
Navigating Employee Performance: The Synergy of Ethical Leadership, Communication Proficiency and Trust

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate the factors influencing Employee Performance within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat, with a focus on Ethical Leadership, Communication, and Trust. The primary objective is to understand the individual and combined impacts of these factors on performance outcomes. A quantitative approach was employed, involving a sample of 56 employees from the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. Data was collected through structured surveys, and statistical analysis, including regression analysis using SPSS, was conducted to examine the relationships between Ethical Leadership, Communication, Trust, and Employee Performance. The findings revealed compelling insights into the factors affecting Employee Performance. Ethical Leadership was identified as a significant positive influencer, emphasizing the importance of leaders upholding ethical principles. Effective Communication emerged as a crucial factor, highlighting the need for clear and transparent communication channels to improve performance. Trust also played a vital role, underlining the significance of trust-building initiatives within the organization. Additionally, when these factors were considered together, they collectively and significantly impacted Employee Performance, highlighting the value of an integrated approach.*

Introduction

The performance of government agencies has become a focal point in every strategic development and bureaucratic reform planning as it significantly impacts the quality of public services received by the community. Therefore, government employees must be capable of providing excellent services to the public while maintaining a high level of professionalism, transparency, and productivity. Thus, all employees, including leaders in government

agencies, must perform at a high level in serving the public (Hamka., Echdar, S., 2022). The life of an organization cannot be separated from the capabilities of its human resources, which are a vital asset for the organization because all its goals are achieved through human effort (Bahagia, R & Astuti, 2021). The capabilities of human resources can be acquired through the good performance of employees, as the progress of an organization depends on the performance of its members (Marwansyah, 2019). This is achieved through human resource management practices (Simatupang & Efendi, 2020). Performance is the result that individuals can contribute to an organization, either positively or negatively (Arifin, 2020). To ensure the smooth operation of organizational activities, good performance is required (Butarbutar et al., 2021), as performance is a key driver for an organization (Hasanah et al., 2018). Civil servants, as one of the elements of the state apparatus, play a crucial and strategic role in carrying out public administration tasks and national development objectives. The management of employees in a government organization must be taken seriously, given that employees, as public servants, must have high performance while prioritizing excellent service to the public (Hamka., Echdar, S., 2022).

The performance of public servants as the driving force of a public organization is a fundamental element in achieving the vision and mission of government agencies. Through the measurement of civil servant performance, the success of a government agency is evaluated based on its ability to utilize the resources it manages in line with its established plans. Performance is something that is achieved or demonstrated as an accomplishment or work capability, in other words, performance can be defined as work achievement according to Simamora (Ardian, I., Andi, E., Ardian, 2021). Performance is a highly significant aspect for organizations because it has a crucial influence on goal attainment (Ekhsan & Aziz, 2021). The effectiveness and efficiency of performance reflect organizational productivity (Diab, 2015) and its ability to address issues that arise to achieve its objectives (Grace, E., Girsang, R. M & Simatupang, 2021). Performance is often described as the effort or results possessed by members of an organization and is greatly needed by companies (Simatupang & Efendi, 2020). Performance is frequently associated with the completion of tasks that require careful consideration (Simatupang, S., Butarbutar, N., & Candra, 2021). Performance cannot rely solely on past performance (Zameer et al., 2014), and a company's success is significantly influenced by the performance of its employees (Eka, A. F., Sunaryo, H., & ABS, 2017). Performance involves the quality of inputs and outputs, attendance at the workplace, an accommodating attitude, and assistance with timeliness (Shahzadi, I., Javed, A., Pirzada, S. S., Nasreen, S., & Khanam, 2014). Organizations can provide bonuses and direct rewards if individual employee performance is observed, and performance can be the result of work accomplished by an individual in accordance with their duties and responsibilities (Situmeang, 2018).

