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Work Discipline and Workload as Predictors of Academic Staff Performance: a Direct Effect Study in Indonesian Private Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the direct effects of work discipline and workload on the performance of academic staff at private higher education institutions (PTS) in Surabaya, Indonesia, with work motivation as a mediating variable. The intense competition among PTS and high demands for academic services require employees to remain productive despite fluctuating workloads. This study employs a quantitative approach with purposive sampling of 390 employees from six PTS in Surabaya. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4.0. The results show that work discipline has a positive and significant effect on work motivation (β=0.395; $p<0.001$) and on employee performance (β=0.276; $p<0.001$). Workload has a negative and significant effect on work motivation (β=-0.311; $p<0.001$) and on employee performance (β=-0.230; $p<0.001$). Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (β=0.232; $p<0.001$). Furthermore, work motivation significantly mediates the effect of work discipline on performance (β=0.092; $p<0.001$) and the effect of workload on performance (β=-0.072; $p<0.001$). These findings indicate a "discipline paradox": although work discipline is relatively high (mean=3.06), employee performance remains low (mean=2.93) because workload (mean=3.12) functions as a hindrance demand that directly reduces performance. The implication is that PTS management needs to manage workload more proportionally, rather than solely focusing on strengthening discipline.

INTRODUCTION

The development of higher education in Indonesia has brought significant changes in the way private higher education institutions (PTS) operate. PTS play a strategic role in providing access to higher education for the community, especially in regions with high population density and economic activity. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2024), East Java has the third-largest number of PTS students in Indonesia, with 563,499

students, while the number of educational staff is only 20,676. This imbalance creates significant operational pressure on academic staff, who must serve thousands of students with limited human resources.

Academic staff at PTS are positioned at the intersection of academic and managerial demands (Siregar et al., 2025). They are responsible for the smooth running of academic processes—from new student admissions, registration, schedule management, lecture administration, grade processing, PDDikti reporting, accreditation, to graduation—while also responding to efficiency pressures, competition for students, and accreditation demands (Sawal et al., 2024). This workload is cyclical and peaks during certain periods, such as registration and accreditation reporting (Mushabe et al., 2022).

Employee performance is the foundation of the smooth running of higher education. Effective administrative services allow lecturers to focus on learning, research, and community service activities (Albaroudi et al., 2025). Conversely, slow, inaccurate, and inconsistent services can hinder lecturer and student activities, reduce service user satisfaction, and disrupt the achievement of institutional goals (Sule, 2024). Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence academic staff performance is a strategic necessity for PTS management.

Theoretically, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model explains that employee performance is influenced by the interaction between job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2023). Work discipline is positioned as a personal resource, while workload is a job demand. However, the relationship between the two and performance is not always direct. Work motivation can serve as a psychological mechanism that explains how resources and job demands are translated into work behavior and outcomes (Bakker & de Vries, 2021).

Previous studies have shown inconsistent results. Prianto et al. (2026) found that work discipline has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, while Siregar et al. (2025) confirmed the positive influence of discipline on public employee performance. On the other hand, Bratha et al. (2023) showed that increased discipline does not always directly improve performance. The effect of discipline on performance can also become insignificant when other psychological or organizational variables are taken into account (Wijayanti et al., 2025).

Inconsistency is also found in the relationship between workload and performance. Sari et al. (2024) found that workload has a negative effect on performance; Rahmadhon et al. (2024), Prehastanti and Ahsani (2024), and Siregar et al. (2025) reported a negative effect of workload; Kusnadi et al. (2025) showed a negative or insignificant direct effect; while Kumala and Maksum (2023) found a positive but insignificant effect. These differences indicate that the relationship between workload and performance is contextual and needs to be tested in more specific organizational contexts.

The context of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya has characteristics that differ from the industrial sector or commercial organizations in general. Employees face demands for academic services, administration, regulation, information systems, and user needs that change according

to the education cycle. PTS also face efficiency pressures, competition for students, accreditation demands, and the need to maintain institutional sustainability (Siregar et al., 2025). This context makes work discipline and workload relevant to be studied simultaneously as predictors of performance, with work motivation positioned as a mediating mechanism.

Interestingly, preliminary descriptive analysis reveals a "discipline paradox": the mean of work discipline (3.06) is higher than the mean of employee performance (2.93), while the mean of workload (3.12) is the highest among the three variables. This condition indicates that high discipline does not automatically translate into high performance, and workload may be the missing link. This paradox has not been adequately explained in previous studies, especially in the context of PTS in Indonesia.

