

The Role of Work Motivation as a Mediator in the Relationship Between Competence and Bureaucratic Leadership on Employee Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to examine the role of work motivation as a mediating variable in the relationship between competence and bureaucratic leadership on employee satisfaction. Competence refers to the abilities, skills, and knowledge possessed by employees to carry out tasks effectively, while bureaucratic leadership focuses on the implementation of strict rules, procedures, and hierarchies in organizational management. This study used a quantitative approach with a survey method involving a sample of 117 Civil Servants at the Regional Revenue Agency of Mojokerto Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)-PLS techniques to test the direct and indirect effects between variables. The results indicate that work motivation plays a significant role as a mediator, strengthening the influence of competence and bureaucratic leadership on employee satisfaction. This finding confirms that increased work motivation can lead to higher job satisfaction, even within a bureaucratic and rule-oriented organizational structure.

KEYWORDS: Competence; Bureaucratic leadership; Work Motivation; Employee Satisfaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of job satisfaction among State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in Indonesia is a crucial issue in efforts to improve bureaucratic performance and the quality of public services. ASN job satisfaction reflects the extent to which employees are satisfied with their jobs, work environment, compensation, relationships with superiors and coworkers, and career development opportunities (Robbins & Judge, 2022). However, various surveys and reports indicate that the level of ASN job satisfaction in many government agencies remains relatively low and varies across regions and ministries/institutions (State Administration Institute, 2023).

One cause of low ASN job satisfaction is the mismatch between workload and rewards received. Many ASN complain that the reward system is not fully performance-based, thus undermotivating achievement (BKN, 2022). Furthermore, a bureaucratic and inflexible work environment often leads to boredom and limited room for innovation. Other contributing factors are superior leadership and organizational culture. Civil servants working in agencies with an open, communicative, and supportive work climate tend to have higher levels of satisfaction than those working in hierarchical and authoritarian environments (Gibson et al., 2012).

On the other hand, the bureaucratic reforms initiated by the government have had positive impacts through increased transparency, performance appraisal systems, and opportunities for competency development (Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform, 2023). Although its implementation has not been evenly distributed, this policy shows signs of improvement in the job satisfaction of civil servants. Therefore, understanding and managing the factors that influence job satisfaction are key to creating professional, productive, and integrity-based civil servants (Hasibuan, 2019).

Various studies have shown that employee competence and bureaucratic leadership have a significant influence on employee job satisfaction, particularly in the public sector, which is characterized by a hierarchical structure and strict regulations. Employee competency, which encompasses knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes, has been shown to directly contribute to effective task performance and positive perceptions of work (Robbins & Judge, 2022; Rivai & Sagala, 2019). Employees with high competency tend to be more confident, able to adapt to change, and satisfied because their performance is recognized by the organization (Luthans, 2011; Noe et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, bureaucratic leadership plays a dual role in creating job satisfaction. On the one hand, leadership that emphasizes adherence to procedures, discipline, and hierarchy can maintain order and fairness in the organization (Weber, 1947; Thoha, 2019). However, if applied rigidly without considering employee psychological needs, this leadership style can reduce motivation

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and job satisfaction (Denhardt et al., 2019; Northouse, 2021). Several studies in the Indonesian government environment show that the effectiveness of bureaucratic leadership depends on the leader's ability to balance formal authority with a participatory and empathetic approach (Dwiyanto, 2018; Sutrisno, 2021).

The combination of strong employee competencies and adaptive bureaucratic leadership has been proven to increase job satisfaction through increased efficiency, role clarity, and a sense of job security. Therefore, these two factors are key to building a professional, productive, and service-oriented bureaucracy (Rivai & Sagala, 2019; Dwiyanto, 2018).

This research is novel in the context of developing human resource management theory and practice in the public sector, particularly within government bureaucracies (Noe et al., 2020; Rivai & Sagala, 2019). Previous studies have largely examined the relationship between employee competency and job satisfaction, or between leadership and work motivation, separately (Robbins & Judge, 2022; Sutrisno, 2021). However, this study presents a more comprehensive approach by integrating employee competency, bureaucratic leadership, work motivation, and employee satisfaction into a single, coherent analytical model.

