

Work Motivation, Work Discipline, and Employee Loyalty in a Public Water Utility: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines how work motivation and work discipline influence employee loyalty in the Regional Public Drinking Water Company (PDAM) of Bandar Lampung City, with job satisfaction positioned as a mediating mechanism. Design/methodology/approach: A quantitative explanatory design was applied. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 82 permanent employees who had worked for at least one year. The model was assessed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Measurement quality was evaluated through indicator loadings, average variance extracted, and composite reliability, while the structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and coefficients of determination. Findings: Work discipline had the strongest positive effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.614$, $p < .001$), followed by work motivation ($\beta = 0.322$, $p = .006$). Job satisfaction significantly predicted employee loyalty ($\beta = 0.517$, $p < .001$). Work motivation also had a direct positive effect on employee loyalty ($\beta = 0.309$, $p = .003$), whereas work discipline did not directly predict employee loyalty ($\beta = 0.142$, $p = .273$). The coefficient pattern indicates that job satisfaction is a central mechanism linking motivation and discipline to loyalty. Originality/value: The study contributes to public-sector human resource management by showing that employee loyalty in a municipal water utility depends not only on rule compliance and motivation, but also on whether these conditions translate into felt job satisfaction.

Keywords: work motivation; work discipline; job satisfaction; employee loyalty; public utility; PLS-SEM

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INTRODUCTION

Human resources remain a core strategic asset for organizations, particularly in public service institutions where service continuity depends on the quality, reliability, and commitment of employees. Public water utilities operate under strong public expectations: they must deliver essential services consistently while also maintaining internal organizational effectiveness. In this context, employee loyalty becomes a critical human resource outcome because loyal employees are more likely to remain with the organization, maintain service quality, and support institutional objectives over time.

The Regional Public Drinking Water Company (PDAM) of Bandar Lampung City represents a public utility setting in which work processes require discipline, coordination, responsibility, and responsiveness to community needs. However, human resource management in such organizations does not always operate optimally. Differences in employee motivation, uneven levels of work discipline, and varying experiences of job

satisfaction may affect the degree to which employees remain attached to and willing to contribute to the organization.

Work motivation is commonly understood as the internal and external energy that directs work behavior toward organizational goals. Self-determination theory explains that motivation is not merely a matter of intensity, but also of quality, because employees are more likely to sustain work effort when they perceive autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the workplace (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020). In organizational practice, motivated employees tend to show stronger work enthusiasm, willingness to improve, and persistence in achieving expected performance outcomes.

Work discipline is equally important in public service organizations. It reflects employees' willingness to comply with rules, meet attendance and punctuality expectations, complete assigned tasks, and assume responsibility for organizational standards (Sutrisno, 2016). In highly regulated service institutions, discipline may create procedural order and reduce uncertainty in daily operations. Nevertheless, discipline alone may not be sufficient to build loyalty unless employees also experience their work positively.

Job satisfaction is a central psychological response to work. It refers to employees' evaluation of their job, including the suitability of tasks, perceived rewards, supervisory relationships, and the comfort of the work environment (Locke, 1976; Spector, 1997). Satisfied employees are more likely to express favorable attitudes toward their organization, while dissatisfaction is often associated with weaker attachment and stronger withdrawal tendencies (Tett & Meyer, 1993).

The present study addresses a practical and theoretical gap in the human resource management of municipal utilities. Although motivation, discipline, and satisfaction are widely studied in private-sector settings, fewer empirical studies examine how these factors jointly explain loyalty in local public service organizations. This study therefore investigates the direct effects of work motivation and work discipline on job satisfaction and employee loyalty, as well as the mediating role of job satisfaction in the PDAM Bandar Lampung context.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

1. Work motivation and job satisfaction

Work motivation refers to the forces that encourage employees to initiate, direct, and sustain work-related behavior. In the human resource management literature, motivation is linked to employees' willingness to exert effort, improve performance, and pursue organizational objectives (Hasibuan, 2017). From a self-determination perspective, motivation becomes more sustainable when the workplace supports autonomy, competence, and social relatedness (Deci et al., 2017). Employees who are motivated to improve and achieve their best results are therefore more likely to experience their work as meaningful and satisfying. Based on this reasoning, the first hypothesis is proposed: H1. Work motivation has a positive effect on job satisfaction.

