

Work discipline as a behavioral mechanism linking work motivation and compensation to employee performance

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ABSTRACT

Despite the existence of motivating and compensation systems, inconsistent work discipline frequently limits employee performance in local government entities. Using work discipline as a mediating variable, this study examines the direct and indirect effects of work motivation and compensation on employee performance. This study uses a convenience sample of 150 government personnel from 18 sub-district offices in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Partial least squares structural equation modeling was used to examine the data. The results show that work motivation and compensation significantly influence both work discipline and employee performance, while work discipline also directly affects employee performance. Work discipline acts as a key mediator in the relationships between work motivation, compensation, and employee performance. This study contributes to the development of theories in human resource management and organizational behavior, particularly by explaining the relationships among work motivation, compensation, work discipline, and employee performance. In practical terms, the findings of this study have important implications for government agencies, specifically subdistrict offices in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, Indonesia, as they work to improve employee performance. Nevertheless, the cross-sectional design and single-district emphasis of this study are its limitations. Therefore, future research is recommended to test this model across different regions and organizational settings.

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1. Introduction

Public organizations depend fundamentally on human resources; employees' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors determine whether public policies translate into tangible outcomes for citizens (Almunthiri et al., 2024). Within this context, employee performance, the extent to which individuals accomplish assigned duties in line with organizational objectives, emerges as a primary driver of service quality, efficiency, and legitimacy (Otoo, 2024). However, the factors that sustain high performance in government

are often contested. Classical human resource management (HRM) scholarship identifies work motivation, compensation, and discipline as core antecedents (Asif & Rathore, 2021), while public administration research stresses accountability, innovation, and resource constraints as contextual moderators (Tran et al., 2022; Satispi et al., 2023). Recent studies also highlight that inconsistencies in employee discipline remain a persistent challenge in public-sector organizations, particularly in developing countries, where institutional constraints and limited managerial control may weaken behavioral compliance (Knies et al., 2022; López-Cabarcos et al., 2022).

District-level offices in Southeast Asia routinely face disciplinary lapses, including tardiness, absenteeism, and procedural non-compliance. Such lapses negatively impact staff efficiency, disrupt procurement cycles, and ultimately degrade public service outcomes (Tran & Nguyen, 2020). When accountability mechanisms are weak and innovative practices are limited, these issues become even more pronounced (Tran et al., 2022). Consequently, low morale further depresses employee motivation and engagement, both of which are critical for effective service delivery (Sixpence et al., 2021).

Resource pressures commonly found in local governments exacerbate the situation: with limited fiscal space, each employee's productivity becomes essential to meeting the needs of the community (Satispi et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, sub-district offices are on the front lines of public service delivery, where civil servants interact directly with citizens and are responsible for administrative efficiency and service responsiveness. Therefore, examining employee behavior in this setting is particularly relevant for understanding how HRM practices influence public-sector performance outcomes (Knies et al., 2022; Satispi et al., 2023). Understanding how HRM practices interact to promote discipline and performance is not merely academic; it has significant implications for improving governance and public service delivery.

Despite extensive research on motivation, compensation, and performance, prior studies have predominantly examined these relationships in isolation, focusing on direct effects and inadequately exploring the underlying behavioral mechanisms linking them (Howard et al., 2021; Kulikowski & Sedlak, 2023). Moreover, empirical findings remain inconsistent: some studies report strong direct effects, while others highlight the importance of contextual or mediating variables (López-Cabarcos et al., 2022; Otoo, 2024). This inconsistency indicates a research gap in understanding how internal (motivation) and external (compensation) factors translate into performance outcomes through specific behavioral processes.

This study investigates whether work discipline mediates the effects of work motivation and compensation on the performance of civil servants in Indonesian district offices. By explicitly incorporating work discipline as a mediating variable, this study offers a novel perspective that integrates motivational and compensation frameworks into a unified behavioral model, thereby addressing the limited attention given to discipline as a central mechanism in public-sector performance research. The context of Indonesian local government offices, particularly the Sub-District Office in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, Indonesia, is one of the nation's flagship one-stop public service centers (Oktariyanda & Epriliyanto, 2019). However, it has persistent internal challenges with disciplinary lapses. These challenges, such as tardiness and unfinished tasks, hinder service delivery, which has implications for the effectiveness of public service provision in this region.