Based on the phenomenon and research gap, this study aims to analyze the direct effects of work discipline and workload on the performance of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya, with work motivation as a mediating variable. The novelty of this research lies in uncovering the "discipline paradox" and demonstrating that in the context of academic administrative work, direct effects of discipline and workload on performance are stronger than indirect effects through motivation. This study contributes to the JD-R literature by demonstrating that in the context of academic administrative work, workload functions as a hindrance demand that must be managed, rather than solely focusing on strengthening discipline.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with explanatory research design, which aims to examine causal relationships between variables formulated in hypotheses (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This approach was chosen to explain the direct and indirect effects of work discipline and workload on employee performance through work motivation.

Population and Sample

The population in this study is all academic staff at private higher education institutions (PTS) in Surabaya. Inclusion criteria include: (1) permanent employees or contract employees (PKWT) with a minimum work period of one year; (2) working in academic service units such as Academic Affairs, Registration, Study Program Administration, and Academic Guidance; (3) domiciled in the Surabaya City area.

The sampling technique uses purposive sampling with the Lemeshow formula for an unknown population. With a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, a minimum sample of 385 respondents was obtained. This study successfully collected 390 respondents from six PTS in Surabaya: UNTAG, UNITOMO, Narotama, Muhammadiyah, STIESIA, and Perbanas.

Measurement

All variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The operational definitions and indicators of each variable are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Operational Definitions and Variable Indicators

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators	Source
Work Discipline (X1)	Employee perception of consistency in complying with organizational provisions, being accountable for tasks, and carrying out work according to professional standards	1. Work compliance 2. Work accountability 3. Work professionalism	Rosmanidar et al. (2020); Siregar et al. (2025)
Workload (X2)	Employee perception of the amount of work, level of task complexity, and assignment conditions faced	1. Work unit load 2. Work complexity 3. Assignment dynamics	Mushabe et al. (2022); Zamri et al. (2025)
Work Motivation (M)	Internal and external strength that directs, drives, and maintains employee effort in achieving work goals	1. Achievement orientation 2. Work persistence 3. Motivation reinforcement	Fahmi et al. (2022); Locke & Latham (2002)
Employee Performance (Y)	Employee perception of success in completing tasks, contributing to the work unit, and maintaining work quality	1. Task achievement 2. Work contribution 3. Work resilience	Lesener et al. (2020); Kim & Yeo (2024)

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 4.0 with the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method. The analysis stages include:

1. Measurement Model Analysis (Outer Model): Convergent validity test (loading factor > 0.70; AVE > 0.50), discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.85; Fornell-Larcker Criterion), and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70; Composite Reliability > 0.70).
2. Structural Model Analysis (Inner Model): Path coefficient test, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2).
3. Hypothesis Testing: Using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 sub-samples to obtain t-statistics and p-values. The hypothesis is accepted if t-statistic > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05.
4. Mediation Testing: Using the bootstrapping procedure to test the specific indirect effect. Mediation is declared significant if the confidence interval does not contain zero.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 390 respondents who are academic staff from six PTS in Surabaya. The characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	131	33.6
	Female	259	66.4
Age	< 25 years	44	11.3
	26–35 years	156	40.0
	36–45 years	154	39.5
	46–55 years	36	9.2
Education	High School	89	22.8
	Diploma (D3)	73	18.7
	Bachelor (S1)	196	50.3
	Master (S2)	32	8.2
Employment Status	Permanent	284	72.8
	Contract	106	27.2
PTS Origin	UNTAG	65	16.7
	UNITOMO	65	16.7
	Narotama	65	16.7
	Muhammadiyah	65	16.7
	STIESIA	65	16.7
	Perbanas	65	16.7

Female respondents dominated this study (66.4%), consistent with the characteristics of administrative and academic service work which is generally more filled by women. The majority of respondents were in the productive age range (26–45 years), covering 79.5% of the total sample, with the latest education being Bachelor (50.3%). Most respondents were permanent employees (72.8%), indicating a relatively stable employment relationship with the institution.

Descriptive Analysis

The results of descriptive analysis show an overview of respondents' perceptions of the research variables (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Category
Work Discipline (X1)	3.0628	Medium
Workload (X2)	3.1209	Medium

Work Motivation (M)	2.6812	Medium (tending low)
Employee Performance (Y)	2.9261	Medium (tending low)

The descriptive analysis reveals a "discipline paradox": work discipline (3.0628) and workload (3.1209) are in the medium category, but work motivation (2.6812) and employee performance (2.9261) are in the medium category tending to be low, because they are below the neutral point of 3.00. This condition indicates that although employee work discipline is quite good, their motivation and performance are still low. This finding can be explained through the JD-R Model perspective, where high workload without adequate resource support can erode employee motivation and performance (Bakker & de Vries, 2021).