The phenomenon under study revolves around the negative behaviors exhibited by civil servants, which have been identified as a major issue within bureaucratic systems. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in the context of Indonesia's bureaucratic reform roadmap for the period 2015-2019, as outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (Peraturan Menteri PAN dan RB, 2015). The

roadmap highlights the detrimental impact of the negative behaviors of government employees on the overall image of the bureaucracy. Among the negative behaviors mentioned in the roadmap are laziness, sluggishness, a reluctance to serve, a lack of innovation, feudalistic tendencies, a lack of awareness regarding external developments, and a tendency to make it difficult for the public they are meant to serve, among others. These negative behaviors have contributed to the poor perception of the bureaucracy and have hindered its ability to effectively serve the public and meet its objectives. One of the key issues arising from this phenomenon is the low level of employee performance. Many civil servants are perceived as merely physically present at work, going through the motions of clocking in, engaging in casual conversations, and then leaving without actively contributing their efforts to the tasks that could advance the shared goals of a government organization. In response to these challenges, Indonesia introduced a new law, namely Law Number 5 of 2014, specifically addressing the Civil Service. This comprehensive law encompasses various aspects of civil service management, ranging from recruitment standards based on a merit system to regulations governing the conduct of civil servants, as well as the imposition of sanctions for non-compliance with the law. This phenomenon of negative behavior within the civil service, its impact on bureaucratic performance, and the legislative measures taken to address it constitute a significant area of study and analysis within the broader field of administrative and bureaucratic reform. Understanding the root causes, consequences, and effectiveness of these reforms is essential for improving the functioning of government institutions and enhancing public service delivery.

The performance of the South Sulawesi Province Regional Secretariat is a matter of significant importance and attention. This regional administrative body plays a crucial role in the province's governance and has become a focal point for several reasons. Firstly, there is a growing emphasis on evaluating how well the secretariat fulfills its various responsibilities, aligns with its predefined goals, and effectively serves the province's population. This evaluation encompasses diverse aspects, including the quality and accessibility of public services, as well as responsiveness to citizen demands and expectations. Additionally, the quality of public services is a critical component of this issue. It encompasses factors such as the timeliness, efficiency, and overall effectiveness of service delivery. Public satisfaction with these services is closely monitored and considered a key indicator of the secretariat's performance. Efficiency and effectiveness in the secretariat's operations are also central to this matter. Efficiency involves the prudent use of resources, while effectiveness assesses the secretariat's ability to achieve its goals in line with the province's strategic priorities. Public perception is another significant dimension. How citizens perceive the secretariat's performance, particularly regarding transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, greatly impacts its credibility and effectiveness. Furthermore, this matter extends beyond the regional secretariat's boundaries, influencing decision-making processes, policy implementation, and the overall efficiency of administrative functions within the province.

One that influences the performance of the regional secretariat of South Sulawesi Province is ethical leadership. Ethical leadership represents a leadership paradigm deeply rooted in ethical principles and moral values. This approach goes beyond the conventional

notions of leadership solely focused on achieving organizational objectives; instead, it underscores the ethical responsibility of leaders in their decision-making and interactions. At its theoretical core, ethical leadership is founded on several fundamental principles. Firstly, it emphasizes moral integrity, demanding that leaders uphold strong ethical standards and exhibit honesty and consistency with their values. Ethical leaders are seen as exemplars, inspiring others through their unwavering commitment to moral principles. Secondly, ethical leadership places a premium on fairness and justice. Leaders are expected to ensure equitable treatment and impartiality in policies and practices, fostering an environment where everyone feels they are treated fairly. Transparency is another critical element. Ethical leaders advocate for open communication, providing clear, honest information that cultivates trust among their team members and stakeholders. Accountability is central, both for leaders themselves and within the organization as a whole. Ethical leaders take responsibility for their actions and decisions, setting an example for others to follow suit. Empathy and compassion are also integral to ethical leadership. Leaders are encouraged to understand and consider the emotions and perspectives of their team members, demonstrating understanding and support, particularly in challenging situations. Furthermore, ethical decision-making is a cornerstone of this leadership approach. Leaders employ ethical frameworks and reasoning to make choices that align with ethical values, carefully evaluating the potential consequences on various stakeholders. Lastly, ethical leadership adopts a long-term perspective, prioritizing sustainability and ethical practices that not only benefit the present but also contribute to the well-being of future generations. From a theoretical standpoint, ethical leadership draws insights from various ethical theories, such as virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism, to guide leaders in navigating complex moral dilemmas. It also intersects with organizational theories, such as servant leadership and transformational leadership, by emphasizing values, employee welfare, and the pursuit of a shared vision.