Expectancy theory, equity theory, and self-determination theory serve as the study's theoretical pillars and together provide a comprehensive framework for understanding employee behavior. Expectancy theory describes how workers' expectations regarding the relationships among effort, performance, and reward affect their behavior at work, particularly in motivating people to achieve desired results (Wanous et al., 1983; Van

Iddekinge et al., 2023). According to equity theory, employees who believe they are being treated fairly are more likely to respond with positive work behaviors, such as discipline and performance (Dessler & Huat, 2009; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022). In the meantime, self-determination theory emphasizes the importance of self-regulation and intrinsic motivation in shaping disciplined, consistent behavior, which ultimately influences performance outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Together, these ideas imply that extrinsic and internal motivators operate together to influence worker performance. However, the results may depend on intermediary elements such as work discipline. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the mediating role of work discipline in the relationship among civil servant performance, compensation, and work motivation, particularly in the context of public-sector organizations characterized by formal regulations and procedural constraints.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Expectancy Theory, Equity Theory, and Self-Determination Theory

From a theoretical standpoint, employee discipline may be understood as a behavioral outcome shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational mechanisms. According to expectancy theory, employees are more likely to maintain effort and exhibit disciplined behavior when they believe that effort, performance, and valued outcomes—such as achievement, recognition, or career-related rewards—are clearly and credibly linked (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). According to this viewpoint, discipline is a logical response to organizational circumstances that give disciplined behavior purpose and advantages, rather than merely a matter of compliance. This argument is strengthened by equity theory, which highlights how employees' attitudes, satisfaction, and work-related behavior—including their willingness to follow organizational rules and standards—are influenced by their perceptions of fairness in compensation and reward distribution (Dessler & Huat, 2009; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022).

Expectation theory states that when workers perceive a clear and credible connection between effort, performance, and valued outcomes—such as achievement, recognition, or career-related rewards—they are more likely to sustain effort and display disciplined behavior (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2022). This perspective holds that discipline is not merely a matter of compliance but rather a logical response to organizational conditions that provide disciplined behavior with benefits and a purpose. Equity theory, which emphasizes how employees' attitudes, satisfaction, and work-related behavior—including their willingness to adhere to organizational rules and standards—are influenced by their perceptions of fairness in compensation and reward distribution, supports this claim (Dessler & Huat, 2009; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022).

Self-determination theory rejects previous theories' exclusive emphasis on motivation intensity in favor of a worldwide contrast between autonomous and controlled forms of motivation, both of which represent qualitative variations in motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Acting or completing activities for self-determined reasons, such as the intrinsic interest or enjoyment obtained from the behavior or task or because it matches with personally valued goals, is an example of autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Controlled motivation, on the other hand, refers to acting or completing activities for externally referenced reasons or contingencies or out of a sense of duty or pressure from external social agents (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Individuals who engage in behaviors or tasks are likely to experience

parallel salient affective, psychological, and interpersonal outcomes arising from the performance of the behavior or task, depending on the type of motivation they experience.

2.1.2. Work Motivation

Work motivation is a concept encompassing both internal and external drives that encourage individuals to carry out their duties earnestly in pursuit of specific goals. Hewett (2023) explains that work motivation is a desire that arises within an individual and influences that person to engage in an activity. Furthermore, Sugiyanto and Setiyono (2024) emphasize that enthusiasm, morale, and work commitment are essential for employees to achieve organizational goals optimally. Based on these perspectives, work motivation may be understood as a driving force that directs employees to work optimally in accordance with the institution's targets and outcomes. In contrast, the study by Tanjung et al. (2023) found that motivation did not have a significant effect on employee performance, which was attributed to other factors, including individual capability, the work environment, insufficient attention to employee needs, and weak workplace communication. Therefore, work motivation continues to be regarded as an important variable in organizations because it is associated with employee performance both theoretically and empirically. However, its effect may vary depending on the organizational context and the dominance of other factors shaping employee performance.

2.1.3. Compensation

Compensation refers to the remuneration provided by an organization to employees in return for their contributions to the performance of their work. Kang and Lee (2021) define compensation as all income received by employees, whether in the form of money, goods, direct, or indirect benefits, as remuneration for the services they provide to the company. Khan et al. (2024) further state that compensation is the total of all rewards given to employees as remuneration for the services they render to the organization. In contrast, Kulikowski and Sedlak (2023) emphasize that compensation is a form of payment provided directly, particularly in monetary terms. Based on these perspectives, compensation may be understood as the full range of financial and non-financial rewards that an institution or company provides to its employees in exchange for their contributions.

2.1.4. Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the work outcomes achieved by employees in carrying out their duties within the organization in which they are employed. Suknunan and Bhana (2022) define performance as the result of the work employees carry out for the organization they serve. Similarly, López-Cabarcos et al. (2022) explain that performance is the achievement of work results accomplished by an individual in accordance with established rules and standards. Based on these definitions, employee performance may be understood as the work outcomes produced by employees through their skills, experience, and adherence to organizational requirements. According to Vuong and Nguyen (2022) employee performance can be measured through several key indicators, namely the quantity of work, which reflects the extent to which employees can complete the tasks assigned to them; the quality of work, which refers to the degree to which the completed work meets predetermined standards; timeliness, which emphasizes the completion of tasks within the required timeframe; attendance, which indicates the consistency of

employees' presence at the workplace; and cooperative commitment, which highlights the importance of collaboration among employees to ensure that work processes run effectively and organizational objectives can be achieved efficiently.

