

The Influence of Competence and Work Environment to Improve the Performance of ASN Employees by Work Motivation as an Intervening Variable at the Regional Secretariat Kota Tebing Tinggi

Afridayani Damanik^{1*}, Sri Rahayu², Kiki Farida Ferine³

Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia

Email: srirahayu@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id*, dhida.k3@gmail.com,

kikifaridaferinesyarif@ymail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of competence and work environment on improving the performance of State Civil Apparatus (ASN) employees, with work motivation as an intervening variable in the Regional Secretariat of Kota Tebing Tinggi. The study uses a quantitative method with a survey approach, distributing questionnaires to ASN employees. Data analysis was performed using path analysis to determine both direct and indirect effects between variables. The results show that competence and work environment have a positive and significant effect on work motivation and performance improvement. Competence (X1) positively influences work motivation (Z) with a path coefficient of 0.502 and performance improvement (Y) with a path coefficient of 0.444. Work environment (X2) positively influences work motivation (Z) with a path coefficient of 0.369 and performance improvement (Y) with a path coefficient of 0.404. Work motivation (Z) positively affects performance improvement (Y) with a path coefficient of 1.017. Performance improvement (Y) significantly mediates the relationship between competence (X1) and work motivation (Z), as well as between work environment (X2) and work motivation (Z). These findings confirm that optimizing ASN performance can be achieved by enhancing competencies, fostering a supportive work environment, and increasing work motivation.

Keywords: *competence; work environment; work motivation; employee performance*



INTRODUCTION

Human resources (HR) are the most important asset in every organization, including government agencies (Fitzgerald & Smith, 2020). The State Civil Apparatus (ASN) as the implementer of public policy has a strategic role in determining the success of government and public service implementation (Siregar & Nurkholis, 2021). Therefore, improving the performance of civil servants is the focus in efforts to realize effective, efficient, and accountable governance (Kurniawan et al., 2022). The optimal performance of ASN is influenced not only by external organizational factors but also by internal factors such as competence and work motivation (Rahayu et al., 2023; Wulandari & Fariq, 2021). The development of these internal factors is essential to achieving a high level of public service performance (Nasution & Saleh, 2020; Tan & Lee, 2022).

Competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that employees need to carry out tasks effectively. ASN with high competence can understand their duties and responsibilities well and produce maximum performance. However, some ASN still lack competence aligned with their position demands in terms of professionalism, technical ability, and work ethics. This can result from inadequate training, coaching, and competency assessment mechanisms (Sutrisno, 2017; Hasibuan, 2020).

In addition to competence, the work environment is an important factor affecting employee performance. A conducive work environment—both physical and non-physical—creates comfortable, safe, and productive conditions (Lestari & Setiawan, 2020; Rahayu et al., 2021). Conversely, a less supportive environment, such as limited infrastructure, disharmonious employee relationships, and high work pressure, can reduce ASN morale (Sedarmayanti, 2022; Mulyadi & Hamid, 2020). At the Regional Secretariat of Tebing Tinggi City, challenges persist related to workspace limitations, supporting facilities, and an organizational climate that is not fully conducive to performance improvement (Fadillah & Suyanto, 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2021).

Work motivation serves as a psychological factor that drives employees to achieve organizational goals. ASN with high motivation strive to deliver optimal results despite constraints. Conversely, low motivation can lead to decreased morale, discipline, and responsibility. Thus, motivation has the potential to act as an intervening variable linking competence and work environment to ASN performance (Robbins & Judge, 2019; Kasmir, 2018).

In the context of the Tebing Tinggi City Regional Secretariat, ASN performance still faces obstacles such as low task initiative, administrative delays, and poor inter-departmental collaboration. This indicates that competence, work environment, and work motivation have not been fully integrated into the performance management system. Therefore, an empirical study is needed to analyze the extent to which competence and work environment affect ASN performance improvement and how motivation intervenes in these relationships.

Performance appraisal is a key instrument in public sector human resource management. In the context of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN), it measures how well employees fulfill duties and responsibilities against set work goals, targets, and competencies.

According to Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 30 of 2019 concerning the Performance Assessment of Civil Servants, ASN evaluation ensures objective development based on performance and career systems. This assessment aims to enhance motivation, productivity, and work quality to achieve organizational goals. It evaluates not only results but also work processes and behaviors in a measurable, transparent, accountable, and fair manner. The assessment comprises two main components: Employee Performance Targets (SKP), which measure work output quantity, quality, timeliness, and cost efficiency; and work behavior, including service orientation, integrity, commitment, discipline, cooperation, and leadership.