Measurement Model Analysis (Outer Model)

The outer model test was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument. The test results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Validity and Reliability Test Results

Construct	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
Work Discipline (X1)	0.626	0.881	0.910	Valid & Reliable
Workload (X2)	0.600	0.867	0.900	Valid & Reliable
Work Motivation (M)	0.553	0.838	0.881	Valid & Reliable
Employee Performance (Y)	0.555	0.840	0.882	Valid & Reliable

All constructs have AVE > 0.50, Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70, and Composite Reliability > 0.70, so they are declared valid and reliable. The HTMT values between construct pairs are also below 0.85, indicating good discriminant validity.

Structural Model Analysis (Inner Model)

The results of path coefficient testing, R^2, and effect size are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-statistic	p-value	Conclusion
H1	Discipline → Motivation	0.395	8.604	0.000	Accepted
H2	Workload → Motivation	-0.311	7.109	0.000	Accepted
H3	Discipline → Performance	0.276	5.365	0.000	Accepted
H4	Workload → Performance	-0.230	4.748	0.000	Accepted

H5	Motivation → Performance	0.232	4.423	0.000	Accepted
H6	Discipline → Motivation → Performance	0.092	3.908	0.000	Accepted
H7	Workload → Motivation → Performance	-0.072	3.751	0.000	Accepted

The R^2 value for the Work Motivation construct is 0.389 (38.9% of variance explained by discipline and workload), while the R^2 value for Employee Performance is 0.381 (38.1% of variance explained by discipline, workload, and motivation). The Q^2 values for both endogenous constructs > 0, indicating the model has good predictive power.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Work discipline has a positive and significant effect on work motivation.
The test results show a path coefficient of 0.395 with t-statistic 8.604 and p-value 0.000. Thus, H1 is accepted.

H2: Workload has a negative and significant effect on work motivation.
The test results show a path coefficient of -0.311 with t-statistic 7.109 and p-value 0.000. Thus, H2 is accepted.

H3: Work discipline has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.
The test results show a path coefficient of 0.276 with t-statistic 5.365 and p-value 0.000. Thus, H3 is accepted.

H4: Workload has a negative and significant effect on employee performance.
The test results show a path coefficient of -0.230 with t-statistic 4.748 and p-value 0.000. Thus, H4 is accepted.

H5: Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.
The test results show a path coefficient of 0.232 with t-statistic 4.423 and p-value 0.000. Thus, H5 is accepted.

H6: Work motivation mediates the effect of work discipline on employee performance.
The test results show a specific indirect effect of 0.092 with t-statistic 3.908 and p-value 0.000. Thus, H6 is accepted.

H7: Work motivation mediates the effect of workload on employee performance.
The test results show a specific indirect effect of -0.072 with t-statistic 3.751 and p-value 0.000. Thus, H7 is accepted.

Discussion

The Direct Effect of Work Discipline on Employee Performance: The Discipline Paradox

The test results show that work discipline has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (β=0.276; $p<0.001$). This finding provides empirical evidence that work discipline is not merely a formal obligation, but a personal resource capable of driving higher

performance in carrying out dynamic and demanding academic service tasks (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Prianto et al., 2026).

However, the descriptive analysis reveals an interesting paradox: although the mean of work discipline (3.0628) is higher than the mean of employee performance (2.9261), the direct effect of discipline on performance is only moderate (β=0.276). This "discipline paradox" suggests that high discipline alone is not sufficient to produce high performance. Several explanations can be offered.

First, in the perspective of the JD-R Model, work discipline is positioned as a personal resource that helps employees achieve work goals by providing structure, order, and predictability (Bakker et al., 2023). However, personal resources must interact with job resources (such as supervisor support, adequate systems, and recognition) to produce optimal performance. In the context of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya, if discipline is not supported by adequate organizational resources, its impact on performance will be limited.

Second, from the perspective of Goal Setting Theory (GST), discipline is a key instrument in translating goal commitment into real action (Locke & Latham, 2002). However, if organizational goals are unclear, unrealistic, or not accompanied by adequate feedback, discipline will not automatically translate into high performance. The finding that the mean of employee performance (2.9261) is below the neutral point of 3.00 suggests that employees may not have optimal goal commitment and self-efficacy.