Furthermore, it examines the mediating role of work motivation in explaining the relationship between competency and leadership on employee satisfaction. This study not only examines the direct influence but also reveals how motivation serves as a psychological bridge that strengthens the impact of competence and leadership style on satisfaction (Herzberg, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Luthans, 2011). This broadens the understanding of the internal mechanisms that drive positive behavior of bureaucratic employees. Furthermore, this study also has empirical novelty because it was conducted in the context of the Indonesian bureaucracy, which has different social and cultural characteristics compared to the private sector or bureaucracies of other countries (Dwiyanto, 2018; Thoha, 2019). Thus, the results of this research are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of models of public organizational behavior as well as practical implications for improving the performance and job satisfaction of civil servants in government environments.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

This research is based on the view that the performance of public organizations is highly dependent on the quality of their human resources. In the context of government bureaucracy, employee competence and leadership style are key factors determining levels of motivation and job satisfaction. Employee job satisfaction reflects the extent to which individuals feel comfortable, valued, and fulfilled in carrying out organizational tasks (Luthans, 2011).

Employee competence has a significant influence on motivation and job satisfaction. Competence encompasses the knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes necessary to carry out tasks effectively (Robbins & Judge, 2022). Employees with high competence tend to feel confident in their work, are able to complete their responsibilities effectively, and receive recognition from superiors and colleagues. This recognition of abilities fosters a sense of satisfaction and a drive to achieve greater heights. Thus, competence not only improves performance but also strengthens intrinsic motivation, leading to increased job satisfaction (Mangkunegara, 2017).

Furthermore, bureaucratic leadership plays a crucial role in regulating and directing employee behavior through clear structures, rules, and hierarchies (Weber, 1947; Thoha, 2019). This type of leadership provides clarity of responsibility, consistency in decision-making, and a sense of security for employees. However, its effectiveness depends heavily on the leader's ability to balance formal aspects with a humane approach. Bureaucratic leaders who demonstrate empathy, provide recognition, and support employee development will foster motivation and increase job satisfaction (Denhardt et al., 2019).

Furthermore, work motivation acts as a mediating variable, bridging the influence of competence and leadership on job satisfaction. According to Herzberg's (1968) theory and Deci and Ryan's (2000) intrinsic motivation theory, motivation is a psychological force that drives individuals to achieve goals, maintain commitment, and derive satisfaction from their work. Competent and fairly led employees feel motivated to contribute optimally, and this motivation increases job satisfaction.

Empirically, previous studies have shown that the combination of high competence and effective bureaucratic leadership can create a productive, disciplined work environment that still supports employee psychological well-being (Rivai & Sagala, 2019; Dwiyanto, 2018). Therefore, this research confirms that to achieve optimal levels of employee satisfaction in the bureaucracy, public organizations must strengthen employee competence, develop an adaptive bureaucratic leadership style, and foster sustainable work motivation.

Empirical findings by Indrawan & Sari (2020) and Nugraha (2021) indicate that employee competence and bureaucratic leadership style significantly influence employee satisfaction and motivation, particularly in the context of public organizations with strong hierarchical structures. Research by Sutrisno and Wibowo (2021) also indicates that employee competence, encompassing knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes, positively contributes to employee motivation and satisfaction. Employees with high competence tend to feel more confident in carrying out their duties, have a high sense of responsibility, and demonstrate greater job satisfaction. These results align with research by Rahman et al. (2020), which asserts that competence plays a crucial role in improving employee performance effectiveness and psychological well-being. This reinforces Spencer &

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Spencer's (2008) view that competence is a combination of individual characteristics that can predict superior performance in the workplace.