2. Work discipline and job satisfaction

Work discipline describes employee adherence to organizational rules, punctuality, task completion, and responsibility. Discipline creates regularity and predictability in work processes, which can reduce interpersonal and operational friction. In a public utility, discipline is especially relevant because work delays and non-compliance may directly affect service quality. Employees who work in an orderly and rule-consistent system may perceive

stronger role clarity and fairness, which can increase job satisfaction. Accordingly, the second hypothesis is proposed: H2. Work discipline has a positive effect on job satisfaction.

3. Job satisfaction and employee loyalty

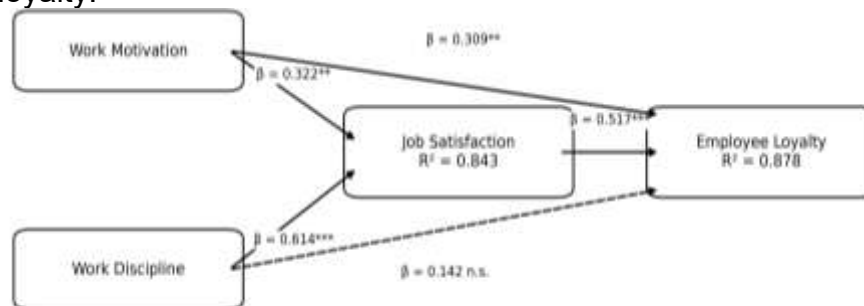
Employee loyalty reflects an employee's willingness to remain in the organization, contribute to organizational goals, maintain the organization's reputation, and develop a sense of belonging. Although loyalty is conceptually distinct from organizational commitment, it overlaps with positive attachment and retention-oriented attitudes. Prior work on job attitudes indicates that satisfaction and commitment are important predictors of employees' withdrawal or retention-related decisions (Meyer et al., 2002; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Thus, satisfied employees are expected to show greater loyalty because their work experience provides psychological reasons to remain and contribute. Therefore, the third hypothesis is proposed: H3. Job satisfaction has a positive effect on employee loyalty.

4. Direct effects of motivation and discipline on loyalty

Motivation may directly foster loyalty because employees who possess high work enthusiasm and personal growth orientation are more likely to identify with organizational success. In contrast, the direct relationship between discipline and loyalty is less straightforward. Discipline may ensure compliance and task completion, but it does not necessarily generate emotional attachment unless employees interpret the disciplined work system as supportive, fair, and satisfying. The following hypotheses are proposed: H4. Work motivation has a positive effect on employee loyalty. H5. Work discipline has a positive effect on employee loyalty.

5. Mediating role of job satisfaction

Job satisfaction may function as an intervening mechanism that translates motivation and discipline into loyalty. When employees are motivated, they may feel more competent and purposeful, which increases satisfaction and, in turn, loyalty. Similarly, disciplined work systems may increase satisfaction by providing order and responsibility, and satisfaction may then strengthen loyalty. Thus, job satisfaction is expected to explain how motivation and discipline become linked to employee loyalty. The mediation hypotheses are formulated as follows: H6. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between work motivation and employee loyalty. H7. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between work discipline and employee loyalty.



Notes. ** p < .01; *** p < .001; n.s. = not significant.

Figure 1. Structural model with standardized path coefficients.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative explanatory design because it aimed to test causal-predictive relationships among latent constructs. The empirical setting was the Regional Public Drinking Water Company (PDAM) of Bandar Lampung City, Indonesia. The organization was selected because it provides essential public services and relies heavily on employee reliability, discipline, and service-oriented performance.

The unit of analysis was the individual employee. The study focused on four constructs: work motivation and work discipline as exogenous variables, job satisfaction as a mediating variable, and employee loyalty as the final endogenous variable.