2.1.5. Work Discipline

Work discipline refers to the attitudes and behaviors of employees that reflect compliance with the rules, regulations, and social norms prevailing within an organization. Salsabilla et al. (2022) define work discipline as an individual's attitude that demonstrates obedience to applicable rules and social norms. In a similar vein, Abbas et al. (2025) explain that work discipline is an activity undertaken by organizational leaders to communicate with employees to ensure compliance with all applicable regulations and social norms. Meanwhile, Zaeni et al. (2023) emphasize that, from these perspectives, work discipline may be understood as employees' compliance with organizational provisions, as reflected in their daily work behavior. The indicators of work discipline include compliance with time regulations, such as arriving and working punctually; compliance with organizational rules, such as understanding and adhering to dress codes, uniforms, and work attributes; and compliance with other workplace regulations, which refers to employees' obedience to all rules that apply while performing their duties within the company or institution.

2.2. Hypothesis Development

2.2.1. Positive Effect of Work Motivation on Work Discipline

Work motivation plays a crucial role in shaping employee discipline as a form of behavioral regulation within organizations. From the perspective of expectancy theory, employees who perceive a strong relationship between effort, performance, and outcomes tend to regulate their behavior to align with organizational expectations. This regulation is reflected in consistent attendance, punctuality, and adherence to rules, which are key indicators of work discipline. In addition, self-determination theory explains that intrinsically motivated individuals are more likely to internalize organizational values and exhibit autonomous self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020). As a result, employees with higher levels of motivation tend to demonstrate stronger discipline, as motivation not only energizes behavior but also directs it toward structured and rule-abiding actions (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Judge & Robbins, 2017).

Empirically, Nugraha and Puterisari (2025) found that intrinsic and extrinsic motivational programs significantly enhanced work discipline. Sugiyanto and Setiyono (2024) similarly documented that higher levels of work motivation were associated with stronger adherence to organizational norms in local government offices, where work discipline refers to employees' obligation to comply with organizational rules in the course of their work. Furthermore, Jobira and Mohammed (2021) reported that intrinsically motivated employees in public enterprises demonstrated higher levels of self-imposed discipline. These findings support the theoretical argument that motivation enhances employees' capacity for self-regulation, leading to more disciplined behavior. Accordingly, civil servants motivated by achievement, self-development, and a sense of purpose will demonstrate higher levels of disciplined behavior. **H₁: Work Motivation Positively Influences Work Discipline**

2.2.2. Positive Effect of Compensation on Work Discipline

Compensation plays a crucial role in shaping employee discipline, particularly as a form of response to perceived fairness and organizational treatment. From the perspective of equity theory, employees continuously evaluate the balance between their inputs (effort, time, responsibility) and the rewards they receive, and this perception influences their behavior (Dessler & Huat, 2009). When compensation is perceived as fair and proportional, employees are more likely to reciprocate through positive work behaviors, including adherence to rules, punctuality, and responsibility. In contrast, perceived inequity may lead to dissatisfaction and reduced compliance. Furthermore, expectancy theory suggests that compensation serves as an external incentive that strengthens the link between performance and rewards, thereby encouraging employees to regulate their behavior to meet organizational expectations (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). Thus, compensation not only serves as an economic instrument but also as a behavioral driver that reinforces disciplined conduct.

Empirically, several studies confirm this relationship. Gunawan et al. (2024) found that fair compensation significantly strengthened workplace compliance among Indonesian employees, with transparent pay structures reinforcing cultural expectations of loyalty and diligence. Hermanto and Srimulyani (2022) documented a positive and significant effect of compensation on work discipline, arguing that fair remuneration communicates organizational respect, which employees reciprocate through rule-abiding behavior. Izhar et al. (2024) demonstrated that compensation significantly predicted discipline, with performance-linked allowances proving particularly effective. Fischer et al. (2019) further noted that external rewards stabilize behavior in highly formalized settings, particularly where intrinsic motivation alone may be insufficient to sustain compliance. These findings collectively support the theoretical argument that fair and adequate compensation reduces perceptions of inequity and encourages employees to align their behavior with organizational standards. **H₂: Compensation Positively Influences Work Discipline.**

2.2.3. Positive Effect of Work Motivation on Employee Performance

Work motivation is a key determinant of employee performance as it influences the intensity, direction, and persistence of work-related behavior. From the perspective of expectancy theory, employees who believe that their effort will lead to desirable performance outcomes and rewards are more likely to exert greater effort and sustain high levels of performance (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). In addition, self-determination theory posits that intrinsically motivated employees tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement, creativity, and persistence because their behavior is driven by intrinsic satisfaction rather than external pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020). As a result, motivation not only energizes employees but also enhances their cognitive and behavioral capabilities, enabling them to perform tasks more effectively and consistently.

