not significant. The indirect effect was significant only for work motivation through job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.188$; $p = 0.039$). Thus, job satisfaction is not a universal mediator; it operates as

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an indirect-only psychological pathway that converts work motivation into performance. The findings contribute to public-sector human resource management by distinguishing the attitudinal effect of formal appraisal from the motivational mechanism that ultimately supports employee performance.

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is a strategic concern in public organizations because it is directly associated with service quality, administrative accountability, and the achievement of institutional targets. Contemporary performance management therefore extends beyond annual ratings and emphasizes clear expectations, continuous dialogue, feedback, and employee development (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). In Indonesian public institutions, this orientation is reinforced by the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Regulation No. 6 of 2022, which positions civil servant performance management as an ongoing process involving target alignment, performance dialogue, and employee development.

KPP Pratama Kepanjen operates in a tax-administration environment characterized by formal procedures, measurable targets, regulatory compliance, and a structured appraisal system. The empirical issue examined in this study is not an assumed decline in office performance, because publishable internal trend data were not available, but the unresolved mechanism through which formal appraisal, employee motivation, and competence are translated into individual performance in a target-intensive public organization. A formal system can clarify standards and create a sense of fairness, yet it may not automatically change behavior unless employees experience recognition, meaningful work, supportive supervision, and opportunities to apply their abilities.

Three research gaps motivate the study. First, the empirical gap concerns inconsistent findings: performance appraisal, motivation, and competence have been reported as significant predictors of performance in some studies, whereas other studies find weak, indirect, or context-dependent effects (Hajiali et al., 2022; Keltu, 2024; Riyanto et al., 2021). Second, the contextual gap arises because evidence from public tax offices remains limited even though these organizations combine strong formal controls with demanding service and revenue targets. Third, the theoretical gap concerns the status of job satisfaction as a mediator. Prior studies often treat job satisfaction as a general mechanism, but the mediator may operate selectively, depending on whether the antecedent is an organizational system, an internal motivational state, or an individual capability.

Job satisfaction is therefore positioned as a psychological response that may explain why some human resource inputs translate into performance while others do not. A fair

appraisal may increase satisfaction by strengthening perceived recognition and procedural clarity. Motivation may increase satisfaction when work allows employees to fulfil needs for achievement, affiliation, and influence. Competence may increase satisfaction and performance only when employees can use their capabilities in appropriately designed roles. These mechanisms are conceptually distinct and should not be assumed to produce identical mediation patterns. Accordingly, this study analyzes the direct effects of performance appraisal, work motivation, competence, and job satisfaction on employee performance, as well as the indirect effects of the three antecedents through job satisfaction. Its contribution is to test whether job satisfaction functions as a universal mediator or as a selective pathway in a public-sector tax office.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrative Theoretical Framework

Organizational behavior provides the overarching perspective for this study by explaining employee performance as the result of interactions among individual characteristics, organizational systems, and work attitudes. Within this framework, Social Exchange Theory clarifies the performance-appraisal mechanism: employees who perceive organizational procedures as fair and developmental are more likely to respond with positive attitudes, including job satisfaction. McClelland's needs perspective explains the motivational mechanism, while the happy-worker-productive-worker proposition links positive job attitudes to performance. These perspectives are used as complementary mechanisms rather than as separate, competing theories.

The revised framework does not rely on Ability-Motivation-Opportunity Theory because opportunity is not measured in the empirical model. Nevertheless, opportunity remains relevant when interpreting the competence findings: an employee may possess adequate knowledge and skills but may not be able to convert them into performance when role design, placement, autonomy, or developmental assignments are limited. This interpretive point is treated as a boundary condition rather than as a tested construct.