Meanwhile, a study by Puspasari and Santoso (2022) found that bureaucratic leadership has a dual influence on job satisfaction. On the one hand, this leadership style can create stability, order, and procedural certainty; However, if applied rigidly, it can reduce work motivation by limiting employee creativity and participation. This finding aligns with Max Weber's (1947) theory of bureaucratic leadership, which emphasizes the importance of hierarchy and formal rules, but also has the potential to reduce employee flexibility and intrinsic motivation if not balanced with a humanistic approach (Robbins & Judge, 2022).

The role of work motivation as a mediating variable has also been widely found in various studies. According to Hasibuan and Manullang (2023), work motivation strengthens the relationship between competence and employee satisfaction because competent employees tend to be more motivated to achieve, thus feeling more satisfied with their work. Similarly, Prihantoro and Hidayat (2022) assert that motivation can moderate the negative influence of bureaucratic leadership by providing meaning and purpose to the work carried out within a structured system.

Overall, the synthesis of these various studies indicates that employee competence and bureaucratic leadership influence job satisfaction both directly and indirectly through work motivation. Therefore, developing competence and implementing adaptive bureaucratic leadership are important strategies for increasing employee satisfaction and productivity in the public sector (Yukl, 2013; Armstrong, 2020). Based on this literature review, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H1: Employee competence has a positive and significant effect on work motivation.

H2: Bureaucratic leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation.

H3: Employee competence has a positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction.

H4: Bureaucratic leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction.

H5: Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction.

H6: Work motivation mediates the effect of employee competence on employee job satisfaction.

H7: Work motivation mediates the effect of bureaucratic leadership on employee job satisfaction.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The study population consisted of 165 employees of the Regional Revenue Agency of Mojokerto Regency, East Java, Indonesia, consisting of 61 Civil Servants (PNS) and 104 Government Employees with Performance Agreements (PPPK). Sampling used the Slovin formula (Umar, 2013), with a 5% margin of error

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$
$$n = \frac{165}{1 + 165 (0,05^2)}$$
$$n = \frac{165}{1,413}$$
$$n = 116,81$$
$$n = 117$$

Thus, out of 165 employees, the sample size for this study using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error was 117. The sampling technique used in this study was proportional random sampling, with the following calculation:

Table 1. Proportional Sampling Distribution Table

Employment status	Population	Sample
Civil Servants	61	61/165 x 117 = 43.25 (43)
Employees with Performance Agreements	104	104/165 x 117 = 73.75 (74)
Total	165	117

To obtain relevant and valid data, the data collection method used a research instrument in the form of a questionnaire distributed to respondents. The research instrument measured four variables: employee competence, bureaucratic leadership, work motivation, and employee satisfaction using a Likert scale with response categories: strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Next, data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) – PLS. The decision to use SEM PLS data analysis techniques was based on the following considerations: it does not require normally distributed data, can use a small sample size (a minimum of 30 is recommended), does not require randomization of the sample, can use measurement scales other

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than intervals, can use formative indicators to measure latent variables, is suitable for use as a procedure for developing theory in the early stages, and allows for very complex models with many latent variables and indicators (Ghozali, 2018).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Outer Model Evaluation

A measurement model is used to show the relationship between manifest variables or measurement items and the latent variables in the study. These tests include convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability.

Convergent Validity Test

Convergent validity is determined based on the principle that measures of a construct should have a high correlation. The convergent validity of a construct with reflective indicators is evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to Ghozali and Latan (2015), the convergent validity test uses the parameter Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value > 0.5 . The following are the results of the convergent validity test.

Tabel 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variables	Average variant extracted (AVE)	Decision
Employee Competence	0.805	Valid
Bureaucratic Leadership	0.865	Valid
Work Motivation	0.833	Valid
Employee Satisfaction	0.918	Valid

Based on Table 2, it is known that the AVE value for each construct is > 0.5 . Therefore, the convergent validity test results are met because all items in each construct can be declared valid.