Empirically, positive and significant effects of work motivation on employee performance have been reported across Indonesian settings, including healthcare workers (Wulandari & Bagia, 2020), retail employees (Susanto, 2019), and local government staff (Utami & Winarno, 2023). Howard et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis across 344 studies grounded in self-determination theory and confirmed that autonomous (intrinsic) motivation consistently predicted higher performance outcomes. Motivated employees exhibit not only greater effort and persistence but

also higher creativity, better judgment, and stronger service orientation, all of which contribute to measurable performance improvements. This study, therefore, retains the hypothesis that motivation directly improves performance and tests whether this effect is mediated by work discipline. **H₃: Work Motivation Positively Influences Employee Performance.**

2.2.4. Positive Effect of Compensation on Employee Performance

Compensation is an important driver of employee performance as it functions both as an economic reward and a behavioral incentive. From the perspective of expectancy theory, employees are more likely to exert higher effort when they perceive a clear and credible linkage between performance and rewards (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). This perception of instrumentality strengthens the effort–performance–reward chain, particularly when compensation systems are transparent and merit-based. In addition, equity theory posits that fair and proportional compensation enhances employees' sense of justice, which, in turn, increases their motivation to perform better as a form of reciprocity (Dessler & Huat, 2009). In the context of Indonesian public administration, where performance allowances are explicitly tied to attendance, goal achievement, and work quality, compensation serves not only as a financial benefit but also as a structured mechanism that directs employees toward higher performance outcomes.

Empirically, positive effects of compensation on employee performance have been documented in various contexts. Rahaman et al. (2023) found that compensation significantly predicted performance among bank employees, with both salary levels and non-financial rewards contributing independently to higher output. Roos et al. (2022) demonstrated that combining individual and collective incentive schemes synergistically enhanced organizational performance beyond the effects of either scheme alone. Dev et al. (2024) further reported that reward and recognition practices, as a component of total compensation, significantly motivated employees and improved performance. These findings support the theoretical argument that compensation strengthens employees' motivation and directs their behavior toward achieving higher performance. **H₄: Compensation positively influences employee performance.**

2.2.5. Positive Effect of Work Discipline on Employee Performance

Work discipline is a critical behavioral factor that directly influences employee performance, reflecting the extent to which employees consistently adhere to organizational rules, procedures, and work standards. From the perspective of self-determination theory, disciplined behavior is closely associated with self-regulation and an internalized commitment, enabling employees to control their actions and maintain consistency in task execution (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020). In addition, expectancy theory posits that employees who understand the importance of performance outcomes are more likely to align their behavior with organizational expectations, including maintaining discipline in task completion (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). As a result, work discipline serves as a mechanism to ensure reliability, punctuality, and responsibility, all of which are essential for achieving high performance.

Empirically, Sitorus et al. (2025) documented a strong positive effect of work discipline on employee performance in the public sector, showing that disciplined employees consistently outperformed their peers on quantity, quality, and timeliness metrics. Kautsarina and Setiyono (2025) confirmed that discipline was the strongest

predictor of employee engagement and performance outcomes. Sugito (2025) found that work discipline significantly predicted service quality, even when controlling for transformational leadership and motivation. Tran and Nguyen (2020) reported that accountability mechanisms were critical for translating organizational inputs into public performance outcomes in transition economies. These findings consistently support the theoretical argument that work discipline acts as a proximate driver of performance by ensuring behavioral consistency and effective task execution. **H₅: Work discipline positively influences employee performance.**

2.2.6. Work Discipline as a Mediator between Work Motivation and Employee Performance

Work discipline can be conceptualized as a key mediating mechanism that translates work motivation into employee performance. From the perspective of expectancy theory, motivated employees are driven by the expectation that their efforts will lead to valued outcomes; however, this motivation must be channeled into consistent, goal-oriented behavior to produce actual performance (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). Discipline is the behavioral manifestation of motivation, reflecting employees' ability to regulate their actions, maintain consistency, and adhere to organizational standards. Similarly, self-determination theory explains that intrinsically motivated individuals internalize organizational goals, which fosters self-discipline and sustained effort over time (Deci & Ryan, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Thus, motivation alone is insufficient unless operationalized through disciplined behavior, making discipline a crucial pathway by which motivation influences performance.

Empirically, Jufrizen and Hadi (2021) explicitly tested this mediation pathway and found that work discipline fully mediated the relationship between motivation and employee performance in Indonesian local government, with no significant residual direct effect. Sugiyanto and Setiyono (2024) reported similar results, with discipline serving as the critical conduit through which motivational energy was converted into measurable performance improvements. Putri et al. (2025) further observed that motivational interventions were most effective when accompanied by institutional disciplinary frameworks, suggesting that motivation and discipline operate in tandem. Jobira and Mohammed (2021) found that intrinsically motivated employees demonstrated not only higher discipline but also superior performance, consistent with a motivation-discipline-performance chain. In bureaucratic public-sector contexts, where formal rules and procedures govern individual actions, discipline becomes the primary behavioral channel through which motivation is translated into measurable outputs. **H₆: Work Discipline Fully Mediates the Relationship between Work Motivation and Employee Performance.**

2.2.7. Work Discipline as a Mediator between Compensation and Employee Performance

Work discipline can be understood as a crucial mediating mechanism in the relationship between compensation and employee performance, particularly when viewed through the lenses of equity and expectancy theories. Equity theory posits that fair and proportional compensation fosters a sense of organizational justice, which encourages employees to reciprocate with positive work behaviors, including disciplined adherence to rules and procedures (Dessler & Huat, 2009). However, this attitudinal response does not directly translate into performance; rather, it operates

through behavioral consistency, as reflected in discipline. Complementarily, expectancy theory suggests that compensation signals valued behaviors, such as attendance, punctuality, and compliance, thereby guiding employees to regulate their actions in line with organizational expectations (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). Consequently, discipline becomes the behavioral pathway through which compensation influences performance outcomes.

