

Compensation, Work Environment, and Employee Performance: The Mediating Role of Work Motivation at the Cultural Preservation Center of North Maluku Province

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether work motivation mediates the relationships between compensation, work environment, and employee performance at the Cultural Preservation Center (Balai Pelestarian Kebudayaan [BPK]) of North Maluku Province. A quantitative cross-sectional census survey was administered to all 50 active civil servants, comprising both permanent civil servants (PNS) and government employees with work agreements (PPPK). Data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed through partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4. Compensation was positively associated with work motivation ($\beta = 0.583$, $p < 0.001$) but had no significant direct association with employee performance ($\beta = -0.018$, $p = 0.455$). The work environment was positively associated with employee performance ($\beta = 0.424$, $p = 0.001$) but not with work motivation ($\beta = -0.024$, $p = 0.431$). Work motivation was positively associated with employee performance ($\beta = 0.472$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, work motivation significantly mediated the compensation-performance relationship (indirect effect $\beta = 0.275$, $p = 0.002$), whereas it did not mediate the work environment-performance relationship ($\beta = -0.012$, $p = 0.433$). These findings indicate that compensation and the work environment contribute to performance through distinct motivational and operational pathways.

Keywords:

Compensation;
Employee
performance;
Public sector;
Work environment;
Work motivation.

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INTRODUCTION

Human resources constitute a central strategic capability because organizational outcomes depend on employees' knowledge, effort, and coordinated behavior. In public institutions, employee performance is particularly consequential because it influences both administrative effectiveness and the quality of public service delivery. Performance encompasses the quality and quantity of work, timeliness, effectiveness, and employees' capacity to complete responsibilities independently (Afandi, 2021; Mangkunegara, 2017). Accordingly, strategic human resource management requires organizational practices that align employee contributions with institutional objectives (Armstrong, 2024; Robbins & Judge, 2017).

The Cultural Preservation Center (Balai Pelestarian Kebudayaan [BPK]) of North Maluku Province operates under the Directorate General of Culture and is responsible for protecting, developing, and utilizing both tangible and intangible cultural heritage across the province. Established under Ministerial Regulation No. 33 of 2022, BPK works across a geographically dispersed archipelagic region, making employee reliability and coordination essential to institutional performance.

The institution's 2024 Performance Report (LAKIN) documented strong organizational outputs: three of five key performance indicators achieved 100% of their targets, one reached 120%, and budget absorption was 99.50%. Nevertheless, the report also identified a managerial gap: BPK had no formal and standardized framework for allocating bonuses, incentives, performance rewards, or disciplinary consequences. Existing

recognition was largely symbolic and primarily took the form of official letters of appreciation rather than performance-linked financial rewards. This condition raises an important question regarding whether compensation can improve performance directly or whether its contribution depends on employees' motivation.

The work environment also presents a substantive concern. Employees operate across areas characterized by limited transportation infrastructure, unstable internet connectivity, and unpredictable weather. Such conditions may create physical and psychological demands that constrain task execution. The work environment encompasses both physical facilities and social conditions that shape employees' ability to perform their duties (Nitisemito, 2000; Sedarmayanti, 2018; Chandrasekar, 2019).

Empirical findings on these relationships remain inconsistent. Several studies report that compensation is positively related to employee performance (Khan & Nawaz, 2021; Octavia et al., 2023; Dewi & Luturlean, 2025), whereas others find that its direct effect is statistically insignificant (Aryawibawa et al., 2024; Muchlis & Rismayanti, 2024). Similarly, a supportive work environment has been associated with higher performance in public organizations (Simamora & Sambas, 2023; Diansari & Alie, 2024), but non-significant relationships have also been reported in comparable government settings (Mahatani et al., 2025). These differences suggest that a mediating mechanism may be required to explain how organizational conditions translate into individual performance.

This study integrates social exchange theory and self-determination theory to examine work motivation as that mechanism. Social exchange theory explains why employees may reciprocate organizational support through stronger commitment and effort (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Wijaya & Rezeki, 2020), whereas self-determination theory explains how organizational conditions can support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby fostering internalized motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci et al., 2017). The study contributes by testing these direct and indirect pathways simultaneously in a cultural-preservation institution, a public-sector context that has received limited attention in previous research.

The study therefore examines: (1) the association between compensation and work motivation; (2) the association between the work environment and work motivation; (3) the direct association between compensation and employee performance; (4) the direct association between the work environment and employee performance; (5) the association between work motivation and employee performance; (6) the mediating role of work motivation in the compensation-performance relationship; and (7) the mediating role of work motivation in the work environment-performance relationship.