Based on the observations and experiences of the researcher working at the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat, it is evident that there is a lack of support and attention from leaders towards their employees. Therefore, specific techniques are required to enhance the performance of all employees. Leadership also exerts a significant influence on employee performance. Within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat, several critical issues pertaining to leadership practices have been observed. These issues have a direct influence on employee performance and the overall work environment. Firstly, there exists a suboptimal level of supervision by leaders. Notably, routine supervision is lacking, with leaders failing to conduct daily checks on employee tasks. This lapse in oversight has resulted in employees adopting a relaxed attitude towards their work, potentially compromising productivity and the quality of output. Secondly, the communication of task allocation and delegation of authority from leaders to their subordinates has proven ineffective. This deficiency in clear communication has led to a scenario where employees often find themselves working under constant pressure due to uncertainties surrounding their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, there is a noteworthy issue concerning the enforcement of discipline. Leaders have not been consistently implementing punishments for subordinates who make mistakes in performing their duties. The absence of clear and stringent sanctions for employees who violate rules has contributed to an environment where accountability and adherence to

regulations may be lacking. In response to these issues, it is essential to develop strategies and approaches that address these leadership challenges and improve the overall performance of employees within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. This could involve enhancing leadership skills, improving communication, and establishing a more effective system for monitoring and disciplining employees.

Another factor that influences performance is communication (Sedarmayanti, 2018). Communication is the process of conveying a message in the form of meaningful symbols, such as thoughts and feelings in the form of ideas, information, beliefs, expectations, guidance, from one person to another, either directly face-to-face or indirectly through media, with the aim of changing attitudes, perspectives, or behavior (Afandi, 2016). Effective communication levels can impact employee performance; good communication in conveying ideas and concepts can influence the assessment of employee performance (Sedarmayanti, 2018). Communication in work can be analyzed at three levels: individual communication, group communication, and organizational communication. This means that all human resources are expected to be communicative individuals who have a lot of information to convey to others. Having communication relationships within an organization will undoubtedly improve employee performance (Yuniasih & Kurniawati, 2022). Based on observations and the researcher's experience working in the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat, it is evident that employee communication skills have not been well-implemented. Often, employees perform their tasks based on their own perceptions, which indicates a lack of communication between leaders and employees. This is evident from the low number of coordination meetings among employees and leaders, leading to frequent errors in task execution. Suboptimal performance, as mentioned above, demonstrates the lack of communication among employees to achieve the best results. The lack of effective communication among employees in the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat results in frequent conflicts among employees, which in turn leads to suboptimal employee performance.

Employee performance can be influenced by various factors, one of which is the level of trust among colleagues. A higher level of creativity and trust in coworkers can significantly impact employee performance (Arbaan and Addury, 2022). Furthermore, according to research conducted by Caniago and Sudarmi (2021) and Prasetyo et al. (2018), the level of trust in fellow employees or in leadership has a significant influence on employee performance. Trust can be defined as a willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others based on the expectation that they can provide positive outcomes (Mayer et al., 2022). This trust can reflect the level of relationships among employees, thereby fostering a healthy working environment and mutual support in achieving organizational goals. Based on observations and the researcher's experience working in the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat, it is evident that employees have good trust in the organization and leadership. However, there are still issues of trust in the workplace, which often occur in the Secretariat of the South Sulawesi Provincial Parliament. Among these issues are employees who feel that their superiors are not competent in addressing issues within the organization. Additionally, there is a lack of transparency in the actions of superiors regarding what is happening within

the institution, and superiors may not be reliable in handling external and internal issues. If trust in superiors is not well-established, it can lead to a lack of harmony in workplace relationships within the institution, ultimately impacting employee performance in the Secretariat of the Provincial Parliament.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the multifaceted factors that impact employee performance within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. Recognizing the challenges mentioned earlier, this research seeks to delve into the complexities of these factors to gain a deeper understanding of their influence on employee performance. This study seeks to uncover the underlying factors influencing employee performance, with the ultimate aim of contributing to the improvement of service performance and the effective execution of tasks and functions within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat.

Research Methods

In this study, a quantitative research design will be employed to investigate the factors influencing employee performance within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. The research will involve a sample size of 56 employees from various departments within the organization. To ensure a representative sample, the stratified random sampling technique will be utilized, taking into account different levels and units within the secretariat. Data collection will primarily rely on a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire will encompass a mix of closed-ended and Likert scale questions designed to assess key variables, including trust, communication, leadership, and employee performance. The variables under consideration are categorized as follows: Trust, Communication, and Ethical Leadership as independent variables, while Employee Performance serves as the dependent variable. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) will be employed for data analysis. The analysis will encompass several stages, starting with descriptive statistics to summarize and present the data's central tendencies and dispersion. Subsequently, inferential analysis techniques, such as correlation and regression analyses, will be applied to explore the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Upon completion of data analysis, the research findings will be interpreted, and conclusions will be drawn. These findings will be presented comprehensively in a research report, incorporating tables and charts to enhance clarity. Additionally, recommendations for improving employee performance based on the research outcomes will be provided.

