

Work Spirit as a Performance Trigger: a Qualitative Study on Competence, Motivation, and Rewards in PT. PLN ULP Gebang Environment

1st Yusmardi Akbar

Master of Management
Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi
Medan, Indonesia
yusmardiakbar@gmail.com

2nd Sri Rahayu

Master of Management
Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi
Medan, Indonesia
sriahayu@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id

3rd Kiki Farida Ferine

Master of Management
Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi
Medan, Indonesia
kikifaridaferinesyarif@yahoo.com

Abstract This research aims to explore how work spirit is formed and plays a role in encouraging employee performance, by highlighting the contribution of individual competence, work motivation, and reward system within PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Gebang. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, data was collected through in-depth interviews with a number of purposively selected engineering service employees. The results show that work ethic arises in response to the integration of technical abilities (competencies), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (motivation), and recognition of contributions (rewards). These findings confirm that work morale is not only an indicator of employees' positive attitudes, but also a major catalyst in achieving service targets. This research provides important implications for human resource management, especially in designing performance development strategies based on a humanistic approach.

Keywords: work ethic, competence, motivation, awards, performance

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of state-owned companies such as PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Gebang, employee performance is the main indicator in ensuring the quality of technical services and customer satisfaction. Employee performance improvement does not only depend on technical competence, but is also influenced by internal factors such as work motivation and rewards. Previous quantitative studies have shown that motivation and rewards have a positive relationship with loyalty and service quality within PLN.

Work spirit is understood as a psychological condition that gives extra energy and dedication to the task, where the role of internal motivation and reward systems is the main catalyst. Employees who are intrinsically motivated and feel valued by the organization tend to be more enthusiastic and productive in providing professional and responsible technical services.

Employee competence in terms of knowledge, technical skills, and problem-solving skills plays an important role in shaping confidence and work effectiveness. When these competencies are strengthened through training and experience in the field, morale tends to increase, further driving individual and team performance.

Although many quantitative studies have examined the relationship between these variables, a qualitative approach is urgently needed to understand the meaning and internal

processes of potential informants contextually. Information from the results of studies involving UNPAB lecturers—such as the work Rahayu (2023) on work flexibility and competence and training analysis on motivation and performance (Ahmad Aswan Waruwu, 2024)—confirms that daily motivation and rewards are often influenced by concrete experiences and interactions in the workplace.

This study aims to reveal how PLN ULP Gebang employees interpret work ethic as a performance trigger, as well as how a combination of competence, internal motivation, and reward system interact with each other subjectively. A qualitative approach is chosen so that the meaning that emerges from employee narratives can be the basis for HR policy recommendations that are more adaptive, humane, and rooted in real experience in the field.

In the era of modernization of public services, companies such as PT. PLN (Persero) is required to not only rely on the sophistication of the electricity system, but also on the quality of its human resources, especially in the technical service line. Employee performance is an important indicator of operational success and customer satisfaction. However, performance improvement cannot be separated from internal employee factors such as competence, motivation, and work morale, as well as external factors such as rewards.

High competence allows employees to complete tasks efficiently and effectively. However, competence alone is not enough if it is not balanced by strong motivation from within employees and from the organizational environment (Rivai & Mulyadi, 2021). Motivation is the main driving force at work. According to Robbins and Judge (2021), motivation plays a role in directing and sustaining individual behaviors toward specific goals, including high performance achievement.

In the context of PLN ULP Gebang, work spirit is a crucial aspect that shows how enthusiastic and serious employees are in carrying out their duties. Work morale is a form of psychological and emotional involvement in work, which is often influenced by the rewards given by the company, both material and non-material (Sedarmayanti, 2020). Fair and targeted rewards will strengthen employees' emotional relationships with their organizations (Hasibuan, 2021).

Previous research conducted by Rahayu (2023) in SOEs shows that work morale can act as a bridge between competence and performance, where consistent rewards can



strengthen these impacts. The same thing was expressed by Waruwu (2024) in a study of PLN employee motivation, that non-structural factors such as feelings of being valued and given space to develop are actually stronger in driving long-term productivity than formal pressure.

However, many previous studies have been quantitative and have focused on the relationship between variables statistically. Not many have explored how the meaning of work ethic is formed in employees' daily experiences, as well as how they interpret the relationship between competence, motivation, reward, and performance. For this reason, this qualitative research is relevant because it can explore subjective experiences, deep perceptions, and social constructions formed in work interactions at PLN ULP Gebang.

