

Employee Performance: The Role of Work Experience, Motivation, and Work Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Work Experience;
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Background: This study investigates the role of work engagement as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between work experience, work motivation, and employee performance within the context of energy transition at PT Paiton Operation and Maintenance Indonesia. Grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, the study emphasizes that individual resources such as experience and motivation can enhance employee performance through the development of positive psychological engagement.

Method: This research employed an explanatory quantitative approach. Data were collected from 423 employees of PT Paiton Operation and Maintenance Indonesia using structured questionnaires. The analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the direct and mediating relationships among work experience, work motivation, work engagement, and employee performance.

Results: The findings reveal that work experience and work motivation have significant positive effects on both work engagement and employee performance. In addition, work engagement significantly enhances employee performance and partially mediates the relationships between work experience, work motivation, and performance. These results demonstrate that employees with greater experience and stronger motivation are more likely to develop higher engagement, which subsequently improves performance outcomes.

Conclusion: This study extends the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework by confirming that employee performance is influenced not only by individual resources but also by the extent to which these resources are transformed into positive psychological states through work engagement. The findings underscore the strategic importance of fostering employee engagement to sustain performance in high-risk and energy transition organizational environments.

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INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is essential for achieving organizational goals, as strategies cannot be executed effectively without optimal individual contributions (Kehoe and Wright, 2013). It encompasses employees' abilities, skills, and accomplishments in meeting work responsibilities and organizational expectations. Based on Organizational Support Theory (OST), when employees perceive strong organizational support, they tend to demonstrate higher performance (Mohammad, 2025). Grounded in social exchange theory OST suggests that employees reciprocate organizational care and support with greater dedication, commitment, and improved performance.

Social Exchange Theory explains that relationships between employees and organizations are built on reciprocal exchanges, where both parties seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs. In this study, work experience and work motivation function as employees' contributions, while good performance and organizational recognition serve as expected rewards. Employees who perceive fair treatment and support tend to respond with higher work engagement and improved performance, making engagement a key psychological mechanism linking these factors (Simbula et al., 2023). Work engagement acts as a mediating mechanism because employees who feel that their experience and motivation are valued develop stronger attachment to the organization, ultimately enhancing their performance. Social Exchange Theory thus provides a solid conceptual foundation for understanding how internal employee factors and reciprocal organizational relationships shape productive behavior. This is particularly relevant in the energy sector, including PT Paiton Operation and Maintenance Indonesia, where operational success relies heavily on highly engaged and motivated human resources. Therefore, companies are advised to pay more attention to improving the competency, training, and supervision of this group of employees to maintain their performance and support the company's competitiveness amidst modern business challenges (Tavakoli & Nafar, 2020).

Empirically, work experience and work motivation are recognized as key factors influencing performance. Fan (2023) highlights that work experience is crucial for individual performance and organizational competitiveness, as employees with strong experiential backgrounds typically show higher motivation and better task accomplishment approach widely adopted in Indonesia's energy industry. This is supported by Wesson (2002), who stated that employee performance is largely determined by previous work experience. This explanation aligns with empirical studies that show that work experience can drive improved employee performance (Fan et al., 2023; Richard W. Herling, 2005; Ardianto, 2023). Furthermore, Mar et al. (2010) in their research explained that previous work experience can have both positive and negative impacts on an individual's performance.

Work motivation is another key factor influencing employee performance. It represents the force that directs, intensifies, and sustains employee behavior in fulfilling their duties (Pinder, 2014). Motivated employees tend to be more productive, creative, and committed. Research by Wang et al. (2024) shows a strong and stable causal link between motivation and performance, supported by Andriana et al. (2019), who found motivation to be more influential than workload. Thus, organizations must strengthen motivation to help employees reach optimal performance and enhance overall competitiveness. Interviews with employees across performance categories revealed that motivation and experience are perceived as essential for maintaining performance. Some employees had strong motivation but lacked experience, causing confusion when facing unfamiliar problems and reducing performance. Others had extensive experience but low motivation to contribute, leaving their potential underutilized. These findings indicate that experience and motivation do not always operate linearly. Therefore, companies must prioritize both factors motivation as an internal drive and experience as the foundation of skills and confidence.