Despite its structured framework, ASN performance assessment implementation faces challenges such as subjectivity, limited employee understanding of SKP preparation, insufficient supervisor feedback, and weak integration of results with rewards and career development. These issues hinder its effectiveness in driving optimal performance. Thus, strong commitment from organizational leaders and HR managers is essential to enhance the system's objectivity, transparency, and functionality in supporting productivity and professionalism.

Based on these conditions, this study identifies key problems, including suboptimal employee competence in technical skills, communication, and innovation; inadequate work environment conditions related to facilities and workspace comfort; low work motivation affecting commitment; and ASN performance issues in timeliness, quality, and discipline.

The objectives of this study are to analyze the direct and indirect effects of competence and work environment on ASN performance and to examine work motivation's role as an intervening variable. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether competence and work environment significantly influence performance improvement and motivation, and whether motivation mediates the relationship between competence, work environment, and ASN performance. The findings are expected to contribute to performance-based human resource management policies within the organization.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach with associative research methods. This approach is used to determine the relationship and influence between independent variables (competence and work environment) on bound variables (performance of ASN employees) and work motivation as an intervening variable. Data was collected through surveys using structured questionnaires measured on the Likert scale. The research was conducted at the Regional Secretariat of Tebing Tinggi City, in 2025.

The population in this study consists of all ASN employees at the Regional Secretariat of Tebing Tinggi City, totaling 99 individuals. Based on Sugiyono (2016), a sample is part of the population that represents its characteristics. Therefore, this study employs a saturated sampling technique (census), in which all members of the population are used as research respondents. By involving the entire population, the study aims to obtain comprehensive and accurate data that reflect the actual conditions of ASN employees at the Regional Secretariat of Tebing Tinggi City.

The types of data used in this research include primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected directly from respondents through the distribution of questionnaires designed to measure perceptions of each research variable, and were supported by brief interviews with selected officials or employees to strengthen the quantitative findings. Secondary data were obtained from personnel documents, agency performance reports, relevant literature, and data from the Personnel and Human Resources Development Agency (BKPSDM) or the personnel division of the Regional Secretariat of Tebing Tinggi City. In this study, variables are defined as attributes or characteristics that vary and are determined by the researcher for analysis, consisting of independent variables, a dependent variable, and an intervening (moderating) variable.

Table 1. Variable Operational Definition

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators
Employee Performance (Y)	Wibowo (2022) the results of work achieved by individuals or groups in the organization, in accordance with their respective authorities and responsibilities, in an effort to realize the organization's goals legally and not unlawfully	Stuart (2022) 1. Quality of work; Degree of rigor and accuracy of work 2. Quantity of work; volume of work completed 3. Punctuality; speed in completing tasks 4. Responsibility; commitment to the implementation of the task 5. Work initiatives; Self-Directed Efforts to Solve Problems
Work Motivation (Z)	According to Kasmir (2018), work motivation is a process to encourage and move employees to have a high spirit to work together, work effectively, and be integrated in an effort to achieve company satisfaction and goals.	Cashmere (2018) 1. Strive 2. Future orientation 3. High level of ambition 4. Task/goal orientation 5. Efforts to progress 6. Perseverance 7. Selected co-workers 8. Time utilization
Competencies (X1)	Spencer (2021) Competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed by a person to carry out their job duties effectively	Spencer (2021) 1. Work knowledge 2. Job skills 3. Professional attitude 4. Adaptability 5. Problem-solving skills
Work Environment (X2)	Sedarmayanti (2022) a good work environment is characterized by safe physical conditions, open communication, and harmonious relationships between employees	Sedarmayanti (2022) 1. Physical Work Environment 2. Non-physical environment

Source of researcher 2025

This study applies a quantitative research approach using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS software. The use of PLS-SEM is considered appropriate because the research model involves an intervening variable, namely work motivation, includes multiple indicators, and aims to simultaneously analyze complex causal relationships among competence, work environment, work motivation, and ASN employee performance. Data analysis is conducted to test the validity and reliability of the research instruments, examine both

direct and indirect relationships between variables, identify the mediating role of work motivation, and test the proposed research hypotheses based on statistical evidence.

The analysis stages in PLS-SEM consist of evaluating the outer model and inner model, followed by hypothesis testing. The outer model evaluation assesses measurement quality through convergent validity (loading factor ≥ 0.70 and AVE ≥ 0.50), discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross loadings, and construct reliability measured by Composite Reliability (≥ 0.70) and Cronbach’s Alpha (≥ 0.60). The inner model evaluation examines structural relationships through R-square (R^2) to determine explanatory power, path coefficients to assess the strength and direction of relationships, predictive relevance (Q^2) to evaluate the model’s predictive capability, and Goodness of Fit (GoF) to assess overall model adequacy. Finally, hypothesis testing is conducted using the bootstrapping method in SmartPLS, where relationships are considered significant if the t-statistic is ≥ 1.96 and the p-value is < 0.05 .