Empirically, this mediation pathway has received growing support. Izhar et al. (2024) found that the relationship between compensation and employee performance was fully mediated by work discipline, with the direct effect becoming non-significant when discipline was included in the model. Fitria and Kuswinarno (2024) similarly reported that compensation improved performance indirectly through compliance behaviors, indicating that financial rewards alone are insufficient without the behavioral intermediary of discipline. Pratama et al. (2025) corroborated this mechanism in an educational context, showing that compensation's effect on performance depended on the level of discipline it generated. These findings are consistent with meta-analytic evidence suggesting that compensation rarely leads to productivity improvements unless behavioral or psychological mechanisms mediate it (Akenroye et al., 2022). Therefore, in organizational contexts where rules and procedure's structure employee behavior, discipline serves as the primary conduit through which compensation is transformed into measurable performance outcomes. **H₇: Work Discipline Fully Mediates the Relationship between Compensation and Employee Performance.**

Together, the seven aforementioned hypotheses comprise an integrated, theoretically supported paradigm in which work discipline serves as the proximal mediating mechanism and work motivation and compensation serve as distal antecedents of employee performance. The suggested structural model is shown in Figure 1. The research techniques used to test these theories empirically, using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), are detailed in the following section.

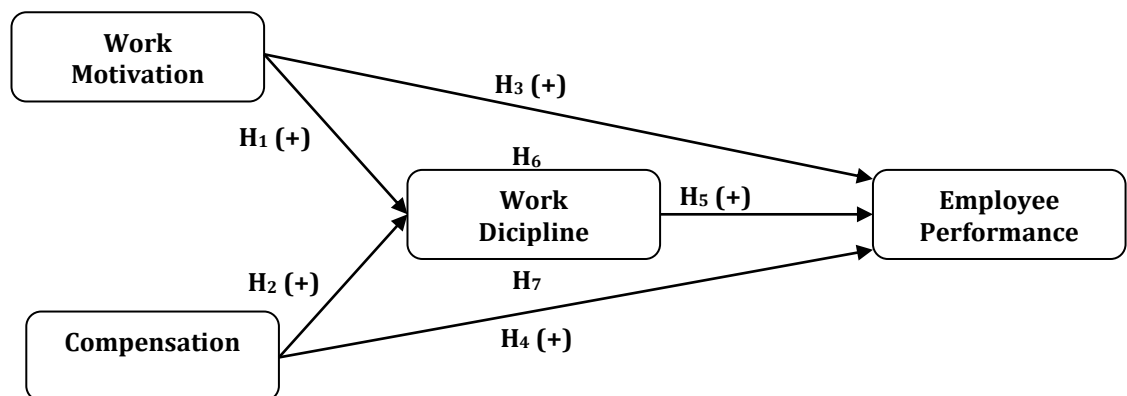


Figure 1. Research Framework

3. Research Methods

3.1. Population and Sampling Method

Within a post-positivist framework, this study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, explanatory design. Testing theory-driven predictions about the direct and mediated effects of compensation and work motivation on employee performance was

the main goal. Instead of concentrating on specific contextual interpretation, a quantitative methodology was selected because it can investigate causal links among latent dimensions and permits broad conclusions across populations (Kerlinger, 1996; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Empirical data were collected from the Sub-District Office in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The target population consisted of civil servants working across 18 sub-district offices. Based on official administrative data obtained from the Regional Personnel Agency of Sidoarjo Regency, the total population comprised 180 employees. From this population, a convenience sample of 150 civil servants who had worked for at least 1 year was selected. The sample size in this research was 150 civil servants who had worked for at least one year, selected through convenience sampling.

3.2. Data Collecting Method

Data collection techniques included survey methods and Likert-scale questionnaires. The research instrument was adapted from prior studies, with indicators operationalized based on established theoretical constructs. Work motivation (WM) was measured using 10 items adapted from Gagné et al. (2015) and Roringkon and Nurkholivvah (2025). Compensation (CS) was measured using 10 items adapted from Helliani and Husein (2025), covering indicators such as salary, incentives, allowances, rewards, recognition, promotion opportunities, and other forms of financial and non-financial compensation. Work discipline (WD) was measured using 10 items adapted from Helliani and Husein (2025), including punctuality, attendance, compliance with rules, adherence to procedures, consistency in task completion, responsibility, and other aspects of disciplined work behavior. Employee performance (EP) was measured using 4 items adapted from Helliani and Husein (2025), which include work quality, quantity, timeliness, and responsibility in completing tasks.

