# Employee Perception Of The Influence Of Leadership, Motivation, And Work Spirit In Driving Performance: A Qualitative Study With A Focus On The Role Of Incentives In Pt. Pln Up3 Lubuk Pakam

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Abstract This study aims to explore employee perceptions of the influence of transformational leadership style, work motivation, and work ethic on employee performance, as well as the role of incentives as factors that strengthen these relationships. A qualitative approach was used in this study with a case study design at PT. PLN (Persero) UP3 Lubuk Pakam. Data was obtained through in-depth interviews with a number of employees from various work units, which were selected purposively. The findings of the study show that an inspiring and exemplary leadership style has a positive impact on employee morale and commitment. Intrinsic motivation such as a sense of responsibility and desire to contribute, as well as high morale, play a big role in driving performance improvement. In addition, incentives are perceived as a form of reward that strengthens loyalty and productivity. This study concludes that combination of transformative leadership, personal motivation, work ethic, and incentive support contributes to the achievement of optimal performance. These results are expected to be a consideration in the development of managerial strategies based on a humanistic approach in the company environment.

Keywords: Transformational leadership style, motivation, work ethic, incentives, performance

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an era of increasingly complex business competition, the success of an organization is largely determined by the ability to manage human resources effectively. Employees who have high motivation, strong work ethic, and are led by a transformative leader will have a tendency to show optimal performance (Robbins & Judge, 2021). Transformational leadership styles, which emphasize inspiration, ideal influence, and individual attention, are considered to be able to create a positive work climate and increase employee involvement in achieving organizational goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Work motivation is an important element in driving productivity. Motivation that comes from within employees, such as the desire to develop and achieve, as well as from outside such as incentives and awards, contribute directly to improving performance (Hasibuan, 2020). Meanwhile, work

morale is a manifestation of psychological satisfaction and a conducive work atmosphere. Employees who have a high work ethic tend to show dedication and loyalty to the company (Sutrisno, 2022).

Incentives as a form of appreciation for work contributions are an important factor in strengthening the relationship between motivation and performance. In the context of public service companies such as PT. PLN (Persero) UP3 Lubuk Pakam, providing incentives is not only financially motivating, but also increases the sense of appreciation by the organization (Rahayu, 2024). Therefore, it is important to understand how employees' perceptions of leadership style, motivation, and morale can shape their performance, particularly considering the role of incentives as a supporting factor.

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach to delve deeper into the meaning and subjective experiences of employees related to work dynamics in the field. This approach was chosen to obtain a complete picture of their perception of the relationship between these variables, which has been predominantly studied quantitatively. Thus, the results of this study are expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of human resource management policies in the public service sector.

Employee performance is one of the main indicators of the success of an organization, especially in the public service sector such as PT. PLN (Persero). In this context, effective human resource management is very crucial, considering that the quality of service is greatly influenced by the performance of individuals and teams in the field. One of the challenges that management often faces is how to create a work environment that is able to encourage employees to work optimally, even in dynamic and stressful working conditions.

Transformational leadership styles are believed to be a relevant approach to addressing these challenges. Transformational leaders are able to influence their subordinates through a strong vision, positive example, and emotional drive that arouses morale. Previous research has shown that this leadership style has a positive relationship with employee satisfaction and performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006;

leadership style is inseparable from intrinsic factors such as work motivation and work spirit that grow in the employees themselves.

employee behavior. Motivated employees tend to have a strong drive to achieve work goals and show initiative in completing tasks. Work ethic, which is reflected in enthusiasm and commitment to work, is an important complement to motivation. However, in practice, motivation and morale often go up and down, influenced by inconsistent leadership, high workload, and lack of appreciation for employee achievements.

In this case, incentives have a strategic role as a form of reward that can strengthen motivation and loyalty. The incentives provided are not only financial, but also in the form of recognition of performance, promotion, training, and selfdevelopment opportunities. Unfortunately, there are still many organizations that have not optimally functioned incentives as a managerial tool that encourages performance achievement (Rahayu, 2024).

A similar situation also occurred at PT. PLN (Persero) UP3 Lubuk Pakam, where the challenge of managing motivation, work morale, and employee perception of incentives and leadership is still an important issue. Although structurally the organization has implemented reward and coaching policies, employees' perceptions of the fairness, effectiveness, and sustainability of the program have not been extensively researched in depth, especially through a qualitative approach.

Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the perception of employees holistically on the influence of transformational leadership style, motivation, and work ethic in shaping performance, by highlighting the role of incentives as an intervention variable. Through a qualitative approach, it is hoped that a deep understanding of non-structural factors that affect work performance will be obtained, which are often overlooked by quantitative approaches and statistical figures alone.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

## A. Performance

Performance is the result of work in terms of quality and quantity achieved by a person in carrying out his duties in accordance with the responsibilities given. According to Mangkunegara (2017), "performance is the result of quality and quantity of work achieved by an employee in carrying out his duties in accordance with the responsibilities given. Meanwhile, according to Robbins and Judge (2017), performance reflects a person's effectiveness and efficiency in achieving work goals that have been set by the organization. Factors that affect performance include individual abilities, motivation, work environment, and leadership. Performance appraisals are important to evaluate employees' contributions to the achievement of organizational goals, as well as being the basis for managerial decision-making such as providing incentives, promotions, or training.

Mangkunegara (2017) stated that the factors that affect performance are, as follows:

- 1) Abilities and expertise are abilities or skills that a person has in doing a job.
- 2) Knowledge is someone who has knowledge about the job well

- Robbins & Judge, 2021). However, the effectiveness of 3) A work plan is a work plan that will make it easier for employees to achieve their goals.
  - *4) Personality is a person's personality or a person's character.*
  - 5) Work motivation is the motivation for a person to do work.
  - Work motivation is the foundation in shaping productive 6) Leadership is the behavior of a leader in organizing, managing and directing his subordinates to do certain tasks and responsibilities that he or she gives.
    - 7) Leadership style is the style or attitude of a leader in dealing with or commanding his subordinates.
    - 8) Organizational culture is the habits or norms that apply and are owned by an organization or company
    - 9) Job satisfaction is a feeling of pleasure or joy or a person's feeling of liking before and after doing a job.
    - 10) The work environment is the atmosphere or conditions around the location of the workplace.
    - 11) Loyalty is the loyalty of employees to keep working and defend the company where they work.
    - 12) Commitment is the employee's compliance to carry out company policies or regulations at work.
    - 13) Work discipline is an employee's effort to carry out their work activities earnestly. Work discipline in this case can be in the form of time, for example, always coming to work on time
    - 14) Compensation is related to expectations and realities of the compensation system.

Individual performance indicators are benchmarks used to assess employee contributions and work performance on a personal level. According to Mangkunegara (2017), performance indicators include:

## 1) Quality of Work:

Reflects the level of precision, neatness, and precision in carrying out tasks according to the standards that have been set.

2) Working Quantity:

Shows how much work was completed in a given period of time.

3) Reliability:

The ability of employees to complete tasks well and consistently, without errors or defects.

4) Attitude:

Includes a positive attitude towards work, coworkers, and organizations, as well as the ability to work well in a team.

### B. Incentive

Incentives are a form of appreciation given by organizations to motivate and improve employee performance. According to Hasibuan (2017), "incentives are a form of additional rewards given to employees who excel beyond the basic salary, as an encouragement to increase work productivity. Gibson et al. (2012) added that incentives serve as a reinforcement of the organization's desired work behavior, as well as encourage employees to achieve set targets. Providing fair and transparent incentives can also increase employee satisfaction and loyalty to the company. Thus, the right incentive system can be an effective strategy in human resource management to encourage the optimal achievement of organizational goals.

Hasibuan (2017) stated that the factors that affect the Incentives are, as follows:

- and willing to provide higher incentives will provide better incentives to its employees.
- Employee Work Productivity: Employees who have high work 2) productivity tend to get higher incentives.
- Cost of Living: The cost of living in an area can affect the 7) amount of incentives given. Areas with a high cost of living will need higher incentives.
- Employee Position Position: A higher position or position will usually get a higher incentive.
- Education and Work Experience: Higher education and work experience can affect the amount of incentives received.
- can affect the amount of incentives given. If the Type and Nature of the Job Are Difficult/Difficult: Difficult or dangerous work can affect the amount of incentives given, as employees who do the work have to face higher risks.

Furthermore, Hasibuan (2017) explained that indicators that show the existence of this incentive include:

## 1) Social Security:

Social security such as health insurance and pension plans are provided in addition to the basic salary.