This study examines three types of intervariable influences, namely:

1. Direct Effect:

$X_1 \rightarrow Y$ (Competence on the Performance of ASN Employees)

$X_2 \rightarrow Y$ (Work Environment on ASN Employee Performance)

$X_1 \rightarrow Z$ (Competence to Motivation)

$X_2 \rightarrow Z$ (Work Environment to Motivation)

$Z \rightarrow Y$ (Motivation for the Performance of ASN Employees)

2. Indirect Effect:

$X_1 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$ (Competence in the Performance of ASN Employees through Motivation)

$X_2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$ (Work Environment on ASN Employee Performance through Motivation)

3. Total Effect:

The combination of the direct and indirect influence of each variable on the performance of ASN employees.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analyst Method

In this study, the data analysis method used is structural equation modeling-partial least squares (SEM-PLS) using SmartPLS software. Mahmud and Ratmono (2013:6) stated that in its development, SEM is divided into two types, namely covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) and variance-based SEM or partial least squares (SEM-PLS). CB-SEM developed in the 1970s pioneered by Karl Joreskog as the developer of the Lisrel software. Meanwhile, SEM-PLS developed after CB-SEM and was pioneered by Herman Wold (academic advisor Karl Joreskog). Here are some examples of software from CB-SEM and SEM-PLS) (Mahmud and Ratmono, 2013:6-7).

Table 2. Some Software Examples from CB-SEM and SEM-PLS

Software CB-SEM	Software SEM-PLS
LISREL	SmartPLS
Amos	WarpPLS
EQS	PLS-Graph
More	Visual-PLS
STATCAL	STATCAL

Mahmud and Ratmono (2013:7) stated that SEM - PLS can work efficiently with small sample sizes and complex models. In addition, the assumption of data distribution in SEM-PLS is relatively looser than that of CB-SEM. Estimation with CB-SEM requires a series of assumptions that must be met such as data normality in a multivariate manner, minimum sample size, homogeneity, and so on. Mahfud and Ratmono (2013:8) stated that the results of the two estimates are not much different so that SEM-PLS can be a good proxy for CB-SEM. SEM-PLS can still generate estimates even for small sample sizes and deviations from the assumption of multivariate normality. SEM-PLS can therefore be seen as a nonparametric approach to CB-SEM. In addition, when the assumptions of CB-SEM are not met, SEM-PLS can be the right method for testing theory. Mahfud and Ratmono (2013:9-13) stated that if the data meets the CB-SEM assumptions correctly, such as minimum sample size and normal distribution, then CB-SEM is chosen. If it doesn't meet, select SEM-PLS. SEM-PLS is a nonparametric approach; can work well even for extreme abnormal data.

Evaluation of Outer Models (Measurement Models): Testing Validity and Reliability

Convergent validity is part of the measurement model which in SEM-PLS is usually referred to as the outer model while in covariance-based SEM it is called confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Mahfud and Ratmono, 2013:64). There are two criteria to assess whether the outer model (measurement model) meets the requirements for convergent validity for reflective constructs, namely (1) loading must be above 0.7 and (2) significant p-value (<0.05) (Hair et al. in Mahfud and Ratmono, 2013:65). However, in some cases, often loading requirements above 0.7 are often not met, especially for newly developed questionnaires. Therefore, loading between 0.40-0.70 must still be maintained (Mahfud and Ratmono, 2013:66).

Indicators with loads below 0.40 should be removed from the model. However, for indicators with a load between 0.40 and 0.70, we should analyze the impact of the decision to remove the indicator on average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability. We can remove indicators with a load between 0.40 and 0.70 if the indicator can increase the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability above the limit (treshold) (Mahfud and Ratmono, 2013:67). The AVE limit value is 0.50 and the composite reliability is 0.7. Another consideration in removing indicators is their impact on the content validity of the construct. Indicators with small loads are sometimes

maintained because they contribute to the validity of the construct content (Mahfud and Ratmono, 2013:67). Table 3 presents the loading values for each indicator.