Next, we test Convergent Validity using the Outer Loading or Factor Loading Value. An indicator is considered to have good Convergent Validity if the Outer Loading value is > 0.7 . The Outer Loading values for each indicator in the research variables are as follows:

Table 3. Convergent Validity Test Results

Variables	Indicator	Outer loading	Decision
Employee Competence (X1)	X1.1	0.959	Very Strong
	X1.2	0.826	Very Strong
	X1.3	0.923	Very Strong
	X1.4	0.804	Very Strong
	X1.5	0.962	Very Strong
Bureaucratic Leadership (X2)	X2.1	0.935	Very Strong
	X2.2	0.918	Very Strong
	X2.3	0.920	Very Strong
	X2.4	0.932	Very Strong
	X2.5	0.943	Very Strong
Work Motivation (M)	Y1	0.804	Very Strong
	Y2	0.784	Very Strong
	Y3	0.755	Very Strong
	Y4	0.923	Very Strong
	Y5	0.804	Very Strong
Employee Satisfaction (Y)	Z1	0.968	Very Strong
	Z2	0.971	Very Strong
	Z3	0.944	Very Strong
	Z4	0.952	Very Strong
	Z5	0.956	Very Strong

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Based on Table 3, the convergent validity test results show that all indicators for each variable have an outer loading value >0.70 , indicating that each indicator has a very strong correlation with the construct it measures. This indicates that the convergent validity of the model meets the requirements.

Indicator Reliability

To measure the reliability of a construct in SEM-PLS, two methods are used: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. This research instrument is considered reliable if the composite reliability value is >0.7 and the Cronbach's Alpha value is >0.7 . The reliability test results are presented in the following table.

Table 4. Indicator Reliability Test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Employee Competence	0.938	0.943
Bureaucratic Leadership	0.961	0.970
Work Motivation	0.967	0.902
Employee Satisfaction	0.978	0.978

Table 4 shows that all constructs had Cronbach's Alpha values > 0.70 and Composite Reliability values > 0.70 . According to Ghozali and Latan (2015), a construct or variable is considered reliable if its Cronbach's Alpha value is > 0.70 and its composite reliability value is > 0.7 . The closer the composite reliability value is to 1, the higher the internal consistency reliability (Hair et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be concluded that all research constructs are reliable.

Structural Model Evaluation Results

The structural model evaluation aimed to predict the relationships between latent variables using R-square. R-square values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 indicated strong, moderate, and weak models, respectively (Chin et al., 1998). The coefficient of determination is a way to assess the extent to which an endogenous construct can be explained by an exogenous construct.

Table 5. Goodness of Fit Test Results

Variables	R-Square
Work Motivation	0.260
Employee Satisfaction	0.685

Based on Table 5, the R-square value for work motivation of 0.260 can be interpreted as meaning that 26% of the variation in work motivation can be explained by employee competence and bureaucratic leadership. This figure falls into the moderate category according to Chin's (1998) criteria, indicating that employee competence and bureaucratic leadership contribute significantly to strengthening work motivation. Furthermore, the R-square value for employee satisfaction of 0.685 means that 68.5% of the variation in employee satisfaction can be explained by employee competence, bureaucratic leadership, and work motivation. This value falls into the strong category, indicating that these three variables are able to explain more than half of employee satisfaction.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the effect of job characteristics and discipline on employee performance, both directly and as moderated by organizational culture. The following table presents the results of the hypothesis testing.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	T statistics	P values	Decision
Employee Competence ---> Employee satisfaction	2.430	0.015	Accepted
Employee Competence ---> Work Motivation	1.960	0.049	Accepted
Bureaucratic Leadership ---> Employee satisfaction	2.860	0.004	Accepted
Bureaucratic Leadership ---> Work Motivation	2.270	0.023	Accepted
Work Motivation ---> Employee satisfaction	3.060	0.002	Accepted
Employee Competence ---> Work Motivation ---> Employee satisfaction	2.340	0.019	Accepted
Bureaucratic Leadership ---> Work Motivation ---> Employee satisfaction	2.790	0.005	Accepted

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Based on table 6, it can be seen that all hypotheses proposed in this study can be accepted because the t-Statistics value is > 1.96 and the P-Values value is < 0.05 .