#### 2) Bonus:

Bonuses are given as additional incentives for achieving certain targets or work achievements.

3) Appreciation:

Awards in the form of charters, certificates, or other awards that recognize employee performance.

4) Promotion:

Promotion to a position or placement to a higher position as a form of incentive.

## C. Leadership Style

Leadership style is a consistent and distinctive pattern of behavior used by a leader in influencing, guiding, and directing his or her members to achieve organizational goals. According to Northouse (2022) in his book Leadership: Theory and Practice 9th edition: "Leadership style refers to the behaviors of leaders, focusing on what leaders do and how they act. It includes both task behaviors and relationship behaviors."

(Leadership style refers to a leader's behavior that focuses on what the leader does and how they act, including task and relationship behavior.)

Here are the factors that influence leadership styles, based on recent leadership theory and literature (including Northouse, 2022):

- Leader Personality; Basic traits such as dominance, empathy, confidence, and emotional stability.
- Experience and Background; Education, training, and work experience influence the way a person leads.
- 3) Organizational Condition; The organizational structure, 2) work culture, and vision-mission of the company influence the style adopted.
- Subordinate maturity level; Leadership styles can change 4) depending on the competence and readiness of subordinates 5) (as per Hersey & Blanchard's theory).

- a) Company Ability and Readiness: A company that is able 5) Social and Cultural Environment; Social norms and cultural values influence expectations of leaders.
  - Stress and Work Situation; Leadership styles are often adjusted to the level of crisis, conflict, or organizational change.
  - Goals to be Achieved; Short-term long-term or organizational goals can affect the leadership approach (task-oriented vs people-oriented).

## D. Transformational Leadership Style Indicators (Based on Northouse, 2022 & Yukl, 2013)

- Type and Nature of Employment: Difficult or dangerous work 1) Directing Ability; Leaders are able to give clear and structured work directions.
  - Ability to Motivate; Leaders encourage subordinate morale through appreciation, support, or example.
  - Communication Skills; Leaders establish open, two-way communication, and are able to convey the organization's vision
  - Involvement in Decision Making; Leaders involve subordinates in the strategic or operational decision-making
  - the ability to delegate tasks; Leaders can divide tasks according to competencies and give trust.
  - Justice in Treatment; Be fair and impartial towards all subordinates.
  - Concern for Team Members; Pay attention to the individual needs, well-being, and development of the team.

#### E. Motivation

The definition of work motivation according to is a situation in a person's personality that encourages the individual's desire to do certain activities to achieve organizational goals (Handoko, 2020). In addition, motivation is a condition that moves employees who are directed to achieve organizational goals. Indicators of work motivation are responsibility, work achievement, opportunities to advance, recognition of performance and challenging work (Mangkunegara, 2017).

According to Handoko (2020), factors that affect employee work motivation include job satisfaction, work environment, and compensation. Job satisfaction is the feeling of being happy or unhappy with a job, which is influenced by salary, benefits, career development, and awards. A conducive and comfortable work environment is also important for increasing employee motivation, including relationships with colleagues and organizational leadership. Compensation, such as salaries and benefits, can be a motivation for employees to work harder.

To know about work motivation, it is very important to know several motivational indicators. The indicators of work motivation according to Mangkunegara (2017), namely:

Hard work, which is doing activities with full abilities Future orientation, namely interpreting what will happen in the future and future plans.

A high level of ideals, namely having more willpower.

Task or goal orientation, which is always oriented to quality work results.

Efforts to advance, namely carrying out activities to achieve a goal.

- Perseverance, which is doing all work diligently and earnestlv.
- Time utilization, that is, using time well.
- The selected colleagues, namely choosing colleagues who can work together to achieve common goals

## F. Work Spirit

Morale theory is concerned with the motivation of individuals to work with full energy and commitment. Robbins and Judge (2017), explain that morale is strongly influenced by internal factors such as personal appreciation, recognition, and a sense of accomplishment, as well as external factors such as the work environment and relationships with colleagues. They argue that work ethic can be a significant driving force in achieving organizational 3) goals.