Table 3. Validity Testing by Loading Factor

	Competencies (X1)	Work Environment (X2)	Work Motivation (Z)	Performance Enhancement (Y)
X1.1	0.905			
X1.2	0.86			
X1.3	0.92			
X1.4	0.899			
X2.1		0.957		
X2.2		0.94		
Y1				0.901
Y2				0.922
Y3				0.896
Y4				0.89
Y5				0.892
Z1			0.88	
Z2			0.897	
Z3			0.9	
Z4			0.894	
Z5			0.891	
Z6			0.776	
Z7			0.75	

Source: SmartPLS Processed

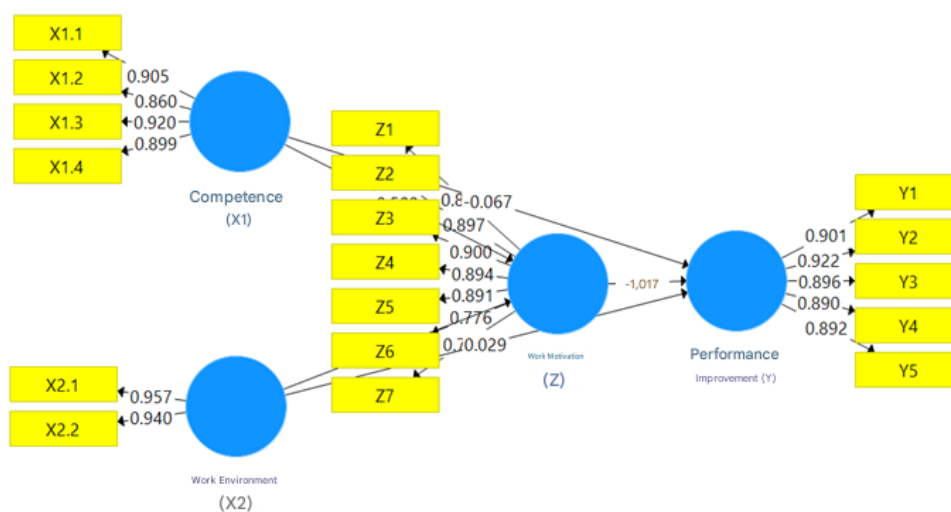


Figure 1. Validity Testing by Loading Factor

All loading values > 0.7, which means that they have met the validity requirements based on the loading value. Furthermore, validity testing was carried out based on the average variance extracted (AVE) value.

Table 4. Validity Testing by Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Mean Variance Extracted (AVE)
Competencies (X1)	0.803
Work Environment (X2)	0.9
Work Motivation (Z)	0.736
Performance Enhancement (Y)	0.811

The recommended AVE value is above 0.5 (Mahfud and Ratmono, 2013:67). It is known that all AVE values > 0.5, which means that they have met the validity requirements based on AVE. Furthermore, reliability testing was carried out based on the composite reliability (CR) value.

Table 5. Reliability Testing by Composite Reliability (CR)

	Composite Reliability
Competencies (X1)	0.942
Work Environment (X2)	0.947
Work Motivation (Z)	0.951
Performance Enhancement (Y)	0.955

The recommended CR value is above 0.7 (Mahfud and Ratmono, 2013:67). It is known that all CR values are > 0.7, which means that they have met the reliability requirements based on CR. Next, reliability testing was carried out based on Cronbach's alpha (CA) value.

Table 6. Reliability Testing by Cronbach's Alpha (CA)

	Cronbach's Alpha
Competencies (X1)	0.918
Work Environment (X2)	0.889
Work Motivation (Z)	0.939
Performance Enhancement (Y)	0.942

The recommended CA value is above 0.7 (Mahfud and Ratmono, 2013:67). It is known that all CA values > 0.7, which means that they have met the reliability requirements based on Cronbach's alpha. Next, a discriminatory validity test was carried out using the Fornell-Larcker approach. Table 4.6 presents the results of the discriminant validity test.

Table 7. Discriminant Validity Testing

	Competencies (X1)	Work Environment (X2)	Work Motivation (Z)	Performance Enhancement (Y)
Competencies (X1)	$\sqrt{AVE_{X1}} = 0.896$			
Work Environment (X2)	0.261	$\sqrt{AVE_{X2}} = 0.948$		
Work Motivation (Z)	0.598	0.499	$\sqrt{AVE_Z} = 0.858$	
Performance Enhancement (Y)	0.549	0.519	0.991	$\sqrt{AVE_Y} = 0.9$

In discriminant validity testing, the square root value of AVE of a latent variable is compared to the correlation value between that latent variable and other latent variables. It is known that the square root value of AVE for each latent variable is greater than the correlation value between the latent variable and other latent variables. Thus, it has met the requirements for discriminatory validity.

