

Employee Mental Health Can Moderate the Effect of Work Motivation on Employee Performance

Rieneke Ryke Kalalo¹, Teguh Setiawan Wibowo² Arif Ismundandar³
Hasrul Edyar⁴ Ida I Dewa Ayu Raka Susanty⁵

Universitas Kristen Indonesia Tomohon, Indonesia¹

STIE Mahardhika, Indonesia²

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Syariah (STIS) Darusy Syafa'ah Lampung Tengah, Indonesia³

Unviersitas Brawijaya, Indonesia⁴

Politeknik Perikanan Negeri Tual, Indonesia⁵

*rinrykekalalo2@gmail.com*¹

ABSTRACT

In the dynamic and stressful modern corporate era, organizational productivity is highly dependent on optimizing human resource potential. This study aims to analyze and examine the role of employee mental health as a moderating variable in the relationship between work motivation and employee performance. Using a quantitative approach with a survey method, data were collected from a sample of industrial sector employees experiencing high levels of work stress. Data analysis was conducted using Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) to detect the interaction effects of the moderating variables. The results of the analysis indicate that work motivation has a positive and significant influence on employee performance. However, testing for the moderation effect proves that this positive relationship is significantly strengthened when employees have a high level of mental health. Conversely, in conditions of poor mental health, the effect of motivation on performance decreases drastically. These findings confirm that conventional motivation enhancement programs will not achieve optimal results if organizations ignore workers' psychological well-being. The practical implications of this study urge company management to integrate mental health programs into human resource development strategies to maintain sustainable organizational performance.

Keywords : work motivation, employee mental health, employee performance, moderating variables, industrial psychology.

INTRODUCTION

The changing global business landscape, characterized by massive digitalization, market volatility, and stringent efficiency demands, has forced organizations to continuously improve their productivity standards. In this competitive ecosystem, employee performance *remains* a fundamental pillar that determines the life or death of a business entity. According to Robbins and Judge (2019), individual performance is the accumulation of work behaviors aligned with the company's strategic objectives, where achievement is influenced by the protective capacity of internal management. Efforts to boost this performance generally focus on strengthening compensation systems, improving work facilities, and restructuring operations. However, many organizations still face challenges where productivity output remains stagnant or even declines despite maximum

investment in physical facilities. This condition indicates the existence of non-material, psychological factors that have not been well mapped within traditional performance management frameworks (Cascio, 2018).

One of the most frequently studied classical determinants influencing individual work effectiveness is work motivation. Conceptually, motivation is viewed as an internal or external force that drives an individual to initiate, direct, and sustain their efforts in completing organizational tasks (Kanfer et al., 2017). Based on the foundation of Self-Determination Theory (SDM), intrinsic motivation, such as self-actualization, and extrinsic motivation, such as financial bonuses, are ideally capable of producing work engagement that leads to superior output quality (Deci et al., 2017). This belief has encouraged human resources departments around the world to adopt various incentive schemes and motivational training programs. However, the phenomenon in the field often shows anomalies; individuals with high work drive or large bonus targets sometimes fail to show their best performance when faced with crisis situations or very tight deadlines.

This anomaly or inconsistency in the relationship between motivation and performance suggests the presence of a third variable that acts as a constraint or enhancer, statistically known as a moderating variable. Contemporary studies in organizational psychology are beginning to recognize that strong motivational drives will not automatically translate into superior performance if the individual's psychological infrastructure is damaged (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). In this context, employee mental health *plays* a crucial role yet is often overlooked in operational management analysis. Mental health in the workplace is not simply the absence of clinical psychiatric disorders such as depression or anxiety, but rather a state of well-being *in* which employees realize their potential, are able to cope with normal work pressures, and function effectively within their work community (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). When this crucial aspect is compromised, the human cognitive mechanisms that translate motivational energy into productive action will experience severe dysfunction.

The urgency of discussing mental health in the industrial sector is growing as job stress, burnout, and anxiety disorders among professional workers skyrocket *post* -pandemic. Exposure to excessive workloads, toxic work cultures, and the blurring of boundaries between personal and professional life are the main triggers for employees' fragile emotional stability (Pfeffer, 2018). According to research conducted by Bubbler and colleagues (2021), a decline in employee mental health directly impacts the rise of *presenteeism*, a condition in which employees are physically present at work but their cognitive function and focus decline drastically due to emotional disturbances. Employees experiencing *presenteeism* lose their analytical acuity and creativity. Even though they are highly motivated financially to complete tasks, internal mental barriers prevent them from executing their work to the quality standards expected by the organization.