Hypotheses Development

1. Compensation and Work Motivation

Compensation includes financial and non-financial returns provided in exchange for employees' contributions and responsibilities (Rivai & Sagala, 2018; Gerhart et al., 2017). From a social exchange perspective, compensation that is perceived as fair and commensurate with workload signals organizational recognition and may encourage employees to reciprocate with greater effort and commitment (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Compensation may also support perceived competence and organizational belonging, which are important motivational conditions in self-determination theory (Deci et al., 2017). Empirical evidence in public-sector contexts similarly indicates that incentives can strengthen work motivation (Syah et al., 2025). *H1. Compensation is positively associated with work motivation.*

2. Work Environment and Work Motivation

A supportive work environment can reduce physical strain, facilitate social interaction, and provide the resources employees need to complete their responsibilities. Favorable physical and interpersonal conditions are therefore expected to strengthen employees' willingness to exert effort (Barri et al., 2022; Lutfi & Prasetya, 2022). Nevertheless, this relationship may vary across public institutions when motivation is driven by professional values or service commitments rather than by workplace conditions alone. *H2. The work environment is positively associated with work motivation.*

3. Compensation and Employee Performance

Compensation may improve performance by reinforcing desirable behavior, attracting and retaining capable employees, and signaling that contributions are valued. Prior studies have reported positive compensation-performance relationships (Khan & Nawaz, 2021; Octavia et al., 2023; Dewi & Lutuilean, 2025). However, other findings indicate that compensation may not generate performance improvements when it is standardized, already considered adequate, or weakly linked to individual contribution (Aryawibawa et al., 2024; Muchlis & Rismayanti, 2024). The hypothesized relationship is therefore tested in the specific institutional context of BPK. *H3. Compensation is positively associated with employee performance.*

4. Work Environment and Employee Performance

The work environment can affect performance directly by enabling concentration, coordination, access to facilities, and efficient task execution. Positive relationships among colleagues may also improve information exchange and collaborative problem solving. Previous public-sector studies generally support a positive association between the work environment and employee performance (Simamora & Sambas, 2023; Diansari & Alie, 2024). *H4. The work environment is positively associated with employee performance.*

5. Work Motivation and Employee Performance

Work motivation reflects the internal and external forces that direct the intensity, persistence, and quality of work behavior (Robbins & Judge, 2017; Vo et al., 2022). Self-determination theory proposes that employees are more likely to sustain high-quality effort when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci et al., 2017). Motivated employees should consequently demonstrate stronger timeliness, effectiveness, and independence. *H5. Work motivation is positively associated with employee performance.*

6. The Mediating Role of Work Motivation

Compensation may influence performance indirectly when rewards first strengthen employees' willingness to exert effort. Evidence from public institutions suggests that motivation can transmit the effects of incentives to employee performance (Syah et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025). Likewise, a supportive work environment may improve performance by increasing enthusiasm and engagement, although evidence for this indirect pathway is mixed (Barri et al., 2022; Mahatani et al., 2025).

H6. Work motivation mediates the association between compensation and employee performance.

H7. Work motivation mediates the association between the work environment and employee performance.