Discussion

The Effect of Employee Competence on Employee Satisfaction.

The results of the hypothesis test indicate that employee competence has a significant effect on employee satisfaction, with a T-statistic of 2.430 and a P-value of 0.015. This confirms that consistent bureaucratic leadership can increase employee satisfaction at the Regional Revenue Agency of Mojokerto Regency, East Java, Indonesia. This finding supports Katz's (1955) Skills Theory, which emphasizes the importance of technical, interpersonal, and conceptual skills in creating work effectiveness. High competence enables employees to work more efficiently and feel satisfied because they are able to effectively handle job demands. Spencer & Spencer's (2008) competency indicators—knowledge, skills, motives, traits, and self-concept—are also relevant in explaining how competence drives satisfaction through meaningful achievement and job confidence.

These results strengthen the theoretical basis that competence not only directly impacts performance but also psychological aspects such as job satisfaction. This aligns with Locke's (1976) Discrepancy Theory, which states that employees will feel satisfied if there is a match between what is expected and what is obtained from their work. Employees who feel their abilities match job demands tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction. In bureaucratic practice, these results demonstrate the importance of training and competency development as a strategy for improving employee psychological well-being (Robbins & Judge, 2019). These findings confirm that investing in competency not only improves work outcomes but also improves employee perceptions and attitudes toward their work, ultimately contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector organizations (Luthans, 2011; Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

In general, these results align with those of Arizal et al. (2025), who found that competency significantly influences job satisfaction. Similar results were also reported by Ramdani and Putra (2024) and Wulandari (2023), who confirmed that improving employee technical and behavioral competencies can strengthen satisfaction and engagement with work. However, this contrasts with the findings of Fitri (2021), who reported that competency had no effect on employee satisfaction. These differences may be due to the characteristics of the institutions studied, the organizational cultural context, and employee perceptions of the relevance of their competencies. In the context of the Regional Revenue Agency, which tends to emphasize technical precision and public service, competency significantly determines employee perceptions of the comfort and meaning of their work (Arizal et al., 2025; Fitri, 2021; Ramdani & Putra, 2024; Wulandari, 2023).

The Influence of Employee Competence on Work Motivation.

The results of the hypothesis test indicate that employee competence has a significant effect on work motivation, with a T-statistic of 1.960 and a P-value of 0.049. This confirms that strong competence can increase the work motivation of employees at the Regional Revenue Agency of Mojokerto Regency, East Java, Indonesia. This finding aligns with Katz's Skills Theory (1955), which states that a person's competence—whether technical, human relations, or conceptual—serves as the foundation for individuals to feel confident, focused, and enthusiastic in carrying out their duties. When employees possess adequate skills, they are not only able to complete their work effectively but also more motivated because they feel competent and relevant in their roles.

This finding provides an important contribution to the development of motivation theory in the context of public organizations. From the perspective of Herzberg et al.'s (2017) two-factor theory, employee competence can be categorized as a motivator because its presence supports achievement, responsibility, and personal growth—elements that directly enhance employee intrinsic motivation. In practice, these results imply that government organizations seeking to improve employee work motivation need to emphasize strengthening individual capacity through training, skills development, and placement appropriate to competencies.

These findings align with research by Suzanna et al. (2023), which also showed that competency significantly influences work motivation. This finding is further supported by Putri (2023) and Pariesti et al. (2022), which indicate a relationship between competency and motivation through both direct and indirect channels. However, in Fitri's (2021) study, competency had no effect on satisfaction, which indirectly indicates its absence on motivation. These differences in results indicate that the organizational context, work culture, and employee perceptions of the relevance of their competencies significantly determine the strength of this variable's influence in various situations (Suzanna et al., 2023; Putri, 2023; Pariesti et al., 2022; Fitri, 2021).