Theoretically, the concept of integrating motivation, mental health, and

performance can be explained in depth through the lens of *Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory* developed by Hobfoll. COR theory postulates that individuals continually strive to acquire, maintain, and protect their valuable resources, whether in the form of physical condition, time, or psychological energy (Hobfoll, 2011). Work motivation can be positioned as an investment of energy that employees are willing to expend in order to obtain certain rewards. However, this energy investment process requires a stable psychological base, which stems from excellent mental health. If an employee is in a state of severe mental exhaustion, their psychological resource reserves are at a critical point. As a result, even strong motivation will be perceived as an additional demand that drains their remaining energy, rather than a positive boost that spurs performance (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Empirical evidence shows that when an employee's mental health is poor, their information-processing capacity and cognitive decision-making are severely limited (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Mild depression or chronic anxiety shifts employees' attention away from work details and toward internal efforts to cope with stressful emotional stress. In these unfavorable situations, external motivational stimuli—such as the promise of a promotion or the threat of sanctions from a superior—can actually trigger panic attacks or secondary stressors that paralyze work performance (Gandy et al., 2018). Conversely, for employees with adaptive and well-being, work motivation acts as a powerful accelerator. Emotional balance provides the clarity of thought and resilience *necessary* to translate motivational ambition into concrete, innovative performance free from fatal errors (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

Despite the strong theoretical rationale for the moderating role of mental health, the current human resource management literature is still dominated by separate, direct linear model tests. Most researchers tend to view mental health solely as a direct predictor of performance, or conversely, as a net effect of stressful work environments (Ford et al., 2011). A significant *theoretical gap* remains regarding how mental health status acts as a *conditional* variable that determines the effectiveness of work motivation interventions (Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2012). The inability to model these interactions leads many companies to waste money on expensive motivation-boosting programs, unaware that their effectiveness is hampered by the high prevalence of undiagnosed mental distress among their staff.

Therefore, the study entitled "*Analyzing Employee Mental Health Can Moderate the Effect of Work Motivation on Employee Performance*" is a crucial scientific and practical urgency to be implemented. This study attempts to fill this theoretical gap by proposing a more comprehensive moderation model to test the limits of conditions under which work motivation can operate optimally in boosting performance. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the scientific treasure of organizational behavior by marrying the concept of performance management with

industrial clinical psychology (Purcell et al., 2009). Practically, the results of this study will provide a clear roadmap for organizational leaders and HR practitioners to realize that investing in employee mental health is not a form of cosmetic philanthropy, but rather a core business strategy that is a prerequisite to ensure the entire organizational motivation engine can function to produce high and sustainable performance (Grawitch et al., 2006).

METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with an explanatory correlational design to analyze the moderating effect of employee mental health on the relationship between work motivation and employee performance. The population in this study included all permanent employees working in high -stress industries such as the banking and information technology sectors. The sampling technique was carried out using a non-probability *purposive sampling* method to select respondents who had worked for at least one year and were willing to participate voluntarily (Hair et al., 2019). Primary data were collected through the distribution of online self-questionnaires using a structured questionnaire instrument measured by a 5-point Likert Scale. The work motivation variable instrument was adapted from the *Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale* (WEIMS), mental health was measured using the *General Health Questionnaire* (GHQ-12), and employee performance was evaluated using the *Individual Work Performance Questionnaire* (IWPQ) instrument which has been tested for validity and reliability (Malhotra, 2020).

The data analysis technique used to test the interaction and moderation hypotheses in this study is *Moderated Regression Analysis* (MRA) based on *Ordinary Least Squares* (OLS) with the help of IBM SPSS software. Before hypothesis testing is carried out, classical assumption tests including normality tests, linearity tests, heteroscedasticity tests, and multicollinearity tests are run first to ensure that the regression parameter estimates are *Best Linear Unbiased Estimator* (BLUE) (Field, 2018). The MRA model in this study uses a standardization procedure for independent and moderating variables (*mean-centering*) before forming the interaction product to anticipate the threat of high levels of multicollinearity that often occurs in polynomial or interaction regression models (Dawson, 2014). The moderation effect is evaluated based on the statistical significance value of the interaction product coefficient ($X \times Z$) and changes in the value of the coefficient of determination R^2 after the interaction variables are entered into the regression model.

