

Unleashing Peak Performance: How Human Relations, Work Discipline, and Work Ethic Drive Employee Success

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of human relations, work discipline, and work ethic on employee performance. Using a quantitative approach with a survey research design, data were collected from 250 employees in the manufacturing industry through a validated questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS to test the research hypotheses. The results indicate that human relations and work ethic significantly improve employee performance, with each variable positively influencing and supporting the proposed hypothesis. Interestingly, work discipline shows a significant negative relationship with employee performance, suggesting that overly rigid or strictly enforced disciplinary practices may hinder employee effectiveness. Specifically, good human relations facilitate collaboration and motivation, while excessively formalized work discipline may reduce flexibility and autonomy, which can negatively impact efficiency and performance in turn. Work discipline decreases efficiency and consistency, and work ethic encourages commitment and dedication to tasks. These findings underscore the importance of managing interpersonal relationships, reevaluating disciplinary systems to ensure they are supportive rather than restrictive, and fostering a strong work ethic to achieve employee success. The practical implication of this study is the urgent need for organizations to develop training programs and work cultures that support these three aspects to optimize employee performance.

Keywords:

Human relations;
Work discipline;
Work ethic;
Employee performance

1. Introduction

In the era of rapid industrial growth and global competition, employee performance has become a central focus for organizations aiming to achieve sustainable success. Employee performance is one of the most important factors determining the success and competitiveness of organizations in today's dynamic business environment (Sumarmi et al., 2024). Organizations must rely on their employees' ability to meet targets effectively, efficiently, and consistently (Akdere & Egan, 2020). Companies often attempt to optimize performance by developing employees' competencies or technical skills within the organization. Leaders even overlook employees' behavioral and attitudinal aspects (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019). In fact, performance is influenced by technical skills and organizational resources, as well as behavioral, attitudinal, and interpersonal aspects at work. Therefore, understanding the factors that drive employee performance is crucial for academics and practitioners in the management field.

Employee behavior and attitudes in building workplace relationships often determine performance outcomes (Cherian et al., 2021). Human relations refer to the quality of interpersonal

interactions and social dynamics in the workplace (Algoe, 2019). As the foundation of workplace interactions, human relations play a crucial role in fostering collaboration, communication, and motivation. Positive human relations among employees unconsciously stimulate work enthusiasm (Akgunduz & Gürel, 2019). Moreover, constructive human relations encourage collaboration, trust, and motivation, vital in achieving collective organizational goals (Alshwayat, D., MacVaugh, J. A., & Akbar, 2020). Such dynamics create a supportive relational climate that motivates employees to work together harmoniously and build trust (Potnuru & Sahoo, 2016), directly contributing to improved performance outcomes.

On the other hand, work discipline is essential to ensure that employees comply with established rules, policies, and procedures, thereby promoting consistency, efficiency, and accountability in task completion (Pisriwati et al., 2024). Without discipline, efficiency and consistency are difficult to achieve, ultimately hindering overall productivity. Strong work discipline also shapes employee behavior to become more focused, responsible, and capable of completing tasks in line with predetermined targets (Puspitasari et al., 2025). This directly contributes to enhanced employee performance, as disciplined employees maintain quality and timeliness and effectively support achieving organizational goals. Thus, work discipline is a fundamental factor that ensures operational order and serves as a key determinant of individual and organizational performance success.

Another important factor is work ethic, which reflects employees' values, attitudes, and commitment toward their responsibilities (Grabowski et al., 2021). A strong work ethic motivates employees to work diligently, responsibly, and with integrity, creating a culture of dedication that enhances organizational effectiveness (Konadu et al., 2023). When employees uphold a solid work ethic, organizations are better able to sustain long-term performance.