The population consisted of employees working at PDAM Bandar Lampung City. Because not all employees could be reached within the study period, purposive sampling was applied. Respondents were selected using two criteria: they were permanent employees and had worked for at least one year. These criteria were used to ensure that respondents had sufficient experience to evaluate working conditions and organizational practices.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to 82 respondents. Secondary information was obtained from organizational documents, reports, and literature relevant to the study. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

All constructs were operationalized as reflective constructs. The indicators were retained from the source questionnaire and aligned conceptually with established human resource management literature. Table 1 presents the operational definitions and indicators used in the study.

Table 1. Operational definitions and indicators

Construct	Operational definition	Indicators
Work Motivation	The internal and external drive that encourages employees to work enthusiastically and improve performance.	Work ethic; effort to achieve the best results; performance improvement; desire for growth.
Work Discipline	Employee compliance with organizational rules, time discipline, task completion, and responsibility.	Punctuality; rule compliance; completion of assigned tasks; responsibility.
Job Satisfaction	Employees' evaluative feeling toward their work and work conditions.	Satisfaction with work; suitability of the job; recognition or rewards; comfort at work.
Employee Loyalty	Employees' willingness to remain, contribute, maintain a sense of belonging, and protect the organization's reputation.	Desire to stay; contribution; sense of belonging; maintaining the company's good name.

Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was selected because the study was prediction-oriented and involved a relatively modest sample size. Following recommended PLS-SEM reporting procedures, the measurement model was assessed using standardized outer loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). Indicator loadings above .70, AVE values above .50, and CR values above .70 were interpreted as evidence of adequate convergent validity and internal consistency reliability (Hair et al., 2019, 2022).

The structural model was evaluated using standardized path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and R² values. Because PLS-SEM does not rely on the same assumptions as ordinary least squares regression, the analysis emphasized measurement-model and structural-model quality rather than classical regression assumption tests. Specific indirect effects were estimated from the product of path coefficients and interpreted using a Sobel-type approximation because the available output reported path coefficients and standard errors but did not provide bootstrapped indirect-effect statistics. For a final journal submission, the bootstrapped specific indirect-effect table from SmartPLS should be inserted if available.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Respondent profile

The sample consisted of 82 employees of PDAM Bandar Lampung City. The source manuscript indicates that male employees dominated the respondent profile, most respondents were in the productive age range, and many had relatively long work tenure. This profile suggests that respondents had sufficient organizational exposure to assess motivation, discipline, job satisfaction, and loyalty. For journal submission, detailed demographic frequencies and percentages should be inserted when the original respondent table is available.

2. Measurement model assessment

All retained indicators produced standardized outer loadings above .80, exceeding the commonly recommended minimum of .70. This indicates that each item contributed strongly to its respective construct. Table 2 reports the item-level loadings.

Table 2. Outer-loading results

Code	Construct	Loading	Decision
SMSDM1	Work Motivation	0.880	Retained
SMSDM2	Work Motivation	0.865	Retained
SMSDM3	Work Motivation	0.837	Retained
SMSDM4	Work Motivation	0.844	Retained
LK1	Work Discipline	0.887	Retained
LK2	Work Discipline	0.857	Retained
LK3	Work Discipline	0.875	Retained
LK4	Work Discipline	0.857	Retained
BO1	Job Satisfaction	0.869	Retained
BO2	Job Satisfaction	0.856	Retained
BO3	Job Satisfaction	0.858	Retained
BO4	Job Satisfaction	0.872	Retained
MK1	Employee Loyalty	0.858	Retained
MK2	Employee Loyalty	0.843	Retained
MK3	Employee Loyalty	0.811	Retained
MK4	Employee Loyalty	0.892	Retained

AVE and CR values were computed from the reported standardized loadings. All AVE values exceeded .50 and all CR values exceeded .70, indicating acceptable convergent validity and internal consistency reliability.