Previous studies show inconsistent findings regarding the effects of work experience and work motivation on employee performance. Some studies report a significant positive influence (Wesson, 2002; Fan et al., 2023; Ardianto, 2023), while others find no significant effect. Similar inconsistencies appear in studies on motivation (Taufik, 2022; Pancasila et al., 2020; Muharam et al., 2020). These mixed results create a research gap, suggesting the need to examine work engagement as an additional variable to better explain these relationships. Work engagement has become a critical determinant of organizational success, especially amid global recession and intense competition (Lee & Ok, 2015). Highly engaged employees show greater productivity, reduced absenteeism, and lower turnover, ultimately improving financial performance. They are more motivated to innovate, maintain work

quality, and contribute to organizational growth. Engagement also fosters a supportive work environment that enhances psychological well-being and strengthens employee loyalty, helping organizations maintain competitive advantage in challenging economic conditions. Ratnawati et al. (2022) found that motivation and work experience do not always produce optimal performance without work engagement. As a mediator, engagement reflects emotional, cognitive, and physical involvement, strengthening the link between these factors and performance. Motivated and experienced employees tend to display higher engagement, which boosts productivity, focus, and innovation. Conversely, without strong engagement, the benefits of motivation and experience cannot be fully transformed into improved performance.

The objectives of this study are to analyze and explain the influence of work experience and work motivation on employee performance at PT Paiton Operation and Maintenance Indonesia, as well as their effects on work engagement. This research also aims to examine the impact of work engagement on employee performance and to assess the mediating role of work engagement in the relationships between work experience, work motivation, and employee performance, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive performance within the organization.

METHOD

Based on the background and research questions, this study employs an explanatory research design, aiming to test the relationships among variables. This type of research is quantitative in nature, focusing on examining causal relationships and providing empirical evidence to clarify how one variable influences another within the organizational context. The population of this study consists of all 423 employees of PT POMI. A saturated sampling technique is used, meaning the entire population is taken as the sample. Thus, all 423 employees are included to ensure comprehensive and representative data for analysis. The data analysis techniques applied in this study include descriptive analysis and inferential statistical analysis. The data collection technique in this study used a questionnaire with a Likert scale for each variable. The following is an overview of the instrument used. The analytical approach utilizes Partial Least Squares (PLS), covering the Measurement Model (Outer Model), Structural Model (Inner Model), hypothesis testing, and mediation testing to thoroughly evaluate the relationships among the research variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent characteristics examined in this study included gender, length of service, and job level. Based on the results of the questionnaire distribution, the following characteristics of the respondents were identified.

Table 1. Responden Characteristic

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Man	234	90%
	Woman	26	10%
Length of Service	0 – 5 years	75	28.85%
	> 5 – 10 years	55	21.15%
	> 11 – 15 years	59	22.69%
	> 16 – 20 years	14	5.38%
	> 20 yeas	57	21.92%
Job Level	Staff	70	26.92%
	Non Staff	190	73.08%

Based on the descriptive analysis of respondent characteristics at PT Paiton Operation and Maintenance Indonesia, the majority of employees are male. Out of all respondents, 234 individuals (90%) are male, while only 23 respondents (10%) are female. This indicates that the workforce is predominantly male, reflecting the nature of the power plant industry, which generally requires technical and field-based operational roles typically occupied by men. The analysis of work tenure shows a diverse distribution among respondents. The largest group consists of employees with 0–5 years of tenure (75

people or 28.85%), indicating a relatively new workforce. Meanwhile, 59 employees (22.69%) have worked for 10–15 years, followed by 57 employees (21.92%) with more than 20 years of tenure. Additionally, 55 employees (21.15%) have 5–10 years of experience, and 14 employees (5.38%) have 15–20 years. This diversity provides a balanced mix of new and long-tenured employees. Descriptive analysis by job level shows that most respondents (73.08%) occupy Non-Staff/Non-Exempt positions. Meanwhile, 70 employees (26.92%) are in Staff/Exempt roles. This indicates that the workforce is dominated by operational and technical positions, which are essential in a power plant operation and maintenance environment. The high proportion of Non-Staff employees also highlights their crucial role in supporting daily operational activities within the company.