Influence Significance Test (Bootstrapping) (Hypothesis Test) (Inner Model)

Table 7. Test Path Coefficient & Significance Influence

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Average (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Competency (X1) -> Work Motivation (Z)	0.502	0.505	0.123	4.086	0.000
Competency (X1) -> Performance Improvement (Y)	0.444	0.448	0.126	3.518	0.000
Work Environment (X2) -> Work Motivation (Z)	0.369	0.372	0.119	3.1	0.002
Working Environment (X2) -> Performance Improvement (Y)	0.404	0.407	0.12	3.371	0.001
Work Motivation (Z) -> Performance Improvement (Y)	1.017	1.016	0.027	38.26	0.000

Source: SmartPLS Processed

Based on the results in Table 7, the results were obtained:

1. Competency (X1) has a positive effect on Work Motivation (Z), with a path coefficient value (Original Sample column) of 0.502, and significant, with a P-Values value = 0.000 (Accepted Hypothesis).
2. Competency (X1) has a positive effect on Performance Improvement (Y), with a path coefficient value (Original Sample column) of 0.444, with a P-Values value = 0.000 (Accepted Hypothesis).
3. Work Environment (X2) has a positive effect on Work Motivation (Z) with Job Satisfaction (Z) as a moderating variable with a path coefficient value (Original Sample column) of 0.369, with a P-Values value = 0.002 (Accepted Hypothesis).
4. Work Environment (X2) has a positive effect on Performance Improvement (Y), with a path coefficient value (Original Sample column) of 0.404, with a P-Values value = 0.001 (Accepted Hypothesis).
5. Work Motivation (Z) has a positive effect on Performance Improvement (Y) with a path coefficient value (Original Sample column) of 1.017, with a P-Values value = 0.000 (Accepted Hypothesis).

Table 8. Effects of Mediation Testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Average (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Competency (X1) -> Work Motivation (Z) -> Performance Improvement (Y)	0.511	0.515	0.132	3.87	0.000
Work Environment (X2) -> Work Motivation (Z) -> Performance Improvement (Y)	0.375	0.375	0.115	3.258	0.001

Source: SmartPLS Processed

Based on the results of the mediation test in Table 4.12:

1. Performance Improvement (Y) significantly mediated the relationship between competencies (X1) through work motivation with a path coefficient value (original column of Sample) 0.511, and significantly with a value of p-Values = 0.000
2. Performance Improvement (Y) significantly mediated the relationship between the work environment (X2) through work motivation with a path coefficient value (original Sample column) of 0.375, and significant with a p-Values value = 0.001

Table 9. R-Square & Adjusted R Square

	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Work Motivation (Z)	0.485	0.474
Performance Enhancement (Y)	0.986	0.986

The R-Square value of Work Motivation (Z) is 0.485, which means competence (X₁), work environment (X₂) can affect work motivation (Z) by 48.5%. The R-Square value of performance improvement (Y) is 0.986, which means competence (X₁), work environment (X₂) can affect performance improvement (Z) by 98.6%.

The Adjusted R Square value for work motivation (Z) is 0.474, which means competence (X₁), work environment (X₂) can affect work motivation (Z) by 47.4%. The Adjusted R-Square value of performance improvement (Y) is 0.986, which means that competence (X₁), work environment (X₂) can affect performance improvement (Z) by 98.6%.

Table 10. Testing the Goodness of Fit Model

	Saturated Models	Estimation Model
SRMR	0.089	0.089
d_ ULS	1.339	1.339
d_ G	Not used	Not used
Chi-Square	Unlimited	Unlimited
NFI	Not used	Not used

Source: Processed Smart PLS (2025)

Based on the results of the SRMR goodness of fit test, the SRMR value = 0.089 < 0.1, so it is concluded that the model has FIT.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that competence (X₁) positively influences work motivation (Z) (path coefficient = 0.502, p = 0.000) and performance improvement (Y) (0.444, p = 0.000), while the work environment (X₂) positively affects work motivation (Z) with job satisfaction as a moderator (0.369, p = 0.002) and performance improvement (Y) (0.404, p = 0.001); additionally, work motivation (Z) significantly impacts performance improvement (Y) (1.017, p = 0.000). Performance improvement (Y) significantly mediates the relationship between competence (X₁) and work motivation (Z) (0.511, p = 0.000) and between the work environment (X₂) and work motivation (Z) (0.375, p = 0.001). Local governments should enhance employee competencies via continuous training, competency-based education, and self-development opportunities; improve the work environment through better facilities, spatial planning, and organizational climate; boost motivation with performance-based rewards, fair promotions, and open communication; and implement objective, sustainable performance evaluation systems to foster a performance-oriented culture. For future research, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term sustainability of these interventions across diverse Indonesian regional secretariats, incorporating additional moderators like organizational culture or digital tools.

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