Research Model

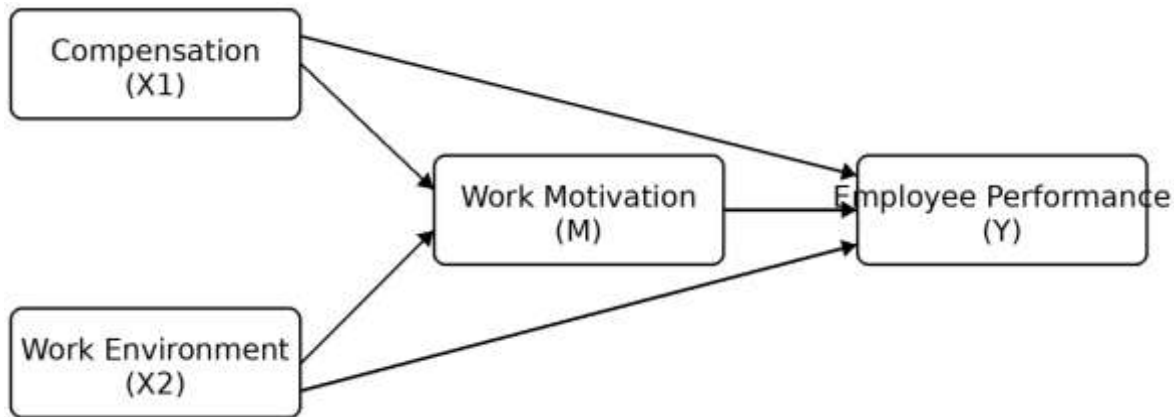


Figure 1. Conceptual model

The conceptual model positions compensation (X1) and work environment (X2) as exogenous constructs, work motivation (M) as a mediator, and employee performance (Y) as the endogenous outcome. The model estimates direct paths from X1 and X2 to M and Y, a direct path from M to Y, and the two corresponding indirect effects through M.

METHOD

The study used a quantitative, explanatory, cross-sectional survey design to test the hypothesized relationships. Data were collected at the Cultural Preservation Center of North Maluku Province, located in Jambula, Pulau Ternate District, Ternate City, North Maluku, Indonesia.

The target population comprised all 50 active civil servants at BPK, including permanent civil servants (PNS) and government employees with work agreements (PPPK). Because the population was small and fully accessible, a census approach was used. All 50 employees participated, resulting in a 100% response rate.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument initially comprised 14 items measuring compensation (X1), 9 items measuring the work environment (X2), 9 items measuring work motivation (M), and 10 items measuring employee performance (Y). Supplementary information was obtained from official institutional documents, including the 2024 BPK Performance Report and organizational profile.

The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS version 4.1.1.8. PLS-SEM was selected because the study emphasized prediction and simultaneously estimated multiple direct and indirect relationships in a relatively small census sample (Hair et al., 2019). Measurement-model evaluation assessed indicator reliability (outer loadings ≥ 0.60), convergent validity (average variance extracted [AVE] ≥ 0.50), internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability ≥ 0.70), and discriminant validity. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT < 0.90) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015). Structural-model evaluation included the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2_{predict}).

Hypotheses were tested through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples using directional, one-tailed tests at $\alpha = 0.05$ ($t > 1.645$ or $p < 0.05$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Respondent Characteristics

Among the 50 respondents, 64% were men ($n = 32$) and 36% were women ($n = 18$). The largest age group was 25–35 years (40%), followed by 36–45 years (30%), older than 45 years (22%), and younger than 25 years (8%). Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (68%); the remainder had completed senior secondary education (12%), a diploma (10%), or postgraduate education (10%). Organizational tenure was distributed as follows: less than 3 years (28%), 3–7 years (28%), 8–15 years (20%), and more than 15 years (24%). In terms of employment status, 74% were PNS and 26% were PPPK.

2. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive results indicate consistently favorable perceptions across the four constructs. Table 1 summarizes the highest-rated indicator and the overall mean for each construct.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the study constructs

Construct	Highest-rated indicator (mean)	Overall mean	Interpretation
Compensation (X1)	Allowances (4.36)	4.25	Very high
Work environment (X2)	Coworker relationships (4.52)	4.38	Very high
Work motivation (M)	Relatedness, M7 (4.50)	4.37	Very high
Employee performance (Y)	Timeliness, Y5 (4.52)	4.43	Very high

Compensation received an overall mean of 4.25. Allowances were the highest-rated component ($M = 4.36$), which is consistent with the implementation of North Maluku Governor's Regulation No. 2/2024 concerning additional civil-servant income. Basic salary was the lowest-rated compensation component ($M = 3.96$), although it remained in the high category. The work environment achieved an overall mean of 4.38, with coworker relationships receiving the highest score ($M = 4.52$). Work motivation averaged 4.37 and was strongest for social relatedness ($M = 4.50$). Employee performance achieved the highest overall mean ($M = 4.43$), with timeliness rated most favorably ($M = 4.52$). These descriptive findings are consistent with the institution's documented 99.50% budget absorption in 2024, although the descriptive data alone do not establish causal relationships.

3. Measurement-Model Evaluation

Indicators with outer loadings below 0.60 were removed during measurement-model refinement. The retained compensation indicators were KOM1 (0.714), KOM2 (0.817), KOM4 (0.774), KOM5 (0.795), KOM6 (0.633), KOM11 (0.622), and KOM13 (0.624). The retained work-environment indicators were LK1 (0.761), LK2 (0.818), LK3 (0.808), LK4 (0.888), LK5 (0.710), and LK6 (0.624). Work motivation was represented by MOT3 (0.699), MOT4 (0.754), MOT5 (0.805), MOT6 (0.769), and MOT7 (0.728). Employee performance was represented by KIN1 (0.832), KIN2 (0.808), KIN3 (0.745), KIN4 (0.752), KIN5 (0.759), KIN7 (0.635), KIN8 (0.671), and KIN9 (0.647).