Table 3. Convergent validity and reliability summary

Construct	Loading range	AVE	CR	Decision
Work Motivation	0.837-0.880	0.734	0.917	Adequate
Work Discipline	0.857-0.887	0.755	0.925	Adequate
Job Satisfaction	0.856-0.872	0.746	0.922	Adequate
Employee Loyalty	0.811-0.892	0.725	0.913	Adequate

3. Structural model assessment

The R² value for job satisfaction was 0.843, indicating that work motivation and work discipline explained 84.3% of the variance in job satisfaction. The R² value for employee loyalty was 0.878, indicating that the model explained 87.8% of the variance in loyalty. These values suggest strong explanatory power for both endogenous constructs.

Table 4. Coefficients of determination

Endogenous construct	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Job Satisfaction	0.843	0.839
Employee Loyalty	0.878	0.874

Table 5 presents the structural path results. Work discipline significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.614$, $t = 5.262$, $p < .001$), supporting H2. Work motivation also significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.322$, $t = 2.743$, $p = .006$), supporting H1. Job satisfaction had a significant positive effect on employee loyalty ($\beta = 0.517$, $t = 4.041$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. Work motivation had a direct significant effect on employee loyalty ($\beta = 0.309$, $t = 3.001$, $p = .003$), supporting H4. However, work discipline did not have a significant direct effect on employee loyalty ($\beta = 0.142$, $t = 1.097$, $p = .273$), so H5 was not supported.

Table 5. Structural path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Hyp.	Path	β	M	SE	t	p	Decision
H1	Work Motivation -> Job Satisfaction	0.322	0.319	0.118	2.743	0.006	Supported
H2	Work Discipline -> Job Satisfaction	0.614	0.612	0.117	5.262	< .001	Supported
H3	Job Satisfaction -> Employee Loyalty	0.517	0.521	0.128	4.041	< .001	Supported
H4	Work Motivation -> Employee Loyalty	0.309	0.310	0.103	3.001	0.003	Supported
H5	Work Discipline -> Employee Loyalty	0.142	0.314	0.129	1.097	0.273	Not supported

4. Indirect effects

The indirect-effect estimates indicate that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between work motivation and employee loyalty (indirect effect = 0.166, $z = 2.261$, $p = .024$) and the relationship between work discipline and employee loyalty (indirect effect = 0.317, $z = 3.201$, $p = .001$). Because the direct effect of work motivation on loyalty remained significant, the pattern indicates partial mediation. For work discipline, the direct effect was not significant while the indirect effect was significant, indicating indirect-only mediation through job satisfaction.

Table 6. Specific indirect-effect estimates

Hyp.	Indirect path	Effect	SE	z	p	Interpretation
H6	Work Motivation -> Job Satisfaction -> Employee Loyalty	0.166	0.074	2.261	0.024	Supported; partial mediation

H7	Work Discipline -> Job Satisfaction - > Employee Loyalty	0.317	0.099	3.201	0.001	Supported; indirect-only mediation
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Note. Indirect effects were calculated as products of standardized path coefficients. Standard errors and z-statistics were estimated using a Sobel-type approximation based on the reported path standard errors. Bootstrapped indirect-effect statistics should be used if available from SmartPLS.

Discussion

The results show that work motivation and work discipline are both important antecedents of job satisfaction among PDAM Bandar Lampung employees. However, the effect of work discipline was stronger than that of work motivation. This finding is theoretically meaningful for a public utility context. In organizations responsible for essential services, punctuality, compliance with rules, task completion, and responsibility are not merely administrative expectations; they structure daily work routines and create a more predictable work environment. Employees may therefore experience greater satisfaction when discipline supports operational clarity and fairness.

Work motivation also had a significant positive effect on job satisfaction. Employees who show stronger work ethic, achievement orientation, and willingness to develop are more likely to interpret their work positively. This aligns with motivational theory, particularly the view that employees are more satisfied when work supports purposeful effort and personal growth (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Job satisfaction had a strong positive effect on employee loyalty. This result supports the broader job-attitudes literature, which argues that favorable evaluations of work strengthen employees' attachment to the organization and reduce withdrawal tendencies (Meyer et al., 2002; Tett & Meyer, 1993). In the PDAM context, satisfied employees are more likely to stay, contribute, develop a sense of belonging, and protect the company's reputation.