The three factors, human relations, work discipline, and work ethic, have been studied separately in different organizational contexts. However, research that simultaneously integrates these three variables to examine their collective impact on employee performance remains limited, particularly in the manufacturing industry. Considering the manufacturing industry's reliance on teamwork, productivity, and precision, it becomes highly relevant to understand how human relations, work discipline, and work ethic shape employee outcomes.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how these three factors affect employee performance. The findings are expected to provide theoretical insights and practical implications for organizations in designing policies, training, and cultural interventions to maximize workforce potential and achieve sustainable success.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Human Relations and Employee Performance

Human relations refer to the quality of interpersonal interactions and social connections in the workplace (Algoe, 2019). Positive human relations foster collaboration, trust, and communication among employees, stimulating motivation and commitment to organizational goals (Alshwayat, D., MacVaugh, J. A., & Akbar, 2020). Prior studies have shown that effective human relations can enhance employee satisfaction and facilitate teamwork, leading to improved performance outcomes (Akgunduz & Gürel, 2019; Potnuru & Sahoo, 2016). Employees who maintain good relationships with colleagues are more likely to demonstrate cooperative behavior, resolve conflicts constructively, and contribute actively to organizational success.

H1: Human relations have a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

2.2. Work Discipline and Employee Performance

Work discipline ensures that employees comply with organizational rules, policies, and procedures, promoting efficiency and accountability in task execution (Pisriwati et al., 2024). Disciplinary practices, such as punctuality, adherence to standards, and commitment to deadlines, contribute to operational consistency and productivity (Puspitasari et al., 2025). Previous research highlights that disciplined employees tend to perform their duties responsibly and effectively, ensuring that organizational objectives are met promptly (Ernest, 2021). Conversely, lacking discipline often leads to inefficiency, errors, and reduced performance outcomes.

However, recent literature also suggests that the impact of work discipline on performance may depend on how discipline is implemented. Excessively rigid, controlling, or punitive disciplinary

systems can limit employee autonomy, reduce intrinsic motivation, and create psychological pressure, ultimately hindering performance rather than enhancing it (Jang & Kim, 2025). In dynamic work environments, overly strict discipline can reduce flexibility and adaptability, resulting in lower efficiency and suboptimal performance outcomes (Stoverink et al., 2020).

Therefore, while work discipline is theoretically expected to improve employee performance, its effectiveness is contingent upon a balanced and supportive implementation that aligns organizational control with employee empowerment. Based on the dominant theoretical perspective, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Work discipline has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

2.3. Work Ethic and Employee Performance

Work ethic represents employees' values, attitudes, and commitment to their responsibilities (Grabowski et al., 2021). Employees with a strong work ethic demonstrate diligence, integrity, and dedication, improving individual performance and fostering a culture of organizational excellence (Konadu et al., 2023). Empirical evidence indicates that work ethic positively influences job involvement, organizational commitment, and productivity (Nabhan & Munajat, 2023; Ramlawati et al., 2023). A strong work ethic can significantly boost overall performance in the manufacturing context, where precision and effort are critical.

In manufacturing environments, where precision, consistency, and effort intensity are critical, work ethic plays a pivotal role in minimizing errors and ensuring optimal performance outcomes (Chukwunweike et al., 2024). Accordingly, work ethic is conceptualized in this study as a motivational and behavioral driver that directly contributes to employee performance (Grabowski et al., 2021). Based on this theoretical and empirical foundation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