Through a qualitative approach, this study is expected to make a practical contribution to the development of a more humanistic and contextual HR management strategy, as well as enriching the treasures of organizational behavior management science, especially in the strategic public service sector.

A. Problem Formulation

Based on the above background, the formulation of the problem in this study is:

- 1) What is the perception of employees on the influence of competence in shaping the morale of work within PLN ULP Gebang?
- 2) What is the role of internal and external motivation in increasing employee morale?
- 3) How is the reward system understood and felt by employees as a form of appreciation for work contributions?
- 4) How does work spirit contribute to improving the performance of engineering service employees at PLN ULP Gebang?
- 5) How is the relationship between competence, motivation, rewards, and work spirit in shaping performance according to employee experience?

B. Research Objectives

This research aims to:

- 1) Exploring employees' perceptions of the importance of competence in shaping work morale.
- 2) Identify the motivational factors that encourage employee morale at PLN ULP Gebang.
- 3) Describe how rewards are perceived as a driver of work morale.
- 4) Analyze the role of work spirit in improving technical service performance.
- 5) Understand the construction of the meaning of work morale from an employee perspective as a result of the interaction between competence, motivation, and reward.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

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 an evaluation of the employee's work compared to previously set criteria (Robbins & Judge, 2016). The technique used by management to improve performance is appraisal (appraisal). Employees' motivation to work, develop personal abilities and improve future abilities is influenced by feedback on past and developer performance. Here are some indicators to measure employee performance, namely Work Quality, Quantity, Punctuality, Effectiveness, and Independence.

Employee performance is the level of achievement of the employee's work in carrying out the tasks for which he is responsible, which reflects his contribution to the organization's goals" (Rahayu, 2018).

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

Abilities and expertise are abilities or skills that a person has in doing a job.

Knowledge is someone who has knowledge about the job well
A work plan is a work plan that will make it easier for employees to achieve their goals.

Personality is a person's personality or a person's character.

Work motivation is the motivation for a person to do work.

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.

Leadership style is the style or attitude of a leader in dealing with or commanding his subordinates.

Organizational culture is the habits or norms that apply and are owned by an organization or company

Job satisfaction is a feeling of pleasure or joy or a person's feeling of liking before and after doing a job.

The work environment is the atmosphere or conditions around the location of the workplace.

Loyalty is the loyalty of employees to keep working and defend the company where they work.

Commitment is the employee's compliance to carry out company policies or regulations at work.

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

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

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

B. Competence

Competency is a guideline that companies can use to show their employees about the right job (Arief & Nisak, 2022). Every organization is created to achieve a specific goal and when achieved it can be considered successful. To achieve success, it is necessary to have a strong foundation in the form of competencies that employees have (Bukhari & Pasaribu, 2019). Competence can be measured through Knowledge, Understanding, Skills, Attitudes, and Interests (Aisyah et al, 2021)

Competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that a person needs to carry out their job duties effectively (Spencer, 2021).

Factors that affect Employee Competence according to Spencer (2021) are:

- 1) *Motives: inner drives that direct work behaviors such as achievement orientation, desire to improve oneself, and Long-term commitment*
- 2) *Traits: stable psychological and physical characteristics such as emotional resilience, flexibility, and confidence.*
- 3) *Self-Concept: attitudes, values, self-identity, and self-perception that affect the way we view work.*
- 4) *Knowledge: job-specific technical and theoretical knowledge, easy to see and train.*
- 5) *Skills: practical skills such as problem solving, communication, and analysis that can be measured through action.*

Indicators (Spencer, 2021):

- 1) *Work knowledge; Understanding of technical duties and responsibilities*
- 2) *Job skills; Field technical skills & use of work tools*
- 3) *Professional attitude; Discipline, responsibility, and work ethic*
- 4) *Adaptability; Speed of learning and adaptation to new technologies*
- 5) *Problem solving skills; Dexterity in resolving technical glitches/issues*

C. Motivation

Work motivation is the internal and external impulses in a person that cause a person to act or behave in achieving certain goals at work. Kasmir, (2017). 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 (Mangkunegara, 2017). Indicators of work motivation are responsibility, work achievement, opportunities to advance, recognition of performance and challenging work(Mangkunegara, 2017).