3.3. Data Analysis Method

To assess the research hypotheses, the data analysis uses statistical methods in SmartPLS. When an indicator's outer loading is larger than 0.7, validity is proven; when Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are greater than 0.7, reliability is confirmed; and when the t-statistic is greater than 1.96, and the p-value is less than 0.05, hypothesis testing is conducted (Hair et al., 2019). These tests determine whether the dependent variable is directly affected by the independent variable; whether the independent variable influences the mediator; whether the mediator influences the dependent variable; and whether the mediator mediates the independent variable's effect on the dependent variable.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Characteristics of Respondents

A 100% response rate was achieved from the distribution of 150 questionnaires, all of which were returned complete and in good condition. Table 1 summarizes the respondents' demographic data. The sample consisted of 52.0% men and 48.0% women. The 31–40 age group was the most common, accounting for 37.3% of respondents. A total of 73.3% of respondents held staff positions, and the remaining 26.7% served as supervisors. The majority of respondents were college graduates (72.0%), and the majority had been employed for more than 10 years (42.6%).

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondent

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	78	52.0
Female	72	48.0
Age		
< 30 Years Old	45	30.0
31 – 40 Years Old	56	37.3
> 40 Years Old	49	32.7
Education Level		
Diploma	19	12.7
Bachelor	108	72.0
Master	23	15.3
Tenure		
1 – 5 Years	37	24.7
6 – 10 Years	49	32.7
> 10 Years	64	42.6
Position		
Staff	110	73.3
Supervisor	40	26.7

4.2. Validity and Reliability Test

Table 2. Convergent Validity and Construct Reliability

Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Work Motivation (WM)		0.940	0.849
WM1	0.820		
WM2	0.800		
WM3	0.850		
WM4	0.860		
WM5	0.840		
WM6	0.800		
WM7	0.760		
WM9	0.850		
WM10	0.840		
Compensation (CS)		0.948	0.866
CS1	0.830		
CS2	0.840		
CS3	0.850		
CS4	0.880		
CS5	0.830		
CS6	0.800		
CS7	0.880		
CS8	0.850		
CS9	0.760		
CS10	0.740		
Work Discipline (WD)		0.961	0.888
WD1	0.830		
WD2	0.800		
WD3	0.840		
WD4	0.860		
WD5	0.860		
WD6	0.900		
WD7	0.860		
WD8	0.910		
WD9	0.870		
WD10	0.870		
Employee Performance (EP)		0.939	0.867
EP1	0.860		
EP2	0.950		
EP3	0.930		
EP4	0.940		

The outside loadings for each questionnaire item were greater than 0.7, as shown in Table 2. The indicator items were deemed acceptable since all 33 indicators satisfied the conventional criterion of outer loadings > 0.7. The results of the validity and reliability tests are shown in Table 2. Each variable's measurement tool has a composite reliability > 0.7 and a Cronbach's alpha > 0.7, according to the reliability test results.

4.3. Hypothesis Test

The outcomes for the direct and indirect hypotheses are shown in Table 3. Based on the findings, all theories were approved, with a p-value < 0.05 satisfied both the directed hypothesis and the significance criteria. Work discipline is positively impacted by work motivation (the first hypothesis is accepted). Work discipline is positively impacted by compensation (second hypothesis accepted). Employee performance is positively impacted by work motivation (the third hypothesis is accepted). Employee performance is positively impacted by compensation (fourth hypothesis accepted). Employees performance positively impacted by work discipline (fifth hypothesis accepted). Employee performance is positively impacted by work motivation through work discipline (sixth hypothesis approved), while employee performance is positively impacted by compensation through work discipline (seventh hypothesis accepted).

Table 3. Path Analysis

Variable	Original Sample	Sample Mean	T Statistics	P Values
Work Motivation → Work Discipline	0.186	0.185	3.440	0.001
Compensation → Work Discipline	0.784	0.783	15.390	0.000
Work Motivation → Employee Performance	0.118	0.213	2.220	0.001
Compensation → Employee Performance	0.233	0.224	2.969	0.000
Work Discipline → Employee Performance	0.737	0.741	6.895	0.000
Work Motivation → Work Discipline → Employee Performance	0.137	0.137	3.065	0.002
Compensation → Work Discipline → Employee Performance	0.578	0.580	6.287	0.000

4.4. Discussion

4.4.1. Work Motivation and Work Discipline

The statistical analysis revealed that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on work discipline. This finding suggests that motivated employees tend to regulate their behavior more effectively, leading to higher levels of compliance with organizational rules and standards. From the perspective of self-determination theory, individuals with strong intrinsic motivation are more likely to internalize organizational values, thereby fostering autonomous self-regulation and consistent, disciplined behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020). In addition, expectancy theory explains that employees who perceive a clear relationship between effort, performance, and expected outcomes tend to align their actions with organizational expectations, thereby strengthening discipline (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). Thus, motivation not only energizes employees but also directs their behavior toward structured and rule-abiding conduct.