Performance Appraisal, Job Satisfaction, and Employee Performance

Performance appraisal is a systematic process for evaluating employee contributions against agreed standards and using the results for feedback, development, recognition, and personnel decisions (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). When the process is transparent and understandable, employees are more likely to perceive procedural fairness and recognition. Social exchange logic predicts that this favorable treatment will be reciprocated through positive attitudes toward the job. Performance appraisal may also influence performance by

clarifying priorities and signaling which behaviors are valued; however, the effect is likely to weaken when appraisal results are not followed by feedback, coaching, or development.

H1: Performance appraisal positively affects job satisfaction.

H2: Performance appraisal positively affects employee performance.

Work Motivation, Job Satisfaction, and Employee Performance

Work motivation refers to the direction, intensity, and persistence of effort. In the present study, it is represented by needs for achievement, affiliation, and power or influence. Employees are more likely to feel satisfied when their work provides meaningful achievement, constructive relationships, and opportunities to contribute. Motivation can also stimulate effort toward work targets, although its performance effect may depend on whether the work environment provides valued outcomes and a satisfying work experience (Riyanto et al., 2021; Siok et al., 2023).

H3: Work motivation positively affects job satisfaction.

H4: Work motivation positively affects employee performance.

Competence, Job Satisfaction, and Employee Performance

Competence comprises the knowledge, skills, and work attitudes required to perform a role effectively. Competent employees should experience greater task mastery and confidence, which can support satisfaction and performance. Yet capability alone may be insufficient when jobs are highly standardized or when placement, career progression, and recognition do not differentiate the use of competence. Empirical evidence therefore suggests that competence-performance relationships are context dependent (Hajiali et al., 2022; Martini et al., 2020).

H5: Competence positively affects job satisfaction.

H6: Competence positively affects employee performance.

Job Satisfaction and Its Mediating Role

Job satisfaction is a positive evaluative state arising from employees' assessment of pay, the work itself, supervision, coworker relationships, and promotion opportunities. Satisfied employees are more likely to sustain constructive work behavior and commit effort to organizational goals. The happy-worker-productive-worker proposition therefore predicts a positive relationship between satisfaction and performance.

As a mediator, job satisfaction explains an attitudinal conversion process. Performance appraisal may generate satisfaction through fairness and recognition; motivation may generate satisfaction through need fulfilment; and competence may generate satisfaction through

mastery and effective role performance. Job satisfaction can then encourage stronger performance. Because these antecedents operate through different mechanisms, the indirect effects are tested separately rather than assumed to be universal.

H7: Job satisfaction positively affects employee performance.

H8: Job satisfaction mediates the effect of performance appraisal on employee performance.

H9: Job satisfaction mediates the effect of work motivation on employee performance.

H10: Job satisfaction mediates the effect of competence on employee performance.

Research Conceptual Model

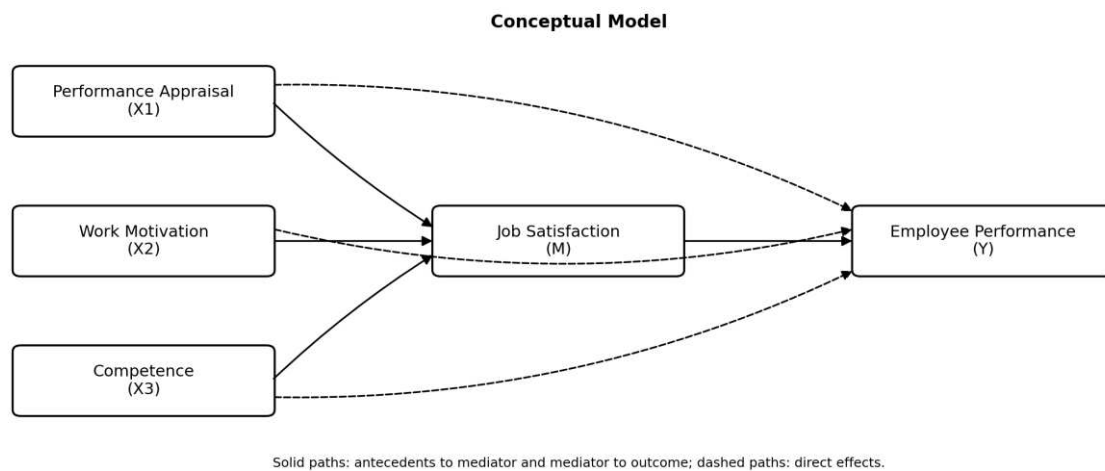


Figure 1. Research conceptual model
Source: Developed by the authors, 2026.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design, Setting, and Respondents