The Influence of Bureaucratic Leadership on Employee Satisfaction

The results of the hypothesis test indicate that bureaucratic leadership has a significant effect on employee satisfaction, with a T-statistic of 2.860 and a P-value of 0. This confirms that consistent bureaucratic leadership can increase employee satisfaction at the Regional Revenue Agency of Mojokerto Regency, East Java, Indonesia. This finding confirms Weber's (1978) classical bureaucratic theory, which states that bureaucratic leadership based on formal structures, standard rules, and institutionalized

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authority creates certainty, stability, and a sense of procedural justice among employees. These conditions strengthen positive perceptions of work and create satisfaction because the system is perceived to operate objectively and in a structured manner.

This finding broadens understanding of the relationship between leadership and employee satisfaction, particularly in the context of public sector organizations heavily regulated by procedures and hierarchy. From the perspective of Discrepancy Theory (Locke, 1976), bureaucratic leadership can help minimize the gap between employees' expectations for a fair and consistent work system and the reality they experience. In practice, leadership that implements systematic control, clear distribution of authority, and non-discriminatory task execution will strengthen employee satisfaction because they feel valued and treated equally. This finding confirms that in a bureaucratic environment, an overly flexible leadership system can actually disrupt role clarity and decrease job satisfaction.

These results are consistent with Pratama and Lestari (2023), who also found that leadership has a significant positive influence on employee satisfaction, both directly and indirectly through performance. This finding differs from Handayani (2022), who found that leadership had no significant influence on job satisfaction at the Kulon Progo Tax Service Office. This difference in results is likely due to variations in the application of bureaucratic leadership styles across agencies, employee perceptions of procedural justice, and the extent to which leaders apply hierarchical principles while still considering human aspects.

The Influence of Bureaucratic Leadership on Work Motivation.

Hypothesis testing results indicate that bureaucratic leadership has a significant effect on work motivation, with a T-statistic of 2.270 and a P-value of 0.023. This confirms that consistent bureaucratic leadership can increase the work motivation of employees at the Regional Revenue Agency of Mojokerto Regency, East Java, Indonesia. This finding reinforces Weber's (1978) classical bureaucratic theory, which emphasizes that leadership based on structure, hierarchy, and consistent rules creates job stability and role clarity. Within the framework of work motivation, the certainty of this work system provides a sense of security and fairness, which are essential foundations for enhancing employees' internal work drive.

From the perspective of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, bureaucratic leadership acts as a hygiene factor that can prevent dissatisfaction and create a structured work environment. When rules are clear and authority is exercised fairly, employees feel less pressured by uncertainty, allowing them to direct their energies toward achieving work goals. Therefore, bureaucratic leadership can foster stable work motivation, especially in the context of public organizations that demand uniform procedures (Herzberg et al., 2017). These findings suggest that a well-organized bureaucracy can still facilitate employee motivation, provided it is not repressive or rigid.

These findings are consistent with research by Suzanna et al. (2023) and Pariesti et al. (2022), which showed that leadership has a significant influence on employee work motivation. In both studies, leadership (both bureaucratic and transformational) was identified as a key factor driving motivation, albeit with different characteristics and approaches. In contrast, research by Fitri (2021) found that leadership had no effect on job satisfaction, possibly due to bureaucratic leadership styles lacking relational or motivational approaches. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between bureaucratic practices that enforce rules fairly and authoritarian and inflexible bureaucracies (Robbins & Judge, 2022; Yukl, 2013).

The Influence of Work Motivation on Employee Satisfaction.

Hypothesis testing results indicate that work motivation significantly influences employee satisfaction, with a T-statistic of 3.060 and a P-value of 0.002. This confirms that strong work motivation can increase employee job satisfaction at the Regional Revenue Agency of Mojokerto Regency, East Java, Indonesia. This finding supports Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which states that motivating factors such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility can increase individual job satisfaction. When employees have a strong intrinsic drive to work, they tend to feel more satisfied because their work aligns with their self-actualization needs and personal values (Robbins & Judge, 2022).