These results are consistent with previous findings indicating that higher levels of work motivation are associated with greater adherence to organizational

norms and greater behavioral consistency in the workplace (Jobira & Mohammed, 2021; Sugiyanto & Setiyono, 2024). However, the relationship between motivation and discipline is not purely automatic, as it may be influenced by contextual factors such as organizational culture, workload, and supervisory practices (Judge & Robbins, 2017). This indicates that while motivation enhances the capacity for self-regulation, its effectiveness in fostering discipline depends on the organizational environment that supports or constrains such behavior (Hicklenton et al., 2019). Therefore, organizations should use a balanced approach that combines intrinsic motivation with appropriate external incentives to sustain discipline and achieve optimal performance.

4.4.2. Compensation and Work Discipline

The analysis showed that compensation has a positive and highly significant effect on work discipline. This relationship can be explained through equity theory, which posits that employees evaluate fairness by comparing the rewards they receive with their contributions and with those of others (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022). When compensation is perceived as fair and proportional, employees are more likely to reciprocate through positive work behaviors, such as adherence to organizational rules, punctuality, and consistency in carrying out their responsibilities (Lee & Rhee, 2023). In this sense, discipline emerges as a behavioral response to perceived organizational justice, in which employees align their actions with institutional expectations as a reflection of fairness.

Furthermore, expectancy theory provides an additional explanation by emphasizing that compensation serves as an external incentive that strengthens the linkage among effort, performance, and rewards (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). When employees believe that disciplined behavior contributes to better performance and leads to desirable rewards, they are more likely to regulate their actions accordingly. This finding is consistent with prior empirical evidence showing a significant relationship between compensation and work discipline (Gunawan et al., 2024). Moreover, the relatively high coefficient suggests that compensation plays a central role in reinforcing discipline in this context, particularly when compensation systems are transparent and performance-based. Therefore, organizations should design fair, structured compensation systems to effectively enhance employee discipline.

4.4.3. Work Motivation and Employee Performance

Based on the analysis, work motivation has a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance. This indicates that motivation contributes to performance improvement, but it is not the dominant factor in this relationship. From the perspective of expectancy theory, employees are more likely to exert effort and perform effectively when they believe that their efforts will lead to desirable outcomes and rewards (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). In this sense, motivation functions as a cognitive mechanism that directs employees' effort toward achieving organizational goals. However, the relatively small coefficient suggests that motivation alone may not be sufficient to produce substantial performance gains, as performance is also influenced by other behavioral and contextual factors such as discipline, organizational systems, and supervisory practices (Utami & Winarno, 2023).

In addition, self-determination theory explains that intrinsically motivated employees tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement, persistence, and

creativity, which contribute to better performance outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020). However, the effectiveness of motivation in improving performance often depends on whether it is translated into consistent work behavior (Zeng et al., 2025). This finding implies that motivation may operate indirectly through behavioral mechanisms, such as work discipline, that ensure employees consistently apply their effort to task completion. Therefore, organizations should not only focus on enhancing employee motivation through recognition, goal clarity, and development opportunities, but also ensure that this motivation is supported by systems that promote consistent, disciplined behavior to achieve sustainable performance improvements.

4.5.4. Compensation and Employee Performance

Based on the analysis, compensation has a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance, indicating that compensation plays an important role in improving employee outcomes. However, its effect is moderate relative to other variables. From the perspective of expectancy theory, employees are more likely to exert greater effort and achieve higher performance when they perceive a clear relationship between performance and rewards (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). Compensation serves as an external incentive that motivates employees to align their efforts with organizational goals (Velghe et al., 2024). In addition, equity theory posits that when compensation is perceived as fair and proportional, employees develop a stronger sense of organizational justice, which encourages them to reciprocate by improving their performance (Dessler & Huat, 2009).

Empirically, this finding is consistent with prior studies indicating that compensation significantly influences employee performance. Rahaman et al. (2023) found that fair and competitive compensation enhances employees' enthusiasm, commitment, and dedication in completing their work responsibilities. Similarly, Roos et al. (2022) demonstrated that appropriate compensation strongly motivates employees to improve the quality, quantity, and timeliness of their work. These results reinforce the theoretical argument that compensation should not be viewed merely as a form of remuneration, but as a strategic instrument that directs employee behavior toward higher performance outcomes. However, the moderate coefficient suggests that compensation alone may not fully determine performance, as its effectiveness often depends on how it interacts with other factors such as motivation, discipline, and organizational systems. Therefore, organizations should design compensation systems that are fair, performance-oriented, and integrated with broader human resource management practices to achieve optimal results.