The study used a quantitative explanatory design to test direct and indirect relationships among latent variables. It was conducted at KPP Pratama Kepanjen, an Indonesian public-sector tax office. The fieldwork began in March 2025. The study adopted a census approach because the defined population was relatively small; the final analytical dataset contained 76 usable questionnaires from employees included in the study.

Eligible respondents were employees assigned to KPP Pratama Kepanjen during the data-collection period and sufficiently familiar with the office's work and appraisal processes to evaluate the questionnaire items. Questionnaires with substantial missing responses or uniform response patterns were to be excluded from analysis. The exact number of questionnaires distributed, the closing date of collection, and the response-rate calculation should be verified against the original field log before final resubmission. Because the data

come from a single office, inference is limited to the studied organizational context and should not be generalized to all tax offices without replication.

Measures and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The measures were adapted from the underlying research instrument and established conceptual sources. Table 1 summarizes the operationalization. The English terms performance appraisal, work motivation, competence, job satisfaction, and employee performance are used consistently throughout the article.

Construct	Indicators	Items	Primary adaptation source
Performance appraisal	Quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost efficiency as reflected in the appraisal process	4	Adapted from performance-management criteria in Armstrong and Taylor (2023)
Work motivation	Need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power/influence	3	McClelland needs framework operationalized by Siok et al. (2023)
Competence	Knowledge, skills, and work attitude	3	Martini et al. (2020)
Job satisfaction	Pay, work itself, supervision, coworker relationships, and promotion opportunities	5	Robbins and Judge (2024)
Employee performance	Work planning, work execution, reporting, and assessment of work outcomes	4	Adapted from public-sector performance dimensions used by Natalia et al. (2022)

Table 1. Operational definition and measurement of variables

Data Analysis

The model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. The reflective measurement model was assessed using individual outer loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, reliability coefficient ρ_A , and composite reliability (ρ_C). Outer loadings above 0.70, AVE above 0.50, and reliability coefficients between 0.70 and 0.95 were treated as acceptable.

The structural model was evaluated using R^2 and adjusted R^2 , path coefficients (β), bootstrap standard deviations, t-statistics, p-values, and specific indirect effects. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5% level (two-tailed; $t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$). Direct and indirect effects were reported separately. The supplied SmartPLS output did not include HTMT, the complete cross-loading matrix, inner VIF, f^2 , Q^2 , or bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence intervals; therefore, those diagnostics were not estimated or reconstructed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

The 76 respondents were relatively balanced by gender. Most respondents were 30-40 years old, more than half had worked for over 15 years, and the largest educational group held a bachelor's degree. The mature tenure profile is relevant when interpreting the competence findings because standardized experience may reduce variation in perceived competence.

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Men	42	55%
	Women	34	45%
Age	< 30 years	15	20%
	30-40 years	29	38%
	41-50 years	16	21%
	> 50 years	16	21%
Tenure	< 5 years	0	0%
	5-10 years	23	30%
	11-15 years	13	17%
	> 15 years	40	53%
Education	Diploma (D3)	14	18%
	Bachelor's degree	39	51%
	Master's degree	12	16%
	Other	11	15%

Table 2. Respondent characteristics

Measurement Model

All 19 indicators had outer loadings above 0.70, ranging from 0.765 to 0.926, supporting indicator reliability. AVE values ranged from 0.679 to 0.830, confirming convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and rho_C were all above 0.70 and below 0.95, indicating satisfactory internal consistency without excessive item redundancy. The exact values below replace the previously rounded and partly inconsistent reliability summary.