As shown in Table 2, all AVE values exceeded 0.50, all reliability coefficients exceeded 0.80, and the maximum HTMT values were below 0.90. The results therefore support convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability.

Table 2. Measurement-model reliability and validity

Construct	AVE	Cronbach's α	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	Maximum HTMT
Employee performance	0.539	0.877	0.884	0.903	0.638
Compensation	0.512	0.841	0.852	0.879	0.659
Work environment	0.597	0.863	0.888	0.898	0.584
Work motivation	0.565	0.808	0.815	0.867	0.659

The Fornell-Larcker assessment further showed that the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlations with the other constructs: employee performance = 0.734, compensation = 0.716, work environment = 0.773, and work motivation = 0.752. Taken together, these diagnostics indicate adequate construct distinctiveness.

4. Structural-Model Evaluation

Table 3. Structural-model explanatory and predictive performance

Endogenous construct	R ² (adjusted R ²)	Q ² _predict	Interpretation
Work motivation	0.327 (0.299)	0.227	Moderate, with a weak tendency
Employee performance	0.481 (0.447)	0.234	Moderate predictive power

Compensation and the work environment jointly explained 32.7% of the variance in work motivation ($R^2 = 0.327$), whereas compensation, the work environment, and work motivation explained 48.1% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.481$). Both Q²_predict values were greater than zero, indicating predictive relevance. The effect-size analysis showed a large effect for compensation on work motivation ($f^2 = 0.405$), medium effects for the work environment on employee performance ($f^2 = 0.278$) and work motivation on employee performance ($f^2 = 0.289$), and negligible effects for compensation on employee performance ($f^2 = 0.000$) and the work environment on work motivation ($f^2 = 0.001$).

5. Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Path coefficients and hypothesis-testing results

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	t statistic	p value	Decision
H1	Compensation → Work motivation	0.583	4.619	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Work environment → Work motivation	-0.024	0.174	0.431	Not supported
H3	Compensation → Employee performance	-0.018	0.114	0.455	Not supported
H4	Work environment → Employee performance	0.424	3.195	0.001	Supported
H5	Work motivation → Employee performance	0.472	3.427	< 0.001	Supported
H6	Compensation → Work motivation → Employee performance	0.275	2.817	0.002	Supported
H7	Work environment → Work motivation → Employee performance	-0.012	0.168	0.433	Not supported

Discussion

1. Compensation and Work Motivation (H1)

Compensation was positively associated with work motivation ($\beta = 0.583$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. This result is consistent with social exchange theory: when employees perceive organizational rewards as fair and meaningful, they may reciprocate through stronger commitment and effort (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). It is also compatible with self-determination theory because compensation can signal recognition of

competence and reinforce employees' sense of organizational belonging (Deci et al., 2017). The finding accords with prior evidence that compensation and incentives are important predictors of motivation in public-sector settings (Syah et al., 2025; Lutfi & Prasetya, 2022).

Within BPK, allowances were the most highly rated compensation component. The result suggests that structured and predictable compensation may be especially salient where employees work across geographically difficult areas. However, the absence of formal performance-reward criteria in the 2024 institutional report indicates that the motivational value of compensation could be strengthened by making the basis for rewards more transparent and explicitly linked to contribution.

2. Work Environment and Work Motivation (H2)

The work environment was not significantly associated with work motivation ($\beta = -0.024$, $p = 0.431$); therefore, H2 was not supported. One plausible explanation is that employees' motivation in a cultural-preservation institution may derive more strongly from public-service values, professional commitment, and compensation than from workplace conditions. In addition, the very high mean for the work environment ($M = 4.38$) suggests restricted variability, which may have reduced its capacity to explain differences in motivation. These interpretations should remain cautious because public-service values and range restriction were not directly tested.

The result is consistent with studies reporting non-significant work-environment effects on motivation in government organizations (Muchlis & Rismayanti, 2024; Mahatani et al., 2025). It also demonstrates that favorable workplace perceptions do not necessarily function as motivational drivers when employees already evaluate the environment positively.