From the perspective of Discrepancy Theory (Locke, 1976), these results confirm that high work motivation can reduce the gap between employee expectations and reality. Motivated employees not only pursue achievement but also form realistic expectations about their work. When their achievements align with their personal efforts and goals, job satisfaction increases. The practical implications of these findings demonstrate the importance of managerial design in developing work systems that foster motivation, such as rewards, career development, and task clarity, to maintain job satisfaction.

These findings align with studies showing that work motivation is an important mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between individual factors and performance or satisfaction. Samona's (2022) study also found that competence and leadership, which drive satisfaction, are largely influenced by high work motivation. Conversely, Suzanna et al.'s (2023) study showed that although motivation is influenced by competence and leadership, it has no effect on performance, possibly because job satisfaction is not a mediating variable in the relationship. These findings are consistent with previous research by Ghozali and Latan (2021), which emphasized that motivation often acts as an intervening variable that channels the influence of leadership and competence on performance and satisfaction. Similarly, Robbins and Judge (2022) asserted that motivated employees are more likely to experience job satisfaction because their intrinsic and extrinsic needs are met. Therefore, the existence of motivation as a driver of satisfaction is valid and relevant within the structure of this model.

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The Influence of Employee Competence on Employee Satisfaction, Mediated by Work Motivation.

Hypothesis testing results indicate that work motivation significantly mediates the influence of employee competence on employee satisfaction, with a T-statistic of 2.340 and a P-value of 0.019. This demonstrates that work motivation not only directly influences employee job satisfaction but also mediates the influence of competence on employee job satisfaction at the Regional Revenue Agency of Mojokerto Regency, East Java, Indonesia.

Employee competence is a crucial factor determining the quality of task execution and organizational success. Competence encompasses knowledge, skills, and work attitudes that enable an individual to carry out responsibilities effectively (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). In both public and private organizations, high competence not only impacts performance but also employee job satisfaction (Arizal et al., 2025; Putri, 2023). Employees with adequate competence tend to feel more confident, valued, and have greater opportunities for achievement. The feeling of being able to perform a job well generates intrinsic satisfaction, as individuals feel useful and have made a real contribution to the organization (Locke, 1976).

However, the relationship between competence and job satisfaction is not always direct. In many cases, work motivation acts as a mediating variable, strengthening this influence (Suzanna et al., 2023). Competent employees typically have higher motivation to work because they perceive the work as aligned with their abilities and interests. High motivation encourages individuals to strive for the best results, seek challenges, and actively participate in decision-making. As motivation increases, perceptions of work also become more positive, thus increasing job satisfaction (Samona, 2022).

From the perspective of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, competence can be categorized as a motivating factor because it provides opportunities for self-actualization, recognition, and achievement (Herzberg, 1966). Employees who feel competent are more likely to experience job satisfaction when they face challenges that align with their abilities. Furthermore, work motivation acts as a psychological mechanism that bridges competence with feelings of job satisfaction. Without motivation, high competence will be meaningless because individuals are not motivated to utilize it optimally (Pariesti et al., 2022).

Empirical research also shows that work motivation strengthens the relationship between competence and satisfaction. Employees with high levels of competence accompanied by strong motivation tend to have positive perceptions of the work environment, feel more valued, and have a high level of work engagement (Fitri, 2021; Suzanna et al., 2023). Conversely, if motivation is low, even if employees possess strong competence, they may feel dissatisfied because their potential is not being utilized to its full potential. Therefore, increasing employee job satisfaction can be achieved through competency development strategies accompanied by strengthening intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation (Arizal et al., 2025).