Table 2. Construct Reliability Results

Variable	Indicator	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Work Experience		0.907	0.928
	Working Period	0.826	0.920
	Level of Knowledge and Skills Owned	0.729	0.880
	<i>Mastery of work and equipment</i>	0.776	0.899
Work Motivation		0.905	0.927
	Behavioral Direction	0.727	0.880
	Level of Effort	0.788	0.904
	Level of Persistence	0.780	0.901
Work Engagement		0.922	0.935
	Vigor	0.736	0.850
	Dedication	0.835	0.901
	Absorption	0.823	0.883
Employee Performance		0.919	0.932
	Quantity of Work	0.721	0.877
	Responsibility	0.760	0.893
	Collaboration	0.727	0.880
	Initiative	0.714	0.875
	Quantity of Work	0.732	0.882

The Cronbach's alpha value of each variable used is greater than 0.7, so the variables are reliable. Variable X1 (Work Experience) is reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.907 > 0.7, and 3 reliable indicators with values > 0.7 each. Variable X2 (Work Motivation) is reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.905 > 0.7, and 3 reliable indicators with values > 0.7 each. Variable Z (Work Engagement) is reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.922 > 0.7, and 4 reliable indicators with values > 0.7 each. Variable Y (Employee Performance) is reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.919 > 0.7, and 5 reliable indicators with values > 0.7 each. Composite reliability values > 0.7 each indicate that the variables and indicators are included in the high reliability category.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing

	Hypothesis	Coefficient	Computed t-value	p-value
H1	Work Experience Influence Employee Performance	0.285	4.547	0.000
H2	Work Motivation Influence Employee Performance	0.243	3.366	0.001
H3	Work Experience Influence Work Engagement	0.208	3.089	0.002
H4	Work Motivation Influence Work Engagement	0.551	8.830	0.000

H5	Work Engagement Influence Employee Performance	0.375	5.575	0.000
H6	Work Experience Influence Employee Performance Mediated through Work Engagement	0.078	2.667	0.008
H7	Work Motivation Influence Employee Performance Mediated through Work Engagement	0.207	4.631	0.000

The analysis shows that work experience has a positive coefficient of 0.285, with a t-statistic of 4.547 and a p-value of 0.000. Since the t-statistic exceeds the t-table value (1.96) and the p-value is below 0.05, work experience significantly influences employee performance. The positive coefficient indicates that greater work experience leads to higher performance. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. The analysis indicates that work motivation has a positive coefficient of 0.243, with a t-statistic of 3.366 and a p-value of 0.001. Because the t-statistic is greater than 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, work motivation significantly affects employee performance. The positive coefficient confirms that higher motivation increases performance. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is accepted. Results show that work experience has a positive coefficient of 0.208 on work engagement, with a t-statistic of 3.089 and a p-value of 0.002. Since the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, work experience significantly affects work engagement. The positive coefficient indicates that greater experience enhances employee engagement. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is accepted.

The analysis reveals that work motivation has a positive coefficient of 0.551 on work engagement, with a t-statistic of 8.380 and a p-value of 0.000. As the t-statistic is far above 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, work motivation significantly influences work engagement. The strong positive coefficient shows that higher motivation substantially boosts engagement. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is accepted. Findings indicate that work engagement has a positive coefficient of 0.375 on employee performance, with a t-statistic of 5.575 and a p-value of 0.000. Since the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, work engagement significantly affects performance. The positive coefficient demonstrates that higher engagement improves performance. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is accepted.