Furthermore, Robbins and Judge (2017), explain the factors that affect work morale, including:

- 1) Motivation; Internal drives that affect a person's direction, intensity, and perseverance at work.
- Job Satisfaction; The extent to which a person feels good 1) In-depth interviews, using semi-structured interview about his or her work as a whole.
- *Leadership: The style and behavior of the boss in guiding and 2)* motivating the subordinates has a great influence on the morale of the worker.
- organizational culture; Values, norms, and belief systems in 3) Documentation studies, to complement data through internal organizations that can foster or suppress work morale.
- 5) Work Environment: Physical and social factors such as workspace conditions, relationships between employees, and work climate.
- 6) Rewards and Recognition: Providing appropriate rewards and appreciation will increase employee morale.
- Career Development Opportunities: Opportunities for promotion, training, or learning new things foster enthusiasm for work.

Work Morale Indicator according to Robbins & Judge (2017)

Enthusiasm in Completing Tasks; Employees show enthusiasm and energy at work.

- Attendance and Punctuality; The attendance rate is high and comes on time reflects the morale of the worker.
- *Initiative and Proactivity; Employees actively seek solutions* and do not wait for orders.
- 10) Willingness to Collaborate; Willing to help colleagues and support team goals.
- 11) Perseverance and Consistency; Work consistently and never give up in completing tasks.
  - 12) Commitment to the Organization; Be loyal to the organization and show high responsibility.
- 13) Job Satisfaction Level: Feeling satisfied and proud to be part of the organization.

## III. RESEARCH METHODS

### A. Approaches and Types of Research

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. This approach was chosen to delve deeply into employees' subjective meanings and perceptions of leadership styles, motivations, morale, and incentives in relation to

performance. Qualitative research allows researchers to capture social realities as understood by the research subjects in their respective work contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## B. Location and Research Subject

The research was carried out at PT. PLN (Persero) UP3 Lubuk Pakam, which is a public service unit with a complex and dynamic work environment. The research subjects consisted of employees from various work units, including operational and administrative staff, who were selected by purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- 1) Have worked for at least 2 years,
- Actively involved in operational and service activities. 2)
- Willing to provide information openly.

The number of informants is adjusted to the principle of data saturation, which is so that the information obtained is repetitive and does not show new findings.

## C. Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected through:

- guidelines to maintain flexibility and depth of information.
- Direct observation is carried out in the work environment to understand the context of employee behavior and social interaction.
- documents such as incentive policies, performance appraisals, and HR management reports.

#### D. Research Instruments

The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself, with the help of interview guidelines that contain aspects such

- 1) Perception of the leadership style of superiors,
- 2) Motivational and morale factors,
- 3) A view of incentives and their fairness.
- 4) The influence of these aspects on personal performance.

## E. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using the model of Miles and Huberman (2014), which included three main stages:

- 1) Data reduction: the process of simplifying and selecting relevant data from interviews and observations,
  - 2) Data presentation: compiling data in the form of narratives and matrices to see patterns, relationships, and themes.
- 3) Conclusion drawing and verification: interpretation of meaning based on findings that have been validated through triangulation.

### F. Data Validity Test

To guarantee the validity of the data, techniques are used:

- 1) Triangulation of sources and methods,
- 2) Member checking, which is confirmation of findings to informants,

3) Peer debriefing, which is a discussion of findings with peers or research supervisors.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## A. Transformational Leadership Style Drives Engagement and Lovalty

Most of the informants stated that their superiors showed an inspiring leadership attitude and set an example of work. Leaders are considered to be able to build open communication, provide clear directions, and support the selfdevelopment of subordinates.

One of the employees stated:

"My boss always invites us to discuss, not just instructs. He also gets involved when there's a lot of work, so we feel appreciated." (Informant 3)

These findings suggest that transformational leadership not only increases work engagement, but also creates a conducive work climate. This is in line with the opinion of Bass & Riggio (2006) who stated that transformational leaders are able to awaken collective spirit and employee loyalty to the organization.

## B. Work Motivation: A Combination of Internal and External Motivations

Employee work motivation at PT. PLN UP3 Lubuk Pakam was formed from a combination of internal factors (sense of responsibility, pride in working in SOEs, and desire to develop) as well as external factors (job guarantees, incentives, and work atmosphere). Some informants revealed that their motivation could not be separated from the desire to make a real contribution to the community through electricity services.

"We feel that this work is beneficial for many people. If the power goes out, people can get angry, so we feel like we have a big responsibility." (Informant 5)

These findings reinforce Herzberg's theory of motivation (in Robbins & Judge, 2021), which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in shaping performance.