Construct	Loading range	Cronbach's α	rho_A	rho_C	AVE
Performance appraisal	0.845-0.923	0.910	0.915	0.937	0.789
Work motivation	0.882-0.910	0.880	0.884	0.926	0.807

Competence	0.898-0.926	0.898	0.904	0.936	0.830
Job satisfaction	0.765-0.878	0.881	0.881	0.913	0.679
Employee performance	0.856-0.913	0.915	0.918	0.940	0.797

Table 3. Convergent validity and construct reliability

Table 4. Individual outer loadings

Indicator	Construct	Outer loading
X11	Performance appraisal	0.845
X12	Performance appraisal	0.874
X13	Performance appraisal	0.923
X14	Performance appraisal	0.908
X21	Competence	0.926
X22	Competence	0.909
X23	Competence	0.898
X31	Work motivation	0.902
X32	Work motivation	0.882
X33	Work motivation	0.910
Y11	Employee performance	0.913
Y12	Employee performance	0.902
Y13	Employee performance	0.900
Y14	Employee performance	0.856
Z11	Job satisfaction	0.839
Z12	Job satisfaction	0.792
Z13	Job satisfaction	0.840
Z14	Job satisfaction	0.765
Z15	Job satisfaction	0.878

The model explained 68.7% of the variance in job satisfaction (adjusted $R^2 = 0.674$) and 76.7% of the variance in employee performance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.753$). These values indicate strong in-sample explanatory power. Bootstrap results for direct and specific indirect effects are reported with standard deviations, t-statistics, and p-values.

Endogenous construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Interpretation
Job satisfaction	0.687	0.674	Strong in-sample explanatory power
Employee performance	0.767	0.753	Strong in-sample explanatory power

Table 5. Explanatory power of the structural model

Job Satisfaction as a Selective Mediator of Employee Performance

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Hypothesis	Direct path	β	STDEV	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	Performance appraisal → Job satisfaction	0.746	0.224	3.326	0.001	Supported
H2	Performance appraisal → Employee performance	0.388	0.221	1.760	0.078	Not supported
H3	Work motivation → Job satisfaction	0.576	0.122	4.709	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Work motivation → Employee performance	0.283	0.181	1.566	0.117	Not supported
H5	Competence → Job satisfaction	-0.473	0.253	1.872	0.061	Not supported
H6	Competence → Employee performance	-0.049	0.196	0.250	0.803	Not supported
H7	Job satisfaction → Employee performance	0.326	0.154	2.115	0.034	Supported

Table 6. Direct effects with bootstrapping results

Hypothesis	Specific indirect effect	β	STDEV	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H8	Performance appraisal → Job satisfaction → Employee performance	0.243	0.155	1.569	0.117	Not supported
H9	Work motivation → Job satisfaction → Employee	0.188	0.091	2.065	0.039	Supported: indirect-only mediation

	performance					
H10	Competence → Job satisfaction → Employee performance	-0.154	0.124	1.246	0.213	Not supported

Table 7. Specific indirect effects with bootstrapping results

H8 was not supported because the indirect effect of performance appraisal on employee performance through job satisfaction was not significant ($\beta = 0.243$; $t = 1.569$; $p = 0.117$). H9 was supported because the indirect effect of work motivation through job satisfaction was significant ($\beta = 0.188$; $t = 2.065$; $p = 0.039$), while the direct motivation-to-performance path remained non-significant ($\beta = 0.283$; $t = 1.566$; $p = 0.117$); this pattern indicates indirect-only mediation. H10 was not supported because the indirect competence pathway was not significant ($\beta = -0.154$; $t = 1.246$; $p = 0.213$).