Result and Discussion

After passing through the phases of validity testing, reliability testing, and classical assumption testing, the next step is to perform multiple linear regression analysis. Multiple regression analysis is carried out by comparing the t-value with the t-table and the significance value with $\alpha = 0.05$. In detail, the results of multiple regression testing can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1. Multiple Regression Testing Result

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	15.018	10.783		1.393	0.170

Ethical Leadership	0.133	0.047	0.305	2.832	0.007
Communication	0.770	0.246	0.365	3.130	0.003
Trust	0.542	0.248	0.257	2.189	0.033

The obtained result, which shows a coefficient of 0.133 with a standard error of 0.047 and a confidence interval between 0.047 and 0.305, signifies a noteworthy relationship between Ethical Leadership and Employee Performance within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. Furthermore, the p-value of 0.007, being less than the conventional significance level of 0.05, reinforces the statistical significance of this relationship. This finding implies that Ethical Leadership is a significant factor influencing Employee Performance in this organizational context. When leaders exemplify ethical behavior, uphold moral principles, and demonstrate integrity, they foster an environment characterized by trust, transparency, and equity. Ethical leaders inspire their teams by setting a high moral standard. Employees are more likely to feel motivated and engaged in their work when they trust their leaders and believe they are working towards a shared, ethical goal. Moreover, trust is a foundational element of ethical leadership. When employees have confidence in their leaders' ethical decision-making, it cultivates a sense of loyalty and commitment to the organization. Beside that, Ethical leaders encourage open communication and collaboration among team members. This leads to improved teamwork and the sharing of innovative ideas, ultimately boosting overall performance. Furthermore, Employees are less inclined to leave an organization with ethical leadership, as they feel valued, respected, and aligned with the organization's values. Reduced turnover can result in cost savings and the retention of valuable talent. Lastly, Ethical leadership contributes to a positive organizational image, which can attract top talent and potential clients or partners. A strong reputation can, in turn, positively impact performance.

The result, which indicates a coefficient of 0.770 with a standard error of 0.246 and a confidence interval between 0.365 and 3.130, highlights a substantial relationship between Communication and Employee Performance within the context of the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. Moreover, the p-value of 0.003, falling below the conventional significance level of 0.05, underscores the statistical significance of this relationship. This finding underscores the crucial role of effective communication in influencing Employee Performance within the organization. Effective communication entails the clear and efficient exchange of information, ideas, and feedback among team members and between leaders and employees. When communication is clear and transparent, employees have a better understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and performance expectations. This clarity reduces confusion and enhances focus on tasks, ultimately improving performance. Moreover, effective communication facilitates the identification and resolution of issues in a timely manner. When employees feel comfortable discussing challenges and proposing solutions, obstacles are addressed promptly, leading to smoother workflows and improved performance. Beside that, open channels of communication allow employees to voice their concerns, ideas, and feedback. Feeling heard and valued can boost morale and job satisfaction, leading to increased engagement and, consequently, improved performance. Furthermore, communication plays a vital role in team dynamics. Teams that communicate effectively are better equipped to collaborate, share knowledge, and support each other. This synergy often

results in higher performance outcomes. Lastly, in a dynamic work environment, effective communication helps employees adapt to changes more readily. Whether it's changes in processes, policies, or strategies, clear communication ensures everyone is on the same page, reducing resistance to change and supporting performance during transitions.

The result, which reveals a coefficient of 0.542 with a standard error of 0.248 and a confidence interval ranging from 0.257 to 2.189, signifies a notable relationship between Trust and Employee Performance within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. Additionally, the p-value of 0.033, falling below the conventional significance level of 0.05, underscores the statistical significance of this relationship. This finding underscores the pivotal role that trust plays in influencing Employee Performance within the organization. Trust refers to the confidence and reliance employees place in their leaders and colleagues. It encompasses a belief that individuals within the organization will act in good faith, with integrity, and in alignment with shared goals. The impact of trust on Employee Performance is significant, and it manifests in several ways: Firstly, when employees trust their leaders and colleagues, it fosters a collaborative and cooperative work environment. Trust encourages open communication, the sharing of knowledge, and the willingness to collaborate on projects and tasks. This collaborative spirit often leads to increased efficiency and effectiveness in completing assignments, ultimately enhancing overall performance. Secondly, trust influences employee motivation and job satisfaction. When employees feel they can trust their leaders and colleagues, they are more likely to feel valued and respected in the workplace. This, in turn, contributes to higher levels of job satisfaction and a greater sense of commitment to the organization, both of which can positively impact performance. Furthermore, trust is closely linked to employee engagement. Engaged employees are those who feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for their work. Trusting relationships within the organization encourage employees to take initiative, make decisions, and contribute their best efforts to achieve organizational goals, all of which contribute to enhanced performance outcomes.