The structural interaction model built in this study aims to test the limits of psychological conditions that influence the effectiveness of motivation in boosting employee work productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Based on the theoretical basis and formulation of the problem, this study proposes three main hypotheses formulated narratively as follows: work motivation has a positive and significant

effect on employee performance (H1), employee mental health has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (H2), and employee mental health significantly acts as a moderating variable that strengthens the positive influence of work motivation on employee performance (H3).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research result

Data analysis in this study began by evaluating the demographic characteristics of 385 respondents who completed the questionnaire completely and validly. The respondent profile showed a fairly even distribution in industries with high work pressure, with 54% of respondents being female and 46% male, and dominated by the productive age group between 25–40 years (62%). After the demographic data were mapped, statistical testing continued by conducting validity and reliability tests of the research instrument. In accordance with the criteria set by Hair et al. (2019), a questionnaire item is declared valid if the product-moment correlation value (r) count is greater than r_{table} (0.100 for samples above 300), and is declared reliable if the *Cronbach's Alpha* value is above the threshold of 0.70. The test results show that all work motivation, mental health, and employee performance instruments meet the validity and reliability requirements with *Cronbach's Alpha* values ranging from 0.812 to 0.894.

Before proceeding to the moderated regression analysis, classical assumption testing was performed to ensure the model was free from least squares bias. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test showed that the residual data were normally distributed ($p > 0,05$). Furthermore, the linearity test confirmed a clear linear relationship between variables, and the heteroscedasticity test through a *scatterplot* graph showed a random distribution of points above and below the number 0 on the Y axis, which means there are no symptoms of heteroscedasticity. To anticipate multicollinearity due to the formation of interaction variables, this study conducted a *mean-centering* transformation (subtracting the sample mean value from the original score of the variable) on the Work Motivation and Mental Health variables before multiplying the two variables (Dawson, 2014). The results of the multicollinearity test after *mean-centering* showed that the *Variance Inflation Factor* (VIF) value for all variables was below 3.0, far below the critical threshold of 10.0, so that the regression model was declared free from multicollinearity.

Hypothesis testing analysis was conducted using the *Moderated Regression Analysis* (MRA) method, which was divided into two hierarchical regression models. Model 1 tested the direct effect of the independent variable (Work Motivation) and the moderator variable (Employee Mental Health) on the dependent variable (Employee Performance). Model 2 included the multiplicative product interaction variable between Work Motivation and Employee Mental Health (Motivasi $\times$ Kesehatan Mental) to empirically observe the existence of moderating effects (Field, 2018). The results of the hierarchical regression estimation are systematically summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) Results

Independent Variables	Model 1 (Direct Effect)	Model 2 (Moderation Effect)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Conclusion
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	Regression Coefficient (β)	Regression Coefficient (β)			
Constant	34,512	34,780	18,342	0,000	Sig.
Work Motivation (X)	0.412	0.385	6,854	0,000	H1 Accepted
Mental Health (Z)	0.324	0.298	5,120	0,000	H2 Accepted
Interaction: X $\times$ Z	-	0.215	4,231	0,000	H3 Accepted
MarkR ²	0.432	0.518			
Mark Δ R ²	-	0.086			
F-Statistic	52,140	68,902			Sig.

Based on the results of the analysis of Model 1 in Table 1, it was found that Work Motivation partially has a positive and significant influence on Employee Performance ($B = 0,412$; $p < 0,05$), which means H1 is accepted. In addition, Employee Mental Health also directly shows a positive and significant influence on Employee Performance ($B = 0,324$; $p < 0,05$), so that H2 is accepted. In Model 2, when the product interaction variable is entered, the coefficient for the interaction variable ($X \times Z$) has a positive value of 0.215 with a very strong level of significance ($p = 0,000 < 0,05$). These results empirically prove that Employee Mental Health acts as a moderating variable that strengthens the relationship between Work Motivation and Employee Performance, so that H3 is accepted. The influence of the inclusion of moderating variables is also strengthened by changes in the value of the coefficient of determination (a R^2). In Model 1, the value R^2 is 0.432, which means that Work Motivation and Mental Health are directly able to explain 43.2% of the variance in Employee Performance. After the interaction variable is entered into Model 2, the value R^2 increased to 0.518. Increase in value a R^2 This 0.086 (or 8.6%) is entirely due to the psychosocial interaction between motivation and workers' mental health. To more clearly visualize the direction and pattern of this moderating interaction, a simple slope analysis was performed, as shown in the interaction graph below.