The indirect effect of work experience on employee performance through work engagement is significant, as both the effect of work experience on engagement and the effect of engagement on performance are significant, with a p-value below 0.05. This indicates that work engagement mediates the relationship between work experience and performance. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is accepted. The indirect effect of work motivation on employee performance through work engagement is significant, supported by significant direct effects of motivation on engagement and engagement on performance, with a p-value below 0.05. This confirms that work engagement serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between work motivation and employee performance. Thus, Hypothesis 7 is accepted.

Table 7. Coefficient Determination Test

Variabel	R-Square
Work Experience and Work Motivation influence Work Engagement	0.495
Work Experience and Work Motivation influence Employee Performance Through Work Engagement	0.616

The coefficient of determination (R-square) obtained from model 1, namely the influence of variables X1 (Work experience) and X2 (Work motivation) on variable Z (Work engagement) is 0.495 or 49.5%. And model 2, namely the influence of variables X1 (Work experience), X2 (Work motivation), and Z (Work engagement) on variable Y (Employee performance) is 0.616 or 61.6%.

The findings demonstrate that work experience significantly enhances employee performance at PT Paiton Operation and Maintenance Indonesia (PT POMI). While this result is consistent with prior studies, a more critical interpretation suggests that work experience should not be reduced to tenure alone, but rather understood as a strategic human capital resource. Work experience reflects accumulated knowledge, skills, and situational understanding developed through repeated task exposure (Foster, 2007; Hasibuan, 2013). From a human capital perspective, experienced employees exhibit superior

decision-making, problem-solving, and adaptability, which are crucial in complex and high-risk environments (Becker, 1993). This finding aligns with recent empirical evidence showing that experience contributes not only to individual productivity but also to organizational competitiveness (Fan et al., 2023). Thus, this study extends prior research by emphasizing that experience enhances performance not only through technical competence but also through improved cognitive readiness in dynamic operational contexts.

Work motivation is also found to have a significant positive effect on employee performance, reinforcing its role as a core psychological driver. Motivation determines the direction, intensity, and persistence of employee behavior (Robbins & Judge, 2013). The findings support classical motivational theories, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) and Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), which highlight that fulfillment of intrinsic and extrinsic needs enhances performance outcomes. In high-risk sectors such as energy operations, motivation becomes particularly critical as it ensures compliance, discipline, and sustained effort under pressure. Empirical support from Wang et al. (2024) and Rozi et al. (2024) confirms that motivated employees demonstrate higher productivity and task effectiveness. Therefore, motivation should be understood not merely as an internal force but as an outcome of organizational practices such as fair rewards, job security, and career development opportunities.

A key contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that work experience significantly influences work engagement. Within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, work experience can be conceptualized as a personal resource that enhances employees' confidence, resilience, and perceived control over tasks (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). These psychological resources foster higher levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption, which are core dimensions of engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). This finding is consistent with Basar (2024) and Maharani and Febriansyah (2022), who reported that experienced employees tend to exhibit stronger emotional and cognitive attachment to their work. Importantly, this study adds nuance by showing that experience does not automatically translate into performance unless it is accompanied by psychological engagement. In high-risk environments such as PT POMI, this engagement is essential for maintaining focus, safety compliance, and operational precision.

Similarly, work motivation is found to significantly enhance work engagement, confirming that motivation and engagement, while related, are conceptually distinct constructs. Motivation initiates effort, whereas engagement reflects the quality and depth of that effort (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). This distinction is critical, as it suggests that motivated employees may not necessarily perform optimally unless they are also deeply engaged in their work. Empirical evidence from Engidaw (2021) and Farmasari et al. (2018) supports this finding, indicating that motivation strengthens employees' psychological attachment, which in turn enhances engagement. Thus, engagement serves as a more proximal predictor of performance by translating motivational energy into focused and persistent work behavior.