According to Kasmir (2017), work motivation is influenced by:

- 1) *Financial needs (salary, bonuses)*

- 2) *Opportunities to excel*
- 3) *Career development*
- 4) *Recognition of achievements*
- 5) *Work environment*

Indicators of work motivation according to Kasmir (2017) are

- 1) *The Desire to Excel*
- 2) *The Desire to Earn Awards*
- 3) *Desire to Earn Income and Benefits*
- 4) *The Desire to Gain Self-Development*
- 5) *The Desire to Gain a Sense of Security*

D. Reward

Rewards are divided into two types, namely extrinsic rewards which are rewards that come from outside the person and intrinsic rewards, which are rewards that are regulated by oneself (Saputra, 2017). Rewards are measured by wages, salaries, incentives, benefits, interpersonal awards, and promotions (Saputra, 2017).

According to Wibowo (2022), rewards include financial and non-financial compensation given to reward employee achievements. Rewards have motivational and retention functions.

The factors that affect Reward according to Wibowo (2022) are:

Financial incentives: Base salary, bonuses, benefits, and other compensation supplements.

Non-financial incentives: Recognition, appreciation, promotion, conducive work environment, and social rewards.

Reward Indicators according to Wibowo (2022)

Wibowo divides rewards into two main types, namely financial rewards and non-financial rewards, with the following indicators:

E. Financial Rewards

- 1) *Basic Salary – The fixed wage received by the employee according to the employment agreement.*
- 2) *Allowance – Additional beyond basic salary (transportation, meals, position).*
- 3) *Bonus – Incentives based on work or performance.*
- 4) *Commission – Rewards for achieving certain targets or contributions.*
- 5) *Other incentives – Additional forms of compensation such as overtime.*

F. Non-Financial Rewards

- 1) *Recognition – Praise or appreciation for performance from superiors.*
- 2) *Promotion Opportunities – Opportunities to move up in a position or role.*
- 3) *Giving More Responsibility – Trust in competence.*
- 4) *Comfortable Work Environment – A supportive work atmosphere.*
- 5) *Competency Enhancement – Opportunities to participate in training or self-development.*

G. Work Spirit

Work spirit is a condition of a person who supports himself to do work faster and better in a company (Badriyah, 2015). Work spirit is an individual's attitude to cooperate with discipline and a sense of responsibility for their activities (Agustini, 2011). The variables of work morale can be determined from the indicators of discipline, cooperation, job satisfaction, and responsibility (Agustini, 2011).

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 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.*
- 2) *Job Satisfaction; The extent to which a person feels good about his or her work as a whole.*
- 3) *Leadership; The style and behavior of the boss in guiding and motivating the subordinates has a great influence on the morale of the worker.*
- 4) *organizational culture; Values, norms, and belief systems in 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.*
- 7) *Career Development Opportunities: Opportunities for promotion, training, or learning new things foster enthusiasm for work.*

Work Morale Indicator according to Robbins & Judge (2017)

- 1) *Enthusiasm in Completing Tasks; Employees show enthusiasm and energy at work.*
- 2) *Attendance and Punctuality; The attendance rate is high and comes on time reflects the morale of the worker.*
- 3) *Initiative and Proactivity; Employees actively seek solutions and do not wait for orders.*
- 4) *Willingness to Collaborate; Willing to help colleagues and support team goals.*
- 5) *Perseverance and Consistency; Work consistently and never give up in completing tasks.*
- 6) *Commitment to the Organization; Be loyal to the organization and show high responsibility.*
- 7) *Job Satisfaction Level: Feeling satisfied and proud to be part of the organization.*

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Approaches and Types of Research

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of exploring in depth the experience, perception, and meaning of work spirit from the perspective of engineering service employees at PLN ULP Gebang. This approach was chosen because it is able to describe complex social realities that cannot be fully explained through a quantitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

B. Research Subject and Location

The subjects in this study are employees of the engineering services section within PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Gebang. The selection of informants is carried out purposively, which is based on criteria such as a minimum of 2 years of service, having direct experience in the field, and being willing and able to provide relevant information.

C. Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected through the following methods:

- 1) *In-depth interviews: Use semi-structured interview guidelines to explore informants' perceptions and experiences related to competence, motivation, rewards, morale, and performance.*
- 2) *Non-participatory observation: The researcher conducts direct observation of work behavior, team interaction, and work environment conditions.*
- 3) *Documentation: Collection of supporting documents such as performance reports, SOPs, internal rewards programs, and motivation policies.*

D. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using the method of Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes:

- 1) *Data reduction – filtering of important information from interviews and observations.*
- 2) *Data presentation – structuring data into narrative and thematic forms.*
- 3) *Drawing conclusions – formulating patterns, categories, and themes from the results of data interpretation.*
- 4) *The analysis process is iterative and takes place simultaneously with the data collection process.*

E. Data Validity Test

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, sources and methods, member checking, and peer debriefing techniques were used. This is important to maintain the reliability of the results and avoid researcher bias.

F. Research Ethics

The researcher guarantees the confidentiality of the informant's identity, and asks for prior approval before conducting interviews and observations. The informant is given the right to withdraw from the process at any time without consequences.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Competence as the Foundation of Work Spirit

The results of the interviews show that employees feel more confident and enthusiastic when they feel competent in carrying out their duties. Technical competencies such as mastery of work tools, operational standards, and communication skills with customers provide a high sense of confidence. This is in line with the theory of Robbins & Judge (2021), which states that competence is one of the main determinants in shaping self-confidence and job satisfaction.

Informant quote: *"If we understand the job well, we become enthusiastic, because there is no fear of being wrong or scolded."* (Informant 1)

B. Motivation as an Internal Driver

Work motivation is both intrinsic (pride in completing tasks, personal satisfaction) and extrinsic (work targets, incentives) is a significant trigger for enthusiasm. Some employees admitted that they felt "more alive" when there were challenges and appreciation. Herzberg's theory (1959) reinforces that motivators such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility can increase work morale.

Informant quote: *"We are motivated if our superiors trust and give us a challenge. It makes us feel valued."* (Informant 3)

C. Reward and Appreciation as Performance Support

Fair and targeted rewards such as work bonuses, thank you, and open appreciation from your boss have a positive effect on work morale. Employees feel that rewards are not only material, but also recognition. This supports the view of Deci & Ryan (2000) in Self Determination Theory that social rewards also increase motivation and work engagement.

Informant quote: *"Even though bonuses are important, sometimes they are just enough to appreciate it and it has made us enthusiastic about work."* (Informant 4)

D. Work Spirit as a Performance Driving Energy

Work ethic emerges as a catalyst between competence, motivation, and reward for performance. Passionate employees are seen as more initiative, more resistant to pressure, and tend to work better together in teams. This is in accordance with a study by Bakker & Demerouti (2017) which states that work morale affects performance and productivity in the long run.

E. Integrative Patterns Between Variables

Field data show an integrative relationship between competence, motivation, and rewards that strengthen work morale. The three do not stand alone, but support each other. The conceptual model of the findings shows that work morale is the result of the synergy between these variables and becomes a strong link towards improving performance.

V. CONCLUSION

This study found that work ethic is a key aspect in shaping the performance of engineering service employees at PLN

ULP Gebang. Morale is strongly influenced by three main factors, namely:

Employee competencies, both technical and non-technical, provide high confidence and job readiness.

Motivation, especially intrinsic motivations such as pride, responsibility, and the desire to grow, are more dominant than extrinsic motivations.

Rewards or awards, not only financial, but also a form of social recognition from superiors, also arouse work morale.

The relationship between these three factors is synergistic. Work ethic emerges as a result of the integration of competence, motivation, and reward, and acts as the main link towards productive, responsible, and initiative performance improvement.

VI. SUGGESTION

Based on the above findings, the suggestions that can be given are:

Improving Competence; PLN ULP Gebang is advised to continuously conduct technical training and soft skill development to increase employee confidence and professionalism.

Strengthening Internal Motivation; Companies can create a work climate that fosters a sense of responsibility, positive challenges, and clarity of work goals. This is important to maintain the intrinsic motivation of employees.

Reward System Optimization; Rewards are not only in the form of financial incentives, but can also be in the form of verbal rewards, promotions, and involvement in decision-making. A fair and transparent reward system is urgently needed.

Management of Work Spirit as an Organizational Asset; Management should make work morale an important indicator in performance evaluation and work culture, because it has proven to be an important bridge between input (competence, motivation, reward) and output (performance).

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