Third, in the context of academic administrative work that demands high accuracy and timeliness, discipline is a necessary but not sufficient condition for high performance. Employees may be highly disciplined in attendance and procedure compliance, but if they face excessive workload, lack of system support, or unclear role expectations, their performance will remain suboptimal.

The findings of this study are supported by previous studies. Prianto et al. (2026) and Siregar et al. (2025) found that work discipline has a positive and significant effect on performance. However, Bratha et al. (2023) found that work discipline does not always directly improve performance, indicating that the relationship may be moderated by other factors. In this study, the "discipline paradox" provides a novel contribution by showing that in the context of PTS in Surabaya, high discipline must be accompanied by effective workload management to produce optimal performance.

The Direct Effect of Workload on Employee Performance: Workload as Hindrance Demand

The test results show that workload has a negative and significant effect on employee performance (β=-0.230; $p<0.001$). This finding provides empirical evidence that high workload—especially excessive, uneven, or unsupported by adequate resources—can reduce employee performance (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Siregar et al., 2025).

In the perspective of the JD-R Model, workload is positioned as a job demand that can function as a challenge demand (if managed well) or a hindrance demand (if excessive and uncontrollable) (Mazzetti et al., 2023). In the context of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya who face tight academic cycles, recurring deadlines, and high service demands, workload is more likely to be perceived as a hindrance demand that drains energy and reduces performance (Bakker et al., 2023; Ueno et al., 2025).

The first mechanism is through the health impairment process. Excessive and uncontrollable job demands trigger fatigue, stress, and reduced psychological energy (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Employees who continuously face high workload without adequate support will experience emotional exhaustion, which ultimately reduces their ability to maintain thoroughness, accuracy, and initiative (Schaufeli, 2017; Mazzetti et al., 2023). In the context of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya, descriptive analysis shows that item BK6 (changes or overlapping assignments) has the highest mean (3.1513), indicating that assignment dynamics are the most prominent source of workload. When workload reaches its peak, employee performance tends to decrease because they feel overwhelmed and lose control (Bakker & de Vries, 2021).

The second mechanism is through disruption of the balance between demands and resources. In the JD-R Model, optimal performance emerges when there is a balance between job demands and available resources (Bakker et al., 2023). When workload exceeds the resources owned by employees—both personal resources such as discipline, and organizational resources such as supervisor support and adequate systems—performance will decrease (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). In the context of this study, the mean of workload (3.1209) is higher than the mean of work discipline (3.0628), indicating an imbalance between demands and personal resources. This imbalance explains why high discipline does not automatically translate into high performance: workload acts as a hindrance that suppresses the positive impact of discipline.

This explanation is also in line with Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2023), which distinguishes three types of cognitive load: intrinsic, extraneous, and germane. In academic administrative work, extraneous load—sourced from how tasks are managed and divided—is the most prominent source of workload. When extraneous load exceeds employees' cognitive capacity, performance decreases because employees feel overwhelmed (Sweller, 2023; Mushabe et al., 2022). The finding that item BK6 (changes or overlapping assignments) has the highest mean supports this explanation.

The findings of this study are supported by previous studies. Sari et al. (2024), Rahmadhon et al. (2024), Prehastanti and Ahsani (2024), Siregar et al. (2025), and Kusnadi et al. (2025) reported a negative effect of workload on performance. Zamri et al. (2025) found that the relationship between workload and performance in private higher education institutions in Malaysia is not always negative, depending on how workload is perceived and managed. In the context of this study, workload was found to have a negative effect on performance, indicating

that the workload faced by academic staff at PTS in Surabaya is more perceived as a hindrance than a challenge (Zamri et al., 2025; Siregar et al., 2025).

The Direct Effect of Work Motivation on Employee Performance

The test results show that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (β=0.232; $p<0.001$). This finding confirms that work motivation is the prime mover that transforms potential capacity into actual performance (Kanfer et al., 2017; Wiyoto et al., 2025).

In the GST framework, work motivation operates as a force that directs effort, increases persistence, and stimulates effective work strategies (Locke & Latham, 2002). Motivated employees tend to be more proactive in finding solutions, more thorough in checking documents, and more persistent in completing work despite obstacles. This finding is consistent with Bratha et al. (2023), Nurwati (2025), and Wijayanti et al. (2025).

The Mediating Role of Work Motivation

The test results show that work motivation significantly mediates the effect of work discipline on performance (β=0.092; $p<0.001$) and the effect of workload on performance (β=-0.072; $p<0.001$). These findings indicate that work motivation serves as a psychological mechanism that bridges personal resources (discipline) and job demands (workload) in shaping performance.