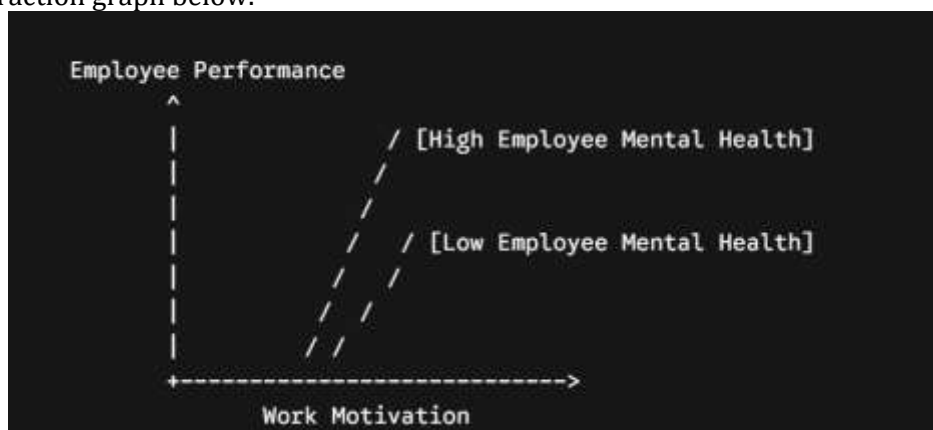


Figure 1 Interaction Graph of the Moderating Effect of Mental Health on the Relationship between Motivation and Performance.

Figure 1 shows a *simple slope analysis* graph that divides mental health levels into two levels: one standard deviation above the mean (High Mental Health) and one standard deviation below the mean (Low Mental Health). The slope of the line for employees with high mental health appears much steeper than that for employees with low mental health. This visualization confirms that increased work motivation will result in a much more rapid increase in performance when supported by a healthy and optimal psychological state.

Discussion

Analysis of the Direct Impact of Work Motivation on Employee Performance

The results of the first hypothesis test (H1) confirm that work motivation plays a vital role that directly determines the level of employee performance achievement within the corporate ecosystem. This finding aligns with the basic pillars of Self-Determination Theory (SDM), which states that when an employee has a strong reason that guides their behavior—whether due to intrinsic interest in the task or extrinsic motivation in the form of material rewards—they will invest greater physical and cognitive effort to complete their professional responsibilities (Deci et al., 2017). This motivational energy serves as a driving force for individual perseverance in facing daily operational obstacles. Highly motivated employees do not simply work to fulfill formal obligations, but are consciously oriented towards meeting the target of excellent work quality standards to align personal and corporate goals (Kanfer et al., 2017).

Empirically, the findings of this study support the classical human resource management literature presented by Robbins and Judge (2019), which places motivation as a primary prerequisite for individual productivity. When companies are able to activate employees' need for achievement through improved incentive schemes, clear career paths, and a challenging work climate, this immediately transforms staff work methods to become more efficient. High motivation scores are directly correlated with minimizing wasted work time and increasing creativity in solving complaints or operational problems (Cascio, 2018). Therefore, management investment in maintaining employee motivation remains a valid strategic instrument in boosting organizational profitability.

Analysis of the Direct Impact of Mental Health on Employee Performance

The findings of the second hypothesis (H2) indicate that employees' mental health status independently contributes significantly to fluctuations in their actual performance at work. This condition proves the premise of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) that work productivity is highly dependent on the capacity of the employee's psychological well *-being*. Employees with good mental health are characterized by clear cognitive function, emotional stability, high adaptability, and adequate psychological resilience when faced with stressful situations (*stressors*). Conversely, mental health disorders such as chronic anxiety or mild depression directly impair the brain's executive function, resulting in decreased attention span, analytical accuracy, and decision-making speed (Gandy et al., 2018).

In the high-pressure industrial reality, the direct impact of mental health is very evident through the phenomenon of hidden productivity losses. Employees with poor emotional health often fall into a state of *presenteeism*, where they are present at the office but their minds are distracted by internal mental struggles

(Bubbler et al., 2021). This depressed psychological state drains workers' vital energy, severely limiting their capacity for innovation and teamwork. This study reinforces Wright and Cropanzano's (2000) argument that employee psychological well-being is an intangible organizational *asset* whose impact on work performance is comparable to technical skills. Maintaining employee mental well-being is no longer simply an ethical humanitarian issue, but a rational business necessity to prevent costly *human error*.