Contextually, in the Regional Revenue Agency (BPBD), employees with high competence face complex work challenges and high performance targets. However, not all competence will automatically result in job satisfaction without internal motivation to achieve organizational goals. Complexity arises when competent employees experience dissatisfaction because their expectations for rewards or recognition are not met. These results emphasize the importance of maintaining continuity between competency improvement training and a fair and transparent work motivation system.

The Influence of Bureaucratic Leadership on Employee Satisfaction, Mediated by Work Motivation.

Hypothesis testing results indicate that work motivation significantly mediates the effect of bureaucratic leadership on employee satisfaction, with a T-statistic of 2.790 and a P-value of 0.005. This indicates that bureaucratic leadership can boost employee satisfaction through strengthening work motivation. This finding aligns with Weber's (1978) classical bureaucratic theory, which emphasizes the importance of structure, certainty of rules, and formal authority in creating organizational stability. Leadership that operates according to procedures provides a sense of security, role clarity, and predictability, ultimately building employee work motivation as a bridge to satisfaction.

In the context of public organizations, particularly government agencies, bureaucratic leadership plays a crucial role in creating order, certainty, and compliance with operational standards. Leaders who effectively perform bureaucratic functions are able to provide clarity regarding the duties, responsibilities, and authority of each employee. This clarity can minimize role ambiguity and work conflict, creating a stable and predictable work environment, which ultimately increases employee job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1966; Robbins & Judge, 2019).

However, bureaucratic leadership also has the potential to reduce satisfaction if implemented rigidly without considering employee motivational needs. In this case, work motivation becomes a mediating variable that bridges the relationship between bureaucratic leadership and employee satisfaction. Leaders who are able to combine bureaucratic aspects with motivational approaches, such as providing recognition for achievement, opportunities for self-development, and open communication, will be more effective in fostering employee morale (Herzberg, 1959; Samona, 2022).

Work motivation encourages employees to view organizational rules and structures not as burdens, but as means to achieve professional goals. Intrinsically motivated employees are better able to adapt to bureaucratic systems because they understand the value of order and responsibility. Thus, bureaucratic leadership accompanied by increased work motivation will create a balance between employee discipline and emotional satisfaction. As a result, employees not only comply with procedures but also feel valued and contribute optimally to achieving organizational goals (Suzanna et al., 2023; Fitri, 2021).

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In practice, bureaucratic leadership is often criticized for stifling individual initiative. However, in the context of public institutions such as the Regional Revenue Agency, this leadership style provides the procedural certainty and work structure needed to maintain organizational stability. Complexity arises when leaders are too rigid, resulting in employee autonomy loss, or too loose, resulting in employee confusion about roles and responsibilities. These findings demonstrate the importance of balance in implementing bureaucratic leadership—that an organized structure can be a foundation for motivation, not a barrier to it.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study on the influence of employee competence and bureaucratic leadership on employee satisfaction, with work motivation as the mediator, indicate that these three variables are closely interrelated in shaping employee behavior and performance in public organizations. Employee competence has been shown to have a positive and significant influence on job satisfaction. Employees who possess abilities, skills, and knowledge that align with job demands tend to feel more confident, empowered, and have a higher sense of job satisfaction. This indicates that competence is an important foundation for creating sustainable job satisfaction.

Meanwhile, bureaucratic leadership also influences employee job satisfaction, although the extent of this influence depends on the extent to which the leadership style balances formal rules with humane aspects. Bureaucratic leaders who are firm, consistent, and fair in implementing policies can create a sense of security and job certainty for employees, thereby increasing their satisfaction with the organization. However, overly rigid leadership can actually decrease motivation and satisfaction, especially if it fails to address employee needs and aspirations.

Work motivation acts as a mediating variable, strengthening the relationship between competence and bureaucratic leadership on job satisfaction. Competent employees working under clear leadership tend to have high intrinsic motivation, feel valued, and are driven to achieve their best work results. Therefore, increased job satisfaction can be achieved through sustainable competency development strategies, the implementation of adaptive bureaucratic leadership, and the creation of a work environment that optimally motivates employees.

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