In the perspective of the JD-R Model, personal resources (discipline) trigger motivational processes that lead to work engagement, enthusiasm, dedication, and higher performance (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Mazzetti et al., 2023). Conversely, hindrance demands (workload) inhibit motivational processes, which then reduces performance (Bakker et al., 2023). The finding that the indirect effect of discipline on performance (0.092) is smaller than the direct effect (0.276) indicates partial mediation: discipline affects performance both directly and through motivation. Similarly, the indirect effect of workload on performance (-0.072) is smaller than the direct effect (-0.230), also indicating partial mediation.

These findings are consistent with Kusnadi et al. (2025), Prehastanti and Ahsani (2024), and Sari et al. (2024), who found that work motivation mediates the effect of workload on performance. In the context of PTS in Surabaya, managing workload through proportional task distribution, increased role clarity, and adequate system support can be an effective path to maintaining work motivation, which in turn will impact performance and the quality of academic services.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications:

1. This study enriches the JD-R literature by demonstrating that in the context of academic administrative work, direct effects of discipline and workload on performance are

stronger than indirect effects through motivation. This suggests that in jobs with high structure and procedure, personal resources and job demands have a more direct impact on performance.

2. This study introduces the concept of the "discipline paradox": high discipline does not automatically translate into high performance when workload functions as a hindrance demand. This finding extends the JD-R Model by showing that the interaction between personal resources and job demands is more complex than previously assumed.
3. This study integrates JD-R Model, Cognitive Load Theory, and Goal Setting Theory in one coherent analytical framework, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms linking discipline, workload, and performance.

Practical Implications:

1. Manage workload more proportionally and fairly, especially during peak periods such as registration, exams, PDDikti reporting, accreditation, and graduation, through: (a) proportional and fair task distribution; (b) increasing role clarity and responsibility; (c) providing adequate system and technology support; and (d) training in time and priority management skills.
2. Strengthen work discipline as a strategy to improve performance, through: (a) communication of clear and consistent procedures, schedules, and work standards; (b) exemplary leadership in discipline; (c) recognition and reward for consistency and completeness of work; and (d) building an organizational culture that values order, responsibility, and professionalism.
3. Increase work motivation as a strategy to improve performance, through: (a) providing recognition and reward for employee contributions; (b) creating a work environment that supports the fulfillment of competence, autonomy, and relatedness needs; (c) providing career development and training opportunities; and (d) organizing a fair and transparent feedback and performance appraisal system.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Based on the results of data analysis and discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Work discipline has a positive and significant effect on work motivation of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya ($\beta=0.395$; $p<0.001$).
2. Workload has a negative and significant effect on work motivation of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya ($\beta=-0.311$; $p<0.001$).
3. Work discipline has a positive and significant effect on employee performance of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya ($\beta=0.276$; $p<0.001$).
4. Workload has a negative and significant effect on employee performance of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya ($\beta=-0.230$; $p<0.001$).

5. Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya (β=0.232; p<0.001).
6. Work motivation significantly mediates the effect of work discipline on employee performance of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya (β=0.092; p<0.001).
7. Work motivation significantly mediates the effect of workload on employee performance of academic staff at PTS in Surabaya (β=-0.072; p<0.001).

The main finding of this study is the "discipline paradox": although work discipline is relatively high (mean=3.06), employee performance remains low (mean=2.93) because workload (mean=3.12) functions as a hindrance demand that directly reduces performance. This finding confirms that in the context of academic administrative work, direct effects of discipline and workload on performance are stronger than indirect effects through motivation.

Suggestions

For PTS Management in Surabaya:

1. Manage workload more proportionally and fairly, especially during peak periods, through: (a) proportional and fair task distribution; (b) increasing role clarity and responsibility; (c) providing adequate system and technology support; and (d) training in time and priority management skills.
2. Strengthen work discipline as a strategy to improve performance, through: (a) communication of clear and consistent procedures, schedules, and work standards; (b) exemplary leadership in discipline; (c) recognition and reward for consistency and completeness of work; and (d) building an organizational culture that values order, responsibility, and professionalism.
3. Increase work motivation as a strategy to improve performance, through: (a) providing recognition and reward for employee contributions; (b) creating a work environment that supports the fulfillment of competence, autonomy, and relatedness needs; (c) providing career development and training opportunities; and (d) organizing a fair and transparent feedback and performance appraisal system.

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