The direct path from work motivation to employee loyalty was significant, suggesting that motivation can independently strengthen employees' willingness to remain and contribute. In contrast, work discipline did not directly predict loyalty. This indicates that rule compliance and punctuality, although important, do not automatically produce loyalty unless they are accompanied by job satisfaction. Discipline appears to become meaningful for loyalty when employees experience disciplined work arrangements as satisfying rather than merely coercive.

The mediation results reinforce this interpretation. Job satisfaction partially mediated the effect of work motivation on loyalty and fully transmitted the effect of work discipline on loyalty. Thus, the main managerial lesson is that motivation and discipline should not be managed as isolated administrative targets. They should be embedded in a broader human resource system that makes employees feel valued, recognized, comfortable, and aligned with their work.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to human resource management literature by clarifying the role of job satisfaction as a psychological mechanism linking motivation and discipline to loyalty in a municipal public utility. The findings support a process-oriented view: employee loyalty

is not produced solely by administrative discipline or motivational encouragement, but by the extent to which those conditions create satisfying work experiences.

The study also suggests that work discipline may have different theoretical implications depending on the outcome examined. Discipline strongly predicts satisfaction, but it does not directly predict loyalty. This distinction is useful because it prevents discipline from being interpreted only as a direct loyalty-building tool.

Practical implications

For PDAM Bandar Lampung City, the findings indicate that strengthening employee loyalty requires an integrated human resource strategy. First, management should maintain clear work rules and punctuality standards, because discipline strongly predicts job satisfaction. Second, discipline should be implemented consistently and fairly so that employees perceive it as a supportive system rather than punitive control. Third, motivational practices should emphasize recognition, growth opportunities, performance feedback, and meaningful involvement in organizational goals.

Management should also monitor job satisfaction as an early indicator of loyalty. Because job satisfaction is the strongest direct predictor of loyalty in the model, improvement programs should focus on the quality of work assignments, fairness of rewards, supervisory support, recognition, and workplace comfort. Public utility organizations that improve these aspects may be better positioned to retain employees and sustain service performance.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample consisted of 82 employees from one public water utility, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions or public organizations. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples across multiple municipal utilities.

Second, the study used a cross-sectional questionnaire design. Although the structural model estimates relationships among variables, causal inference should be interpreted cautiously. Longitudinal designs would help assess whether motivation and discipline predict changes in satisfaction and loyalty over time.

Third, the source conceptual discussion recognized organizational commitment and the work environment as theoretically important constructs. However, the empirical output available for this revision did not include measurement indicators, loadings, R^2 values, or structural paths for organizational commitment or work environment. Therefore, the present article reports only the variables supported by available empirical results. Future studies should explicitly measure organizational commitment and work environment to test a more comprehensive model.

Fourth, the mediation results in this revised manuscript were calculated using a Sobel-type approximation based on the reported path coefficients and standard errors. Future submission should replace this approximation with bootstrapped specific indirect effects exported directly from SmartPLS.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of work motivation and work discipline on employee loyalty through job satisfaction among employees of the Regional Public Drinking Water Company (PDAM) of Bandar Lampung City. The findings indicate that both work motivation

and work discipline significantly improve job satisfaction, with work discipline showing the stronger effect. Job satisfaction, in turn, significantly increases employee loyalty.

Work motivation also directly increases employee loyalty, while work discipline does not directly influence loyalty. These results indicate that discipline is important, but it contributes to loyalty mainly when it strengthens job satisfaction. Overall, job satisfaction is the central mechanism through which motivation and discipline become translated into employee loyalty. For public utilities, employee loyalty should therefore be developed not only through rules and motivational encouragement, but also through work conditions that allow employees to feel satisfied, valued, and committed to service quality.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to institutional permission and respondent confidentiality considerations.

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