Furthermore, the results confirm that work engagement has a direct and significant effect on employee performance. This finding reinforces the JD-R model, which posits that engaged employees exhibit higher levels of energy, resilience, and proactive behavior (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Engaged employees are more likely to demonstrate persistence, initiative, and adaptability, which are critical for achieving high performance (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Empirical studies by Nurjuha et al. (2022) and Ohemeng et al. (2019) further confirm that engagement is a strong predictor of performance outcomes. In the context of PT POMI, where operational accuracy and safety are paramount, engagement ensures that employees remain attentive, disciplined, and committed to achieving performance targets.

Importantly, this study reveals that work engagement mediates the relationship between work experience and employee performance. This finding highlights that experience alone is insufficient to produce optimal performance unless it is activated through positive psychological states. Experienced employees tend to develop greater confidence and mastery, which enhances their engagement levels, ultimately improving performance outcomes (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). This mediating mechanism confirms findings from Maharani and Febriansyah (2022) and Basar (2024), while also extending the literature by positioning engagement as a key explanatory mechanism rather than a complementary variable. In high-risk operational settings, this pathway is particularly relevant, as engaged employees are more likely to apply their experience effectively in complex and demanding situations.

Similarly, work engagement mediates the relationship between work motivation and employee performance. This suggests that motivation alone does not directly translate into performance unless it is transformed into sustained psychological involvement. Motivation provides the initial energy, but engagement determines how that energy is maintained and directed toward productive outcomes (Robbins & Judge, 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Empirical support from Engidaw (2021), Zahro et al. (2024), and Thalia (2024) confirms that motivation enhances engagement, which in turn improves performance. This finding contributes to the literature by clarifying the mechanism through which motivation operates, emphasizing that engagement is the key process linking motivation to performance outcomes.

Overall, this study provides important theoretical implications for organizational behavior and human resource management. By integrating work experience and motivation within the JD-R framework, this study demonstrates that both variables function as resources that generate work engagement, which ultimately drives employee performance. This highlights that performance is not solely determined by competence or motivation alone, but by how these factors are translated into positive psychological states. Therefore, organizations should adopt a more integrative approach by simultaneously enhancing employee experience, strengthening motivation, and fostering engagement. Practical strategies may include structured training, mentoring, job rotation, fair reward systems, and supportive leadership. Such efforts will ensure that individual capabilities and motivations are effectively converted into sustained high performance and long-term organizational effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that work experience and work motivation are significant predictors of employee performance at PT Paiton Operation and Maintenance Indonesia. However, the findings go beyond direct relationships by demonstrating that both variables operate more effectively through work engagement as a mediating mechanism. This indicates that employee performance is not solely driven by accumulated experience or motivational intensity, but by the extent to which these resources are transformed into positive psychological states, reflected in vigor, dedication, and absorption. The results highlight the central role of work engagement as a key explanatory pathway linking individual resources to performance outcomes. In this regard, work experience functions not only as a source of technical competence but also as a personal resource that enhances employees' confidence and involvement. Similarly, work motivation provides the initial energy that, when supported by engagement, is translated into sustained and focused work behavior. These findings reinforce the relevance of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) perspective, emphasizing that optimal performance emerges from the interaction between resources and psychological engagement. From a practical standpoint, the study suggests that organizations, particularly in high-risk and technology-intensive sectors such as PT POMI, should adopt an integrative human resource strategy. Enhancing employee performance requires not only improving skills and motivation, but also fostering deeper work engagement. This can be achieved through structured training, job rotation, mentoring systems, fair and transparent reward mechanisms, and supportive leadership practices that promote meaningful and challenging work experiences. For employees, continuous skill development, sustained motivation, and active psychological involvement in work are essential to achieving high performance. Meanwhile, future research is encouraged to extend this model across different industrial contexts, incorporate additional variables such as leadership style, organizational climate, or job stress, and apply more diverse methodological approaches to strengthen the generalizability and robustness of findings. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature by clarifying the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between work experience, motivation, and employee performance.

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