The competence-to-job-satisfaction coefficient was negative and close to, but above, the 5% significance threshold ($\beta = -0.473$; $t = 1.872$; $p = 0.061$). This statistically inconclusive result should not be interpreted as evidence that competence reduces satisfaction. The direction requires further assessment using HTMT, cross-loadings, inner VIF, and item-level distributions once those outputs are exported from the original project.

DISCUSSION

Performance Appraisal Shapes Satisfaction but Not Performance Directly

Performance appraisal had a strong positive effect on job satisfaction, supporting H1, but its direct effect on employee performance was not significant, rejecting H2. This pattern indicates that employees primarily experience appraisal as a source of clarity, recognition, and perceived fairness. It does not show that the appraisal process itself changes work outcomes. The non-significant indirect effect through job satisfaction further indicates that satisfaction alone is insufficient to convert appraisal into performance in this sample.

The result refines Social Exchange Theory in a formal public-sector setting. Fair appraisal can improve employees' attitudes toward the organization, but a favorable attitude does not automatically produce behavioral change when the appraisal is weakly linked to developmental action. For KPP Pratama Kepanjen, the implication is not simply to repeat the appraisal cycle, but to connect each appraisal to a documented feedback conversation, an individual development plan, and follow-up responsibilities for both employee and supervisor.

Job Satisfaction Selectively Converts Motivation into Performance

Work motivation significantly increased job satisfaction, while its direct effect on employee performance was not significant. The specific indirect effect through job satisfaction was significant, supporting H3 and H9 but not H4. This is an indirect-only mediation pattern: motivated employees performed better only when their motivational energy was accompanied by a satisfying work experience.

The finding provides the central theoretical contribution of the study. Job satisfaction is not a universal bridge between all human resource antecedents and performance. It specifically converts achievement, affiliation, and influence needs into productive behavior when employees experience recognition, supportive relationships, and meaningful development opportunities. This result is consistent with the view that motivation requires valued organizational experiences before it becomes sustained performance (Riyanto et al., 2021).

Competence Shows a Negative, Non-Significant Pattern

Competence did not significantly predict either job satisfaction or employee performance, and its indirect effect was also not significant. The negative coefficient toward satisfaction is theoretically unexpected and should be interpreted cautiously. Because $p = 0.061$, the result is statistically inconclusive rather than evidence of a negative causal effect. Without VIF, HTMT, and item-level distribution diagnostics, suppression, construct overlap, restricted variance, or measurement artifacts cannot be ruled out.

A contextual interpretation is nevertheless possible. More than half of the respondents had over 15 years of service, and competence may have become a baseline requirement rather than a differentiating resource. In a standardized bureaucracy, highly competent employees may also expect greater autonomy, recognition, or career progression; when those opportunities are not differentiated, competence may not increase satisfaction. This interpretation is consistent with the idea that capabilities create value only when role design and organizational opportunities allow them to be used, but it must be tested in future studies rather than treated as a proven explanation.

Job Satisfaction Improves Employee Performance

Job satisfaction had a positive and significant effect on employee performance, supporting H7. Employees who evaluate their work, supervision, coworker relationships, rewards, and promotion opportunities positively are more likely to maintain constructive work behavior and complete responsibilities consistently. The result supports the happy-

worker-productive-worker proposition in this organizational context, while the mediation results show that the effect is selective rather than universal.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

The study concludes that performance appraisal and work motivation improve job satisfaction, and job satisfaction improves employee performance. However, performance appraisal, work motivation, and competence do not directly improve employee performance. Job satisfaction mediates only the effect of work motivation on employee performance; it does not mediate the appraisal-performance or competence-performance relationships. The central conclusion is therefore that job satisfaction is a selective psychological pathway rather than a universal mediator.

KPP Pratama Kepanjen should prioritize three actions: link appraisal results to structured feedback and individual development plans; convert motivation into satisfaction through recognition, supportive supervision, and transparent development opportunities; and activate competence through role alignment, targeted assignments, and competency-based development. These recommendations should be implemented with measurable follow-up indicators rather than as general HR initiatives.

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