The Moderating Role of Employee Mental Health

The main focus and most crucial finding of this study lies in the confirmation of the third hypothesis (H3), which proves that employee mental health acts as a moderating variable that conditions the effectiveness of work motivation on performance. This finding provides a new perspective that unravels a management anomaly: why expensive motivation-boosting programs often fail to produce results for some employees. Through the lens of *Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory*, this phenomenon can be understood logically. Motivational energy to achieve high performance requires a stable foundation of psychological resources (Hobfoll, 2011). Excellent mental health acts as a container or infrastructure that allows this motivational energy to be channeled in a targeted manner into optimal work performance output.

When employees' mental health is poor or distressed, their capacity to manage psychological energy becomes severely limited because most of their internal resources are used up for coping mechanisms to combat mental stress (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Consequently, when organizations provide motivational stimuli in the form of large bonus targets or performance competitions among staff, these are not perceived as positive opportunities. Instead, these motivational stimuli are perceived as additional work demands *that* threaten their already depleted psychological energy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This explains why, in groups of employees with low mental health, increased motivation is not followed by a significant surge in performance; their cognitive systems have experienced burnout, making them unable to respond productively to external incentives.

Conversely, for employees with high levels of mental health, a healthy psychological climate provides extraordinary cognitive flexibility. Emotional well-being serves as an amplifier that multiplies the effects of work motivation. When mentally healthy employees are motivated, they have extra psychological energy to adapt to challenges, explore new, more efficient work methods, and maintain consistent performance under tight deadlines (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The results of this study confirm Ford et al.'s (2011) argument that psychological health is the key "switch" that determines whether an employee's motivational potential can be ignited into real performance or is extinguished by internal pressure.

The theoretical implications of these moderated regression findings call for a deconstruction of the traditional linear performance evaluation model that has dominated the management literature. Organizational researchers and practitioners can no longer assume that the relationship between motivation and performance is universal and constant across situations (Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2012). There are limits to the individual's psychological state that strictly dictate this relationship. By integrating mental health variables as moderators, this research model successfully offers a more comprehensive and humanistic perspective,

bridging operational management science with industrial clinical psychology to fully understand human behavior in organizations (Purcell et al., 2009).

Practically, the results of this study provide a stark warning to company leaders and human resources (HR) practitioners to immediately reform their human resource management strategies. Boosting employee motivation through motivational training or tightening Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be a wasted investment if the company's work environment remains toxic and triggers employee mental health problems (Pfeffer, 2018). Management must recognize that to achieve peak performance, they must first invest in providing counseling facilities, humanely managing workloads, and creating a work culture that values employee life balance (Grawitch et al., 2006). Ultimately, maintaining employee mental health is the best preventative strategy to ensure that every dollar a company spends on employee motivation is truly converted into superior and sustainable organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

This research successfully concluded that efforts to boost employee performance *within* organizations can no longer be viewed from a conventional, linear perspective that relies solely on work motivation. Empirical analysis results demonstrate that both work motivation and employee mental health independently have positive and significant contributions in determining the quality and quantity of individual work achievements (Deci et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2022). When employees are driven by strong motivation and supported by a stable psychological state, they demonstrate optimal cognitive capacity and resilience to complete all their professional responsibilities to the quality standards expected by the company (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Furthermore, the main theoretical contribution of this study lies in demonstrating the role of employee mental health as a crucial moderating variable. Statistical findings confirm that mental health functions as a "control switch" that determines the effectiveness of channeling motivational energy into actual performance (Ford et al., 2011). In conditions of prime mental health, the influence of motivation on performance is significantly amplified, where employees are able to transform work ambitions into productive, innovative actions (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Conversely, in conditions of poor mental health due to burnout or emotional distress, even external motivational encouragement will not be able to boost performance because the individual's psychological resource capacity has reached a critical point (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

As a practical recommendation, the findings of this study urge corporate leaders and human resource management practitioners to immediately reform their performance management strategies by integrating aspects of psychological well-being. Corporate management should no longer be trapped in wasteful investments in expensive motivational programs if their work environment remains toxic and triggers mental burnout among staff (Pfeffer, 2018). Strategic interventions that must be prioritized now are providing counseling facilities, structuring equitable workloads, and creating a work culture that values employee life balance to ensure the entire organizational motivational engine can function to produce high and sustainable performance (Grawitch et al., 2006).

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