## C. Work Spirit Grows from a Sense of Togetherness and Social Support

The informant showed that high work morale was influenced by strong social relationships between colleagues and support from superiors. A respectful work environment makes employees feel comfortable and motivated to work optimally.

"Sometimes there is a lot of work, but because our friends are compact, we are still enthusiastic. If something is difficult, we help together." (Informant 7)

This shows that work morale is not only influenced by workload, but also social and emotional aspects in the work environment, which also determine daily performance.

## D. Incentives as Reinforcement and Recognition of Performance

Most employees recognize that incentives have a significant role in maintaining motivation and morale, especially in demanding and demanding work situations. However, some informants also highlighted the mismatch between the workload and the amount of incentives provided.

"If you get incentives, it's fun, but sometimes it's not balanced with tired work and risks in the field." (Informant 4)

Incentives are valued not only as a form of financial compensation, but also as a form of symbolic reward and validation of performance. This view is in line with Rahayu (2024) who states that incentives are effective when accompanied by transparency and fairness in distribution.

## E. Employee Performance Is Collectively Influenced by Social and Psychological Factors

Employee performance is not determined by a single factor. Based on the results of the interviews, there is a strong relationship between leadership style, motivation, work morale, and incentives. A transformative leadership style creates the foundation of a positive work culture, motivation to provide direction, work spirit maintains energy, and incentives to strengthen perseverance.

In general, the majority of informants show the perception that their performance improves when all these factors go in harmony.

## F. Brief Discussion

These findings reinforce the concept that employee performance is the result of complex interactions between structural and psychological aspects. Inspiring leadership, maintained work motivation, collective spirit, and fair and transparent incentives are important prerequisites for achieving high performance.

This research also confirms that in the context of public services such as PT. PLN, a humanistic approach in human resource management is a necessity, not an option. By understanding employee perceptions qualitatively, management can develop policies that are more adaptive, fair, and grounded in accordance with the reality of field work.

### V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of qualitative research conducted on employees of PT. PLN (Persero) UP3 Lubuk Pakam, several conclusions were obtained as follows:

- I) Transformational leadership styles are perceived positively by employees and are a key factor in creating morale, emotional engagement, and loyalty to the organization. Leaders who are communicative, exemplary, and support individual growth are able to form a productive work climate.
- 2) Employee work motivation is formed from a combination of intrinsic motivations, such as responsibility and pride in working in the public sector, as well as extrinsic motivation in the form of job guarantees and incentives. This encouragement directly encourages employees to excel and take their duties seriously.

- 3) Work spirit is influenced by a sense of togetherness and harmonious social relations between fellow colleagues. Social support and team cohesiveness have been proven to increase work resilience in the face of burdens and pressures.
- 4) Incentives are seen as a factor that strengthens motivation and validation of performance. Incentives that are considered fair and transparent provide a great psychological boost, although some employees still feel the need to improve their giving system to be more proportionate to the workload.
- 5) Employee performance is the result of a dynamic interaction between leadership, motivation, morale, and incentives. These four factors do not stand alone, but complement each other and form the foundation of effective and sustainable work behavior.

#### VI. SUGGESTION

Improving the quality of leadership; The management of PT. PLN UP3 Lubuk Pakam is advised to develop transformational-based leadership strengthening programs, such as inspirational leadership training, empathetic communication, and coaching for direct superiors. Leadership that is able to build positive emotional relationships with subordinates has been proven to be effective in improving performance and loyalty.

Motivation Management in a Continuous Manner; Companies need to continue to pay attention to factors that affect employee motivation, both intrinsically and extrinsically. A personalization approach is needed, such as giving meaningful responsibility, career development, and recognition of contributions that are not always material.

Building a Work Culture that Supports Collective Spirit; Support for informal activities such as team building, internal discussion forums, and providing space for employees to convey constructive ideas needs to be expanded. This will strengthen teamwork spirit and create a positive work atmosphere.

Evaluation and Adjustment of the Incentive System; Incentives need to be reviewed to better match the workload and risks. Transparency in the assessment system and the distribution of incentives is also important to prevent perceived gaps among employees. Non-financial reward systems such as public appreciation, award charters, or access to training also need to be improved.

Management approach based on employee perception; Companies need to more actively absorb employee feedback through discussion forums, internal surveys, or periodic interviews. This approach will strengthen the relationship between management and employees and help formulate policies that are responsive to real needs in the field.

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