4.4.5. Work Discipline and Employee Performance

Based on the analysis, work discipline has the strongest and most significant effect on employee performance, indicating that discipline is the dominant factor influencing performance outcomes in this study. This strong relationship can be explained through self-determination theory, which emphasizes the role of self-regulation and internalized commitment in shaping consistent behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Employees who can regulate their behavior effectively tend to demonstrate punctuality, adherence to procedures, and responsibility in executing tasks, all of which directly contribute to higher performance. In addition, expectancy theory suggests that employees who understand the importance of performance outcomes are more likely to align their

behavior with organizational standards, thereby maintaining discipline in completing their work (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). Thus, work discipline functions as a behavioral mechanism that ensures reliability and consistency in achieving performance targets.

Empirically, this finding is consistent with prior studies indicating that work discipline significantly influences employee performance. Sitorus et al. (2025) reported that disciplined employees consistently outperform their peers in the quantity, quality, and timeliness of their work outcomes. Similarly, Kautsarina and Setiyono (2025) identified discipline as one of the main predictors of employee performance in the public service sector. These results reinforce the argument that discipline is a proximate driver of performance, as it directly shapes employees' day-to-day work behavior. Moreover, the high coefficient indicates that performance improvements in this context are largely dependent on the extent to which employees consistently comply with organizational rules and procedures. Therefore, organizations should prioritize developing structured disciplinary systems, clear standard operating procedures, and effective supervision to sustain high levels of employee performance.

4.4.6. Work Discipline as a Mediator between Work Motivation and Employee Performance

The results indicate that work discipline significantly mediates the relationship between work motivation and employee performance, suggesting that the influence of motivation on performance is largely transmitted through disciplined behavior. From the perspective of expectancy theory, motivation encourages employees to exert effort based on the expectation of achieving desired outcomes; however, this effort must be translated into consistent, goal-oriented actions to produce actual performance (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). In this context, discipline functions as the behavioral mechanism that operationalizes motivation into measurable results (Bandhu et al., 2024). In addition, self-determination theory posits that intrinsically motivated individuals tend to internalize organizational goals, thereby fostering self-regulation and consistent work behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Therefore, motivation alone may remain latent unless accompanied by disciplined task execution.

Empirically, this finding is consistent with prior research demonstrating the mediating role of discipline in the motivation-performance relationship. Jufrizen and Hadi (2021) found that work discipline serves as a key intermediary variable that strengthens the impact of motivation on employee performance. This result implies that high levels of motivation do not automatically lead to optimal productivity in the absence of discipline, because performance depends on employees' ability to translate their motivation into punctuality, adherence to procedures, and responsibility in completing tasks. Furthermore, the significant indirect effect suggests that discipline plays a crucial role in directing motivational energy toward effective work behavior. Therefore, organizations should not only focus on enhancing employee motivation but also develop systems and practices that reinforce disciplined behavior, such as clear work standards, supervision, and accountability mechanisms, to achieve sustainable performance improvement.

4.4.7. Work Discipline as a Mediator between Compensation and Employee Performance

The results of the study indicate that work discipline significantly mediates the relationship between compensation and employee performance, suggesting that compensation influences performance primarily through its impact on employees' disciplined behavior. This relationship can be explained through equity theory, which posits that when employees perceive compensation as fair and proportional, they are more likely to reciprocate through positive work behaviors, including adherence to organizational rules and procedures (Dessler & Huat, 2009). In addition, expectancy theory suggests that compensation signals desired behaviors, encouraging employees to regulate their actions to achieve valued rewards (Wanous et al., 1983; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). In this context, discipline serves as the behavioral mechanism that translates compensation into consistent, goal-oriented actions, ultimately leading to improved performance (Bandhu et al., 2024).

Empirically, this finding is supported by prior research demonstrating that compensation enhances performance indirectly through behavioral and psychological mechanisms. Akenroye et al. (2022) highlighted that compensation alone rarely guarantees productivity unless it is channeled through mediating variables such as discipline and motivation. The relatively high indirect effect further indicates that discipline plays a substantial role in converting compensation into measurable performance outcomes. This implies that providing financial rewards without reinforcing disciplined behavior may limit the effectiveness of compensation in improving performance. Therefore, organizations should design compensation systems that are not only fair and motivating but also explicitly linked to disciplined behavior, such as attendance-based incentives, performance-linked rewards, and clear procedural standards, to ensure that employee performance can be enhanced more effectively and sustainably.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that work motivation and compensation have positive and significant effects on employee performance, both directly and indirectly through work discipline as an intervening variable, with compensation showing a stronger influence than motivation. From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the relevance of expectancy theory, equity theory, and self-determination theory in explaining employee behavior, particularly the role of discipline as a key behavioral mechanism that translates motivation and compensation into performance outcomes. Empirically, this study supports prior research highlighting the dominant role of compensation and the critical mediating function of work discipline in strengthening performance. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that government institutions, such as Sub-District Offices in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, Indonesia, should integrate fair compensation systems, sustained motivation, and strong disciplinary practices to achieve optimal performance. However, this study is limited by the non-proportional regional distribution of the sample, and future research should incorporate regional characteristics as a moderating variable to examine potential differences across contexts.

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