3. Compensation and Employee Performance (H3)

Compensation had no significant direct association with employee performance ($\beta = -0.018$, $p = 0.455$), and H3 was therefore not supported. Because compensation was already rated very highly ($M = 4.25$), additional differences in perceived compensation may not have produced proportional differences in performance. Moreover, performance dimensions such as work quality, effectiveness, and independence may depend more immediately on motivation, competence, and professional responsibility than on financial rewards alone.

This finding is consistent with evidence that compensation may have no direct effect on performance once motivational or contextual factors are considered (Aryawibawa et al., 2024; Muchlis & Rismayanti, 2024). It also helps reconcile the mixed evidence in the literature: compensation may remain organizationally important, but its performance contribution may be transmitted through employees' motivational responses rather than through a direct behavioral effect.

4. Work Environment and Employee Performance (H4)

The work environment was positively associated with employee performance ($\beta = 0.424$, $p = 0.001$), supporting H4. Unlike compensation, which operated through motivation, the work environment appears to function as an operational enabler. Strong coworker relationships can facilitate coordination, information sharing, and collaborative problem solving, while adequate facilities and a conducive atmosphere can reduce distractions and support timely task completion.

The finding is consistent with previous public-sector research identifying the work environment as a direct predictor of performance (Diansari & Alie, 2024; Simamora & Sambas, 2023). For BPK, this direct pathway is particularly relevant because employees

must work across geographically challenging areas where transportation, connectivity, and weather can affect the practical execution of duties.

5. Work Motivation and Employee Performance (H5)

Work motivation was positively associated with employee performance ($\beta = 0.472$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5. The result is consistent with self-determination theory, which proposes that internalized motivation supports persistent and high-quality work behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci et al., 2017). Social relatedness was the highest-rated motivational indicator, suggesting that employees' sense of belonging to the institution and its cultural mission may be an important source of sustained effort. The positive path is also consistent with prior evidence that motivation is central to public-sector performance (Vo et al., 2022; Syah et al., 2025).

6. Mediating Role of Work Motivation in the Compensation-Performance Relationship (H6)

The indirect effect of compensation on employee performance through work motivation was significant ($\beta = 0.275$, $t = 2.817$, $p = 0.002$), supporting H6. Because the direct compensation-performance path was non-significant while the two component paths of the indirect effect were significant, the pattern is consistent with indirect-only mediation, conventionally described as full mediation. Thus, compensation was related to performance only to the extent that it was associated with stronger work motivation.

This result has a clear managerial implication: compensation should not be treated merely as a financial transaction. Reward systems should communicate recognition of competence, respect employees' contribution, and strengthen organizational attachment. The finding is consistent with studies showing that motivation mediates the relationship between incentives and employee performance (Syah et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025).

7. Mediating Role of Work Motivation in the Work Environment-Performance Relationship (H7)

Work motivation did not mediate the relationship between the work environment and employee performance (indirect effect $\beta = -0.012$, $t = 0.168$, $p = 0.433$); therefore, H7 was not supported. This result follows logically from the non-significant work environment-motivation path. In the present model, the work environment was associated with performance through a direct facilitative pathway rather than through a motivational pathway. A similar pattern has been reported in a comparable public-institution context (Mahatani et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among compensation, the work environment, work motivation, and employee performance at the Cultural Preservation Center of North Maluku Province. Compensation was positively associated with work motivation but was not directly associated with employee performance. In contrast, the work environment was positively associated with employee performance but was not associated with work motivation. Work motivation was positively associated with performance and mediated the compensation-performance relationship, whereas it did not mediate the work environment-performance relationship.

The findings contribute to human resource management research by showing that compensation and the work environment may support performance through different mechanisms. Compensation follows a motivational pathway, whereas the work environment follows a direct operational pathway. Practically, BPK should establish

transparent performance-based reward and incentive criteria, communicate how rewards recognize employee contribution, and maintain supportive physical and social working conditions. These initiatives should be implemented jointly because motivation and operational support address different determinants of performance.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings should be interpreted in light of the study's cross-sectional design, single-institution setting, small census population, and reliance on self-reported questionnaire data. The estimated paths indicate statistical associations within BPK and should not be interpreted as definitive causal effects or automatically generalized to other public institutions. Future research could use longitudinal or multi-institutional designs, incorporate supervisor-rated performance, and examine additional determinants of motivation such as leadership, organizational culture, public-service motivation, and perceived organizational support.

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