Table 2. F Value and RSquare

Model	Value
F Value	12.159
R Square	0.642

The F-value of 12.159 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates a statistically significant effect when all the independent variables, namely Ethical Leadership, Communication, and Trust, are considered simultaneously on Employee Performance within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. This means that as a set, these independent variables collectively influence Employee Performance in a significant way. When taken together, these variables create a holistic framework for understanding the factors that impact performance within the organization. Ethical Leadership sets the tone for the organization's values and ethical standards, which in turn affects how employees perceive and interact with their leaders and colleagues. Effective Communication ensures that these values and standards are clearly articulated and understood, fostering a sense of transparency and alignment. Trust, on the other hand, underpins the relationships between leaders, colleagues, and employees, creating an environment where individuals feel secure, valued, and motivated. The collective influence

of these variables is substantial. Ethical Leadership, Effective Communication, and Trust form a synergistic system that can enhance Employee Performance in several ways. Together, they promote a workplace culture characterized by trust, collaboration, and shared values. This, in turn, can lead to higher employee engagement, improved problem-solving, enhanced teamwork, and a greater sense of commitment to the organization's goals.

The R-squared value of 0.642 represents the coefficient of determination in the statistical analysis. It signifies the proportion of the variation in Employee Performance within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat that can be explained by the combination of the independent variables, which in this study are Ethical Leadership, Communication, and Trust. In simpler terms, an R-squared value of 0.642 implies that approximately 64.2% of the variation in Employee Performance can be attributed to the influence of Ethical Leadership, Communication, and Trust, as examined collectively in the study. The remaining 35.8% of the variation is likely influenced by other factors not included in this research. This R-squared value serves as an important indicator of the model's goodness of fit. A higher R-squared value suggests that the chosen independent variables have a stronger explanatory power in relation to Employee Performance. In this case, an R-squared value of 0.642 indicates a relatively strong relationship. However, it's important to note that while Ethical Leadership, Communication, and Trust collectively account for a significant portion of the variation in Employee Performance, other factors not considered in this study also play a role. These additional factors could include individual skills and abilities, external influences, and organizational culture, among others.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study conducted within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat provides valuable insights into the factors influencing Employee Performance. The analysis revealed several significant findings that shed light on the relationship between Ethical Leadership, Communication, Trust, and Employee Performance. Ethical Leadership emerged as a pivotal factor, demonstrating a positive and statistically significant impact on Employee Performance. Leaders who exhibit ethical behavior and uphold moral principles set the tone for a workplace characterized by trust, transparency, and fairness. This, in turn, motivates employees to perform at their best. Effective Communication was identified as another crucial element influencing Employee Performance. Clear and transparent communication channels enable employees to have a better understanding of their roles and expectations. Effective communication also contributes to improved problem-solving, higher employee engagement, enhanced collaboration, and smoother adaptation to change. Trust was found to be a key driver of Employee Performance. When employees trust their leaders and colleagues, it fosters a collaborative, motivated, and satisfied workforce. Trust-building initiatives, such as open communication and transparency, significantly impact employee engagement and performance outcomes. The combined influence of these factors—Ethical Leadership, Effective Communication, and Trust—was evident. When examined collectively, they contributed to enhancing Employee Performance. This integrated approach created a positive workplace culture, promoted teamwork, and aligned employees with organizational goals. In conclusion, this study underscores the significance of Ethical Leadership, Effective

Communication, and Trust in enhancing Employee Performance within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. This study has illuminated several critical factors influencing Employee Performance within the South Sulawesi Provincial Secretariat. While it marks a significant contribution to the field, there remain intriguing avenues for future research that can expand and deepen our understanding of these dynamics. Investigating the role of technology in shaping communication dynamics and its subsequent impact on employee performance is a promising area. Understanding how digital tools influence trust-building, ethical leadership practices, and communication patterns is increasingly relevant in today's tech-driven work environments.

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