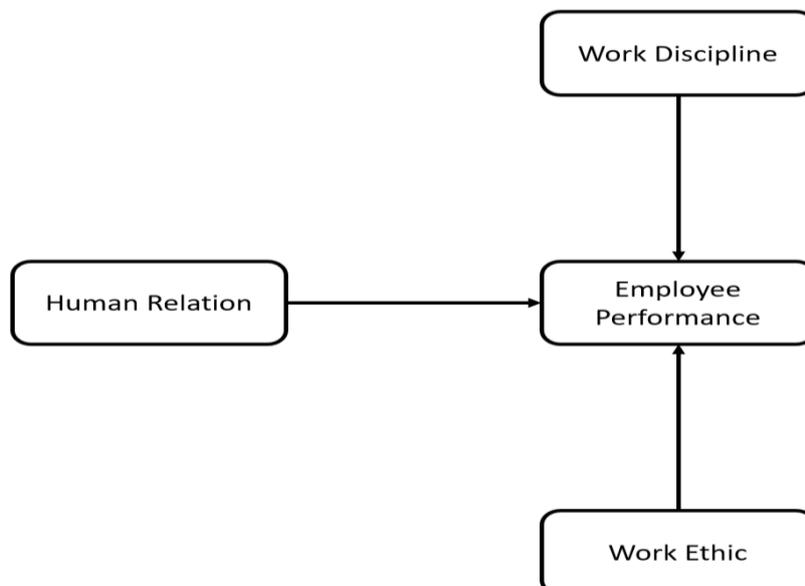
H3: Work ethic has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

2.4. Integrated Influence of Human Relations, Work Discipline, and Work Ethic

Although human relations, work discipline, and work ethic have often been examined separately, their combined influence on employee performance remains underexplored. These three factors represent complementary dimensions: human relations foster collaboration, work discipline ensures consistency, and work ethic sustains commitment. Together, they create a supportive, orderly, and dedicated work environment that drives performance at both individual and organizational levels. In the context of the manufacturing industry, where teamwork, precision, and efficiency are critical, integrating these factors is expected to play a pivotal role in enhancing employee outcomes.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design with a survey method to examine the influence of human relations, work discipline, and work ethics on employee performance. A cross-sectional approach was applied, in which data were collected at a single point in time to capture respondents' perceptions of workplace conditions and behaviors. A structured questionnaire was distributed to employees working in the manufacturing industry. A quantitative approach was chosen to provide measurable and generalizable evidence regarding the relationships between the variables studied (Saunders et al., 2019).

The population of this study consisted of employees working in manufacturing companies located in Jawa Tengah Province, Indonesia. A total of 250 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, with the inclusion criteria limited to full-time employees who had been working at their companies for at least one year. This criterion ensured that respondents possessed adequate organizational experience and understanding of work processes, interpersonal relations, and performance expectations relevant to the study variables.

3.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data were collected using a validated self-administered questionnaire, which was distributed directly to respondents. The questionnaire consisted of statements measuring human relations, work discipline, work ethic, and employee performance. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), allowing for consistent and quantitative measurement of respondents' perceptions.

The collected data were analyzed using multiple linear regression with statistical software. Before hypothesis testing, validity and reliability analyses were conducted to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the measurement instruments. Descriptive statistics were also used to present the demographics of the respondents.

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) and appropriate statistical software. SEM-PLS was selected due to its suitability for predictive analysis, its ability to handle complex models with multiple latent variables, and its robustness in analyzing data that may not strictly meet multivariate normality assumptions (Hair, Jr. et al., 2022).

The analysis procedure followed two main stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess construct validity and reliability. Convergent validity was examined through factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loadings. Construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values. Second, the structural model was assessed to test the proposed hypotheses by examining path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values obtained through a bootstrapping procedure. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was also evaluated to determine the explanatory power of the model.

3.3. Measurements

Human Relations was measured using three items adapted from previous studies (Pidada, 2019): Relationships with coworkers, Relationships with superiors, and Client relations. Work Discipline was measured using five items, punctuality, adherence to organizational policies, responsibility in completing tasks, adherence to procedures, and consistency in performance (Chewe & Taylor, 2021), and the thinking system (Yuliandi & Tahir, 2019).

Work Ethics was measured using three items with indicators of diligence, responsibility, and integrity (Swastika et al., 2025). Employee Performance was measured using five items: target achievement, punctuality, quality of output, initiative in work, contribution, and responsibility (Al Harbi et al., 2019; Sumarmi et al., 2025). The measurement scale uses a Likert scale of 1 - 5 points.

4. Results and Discussion

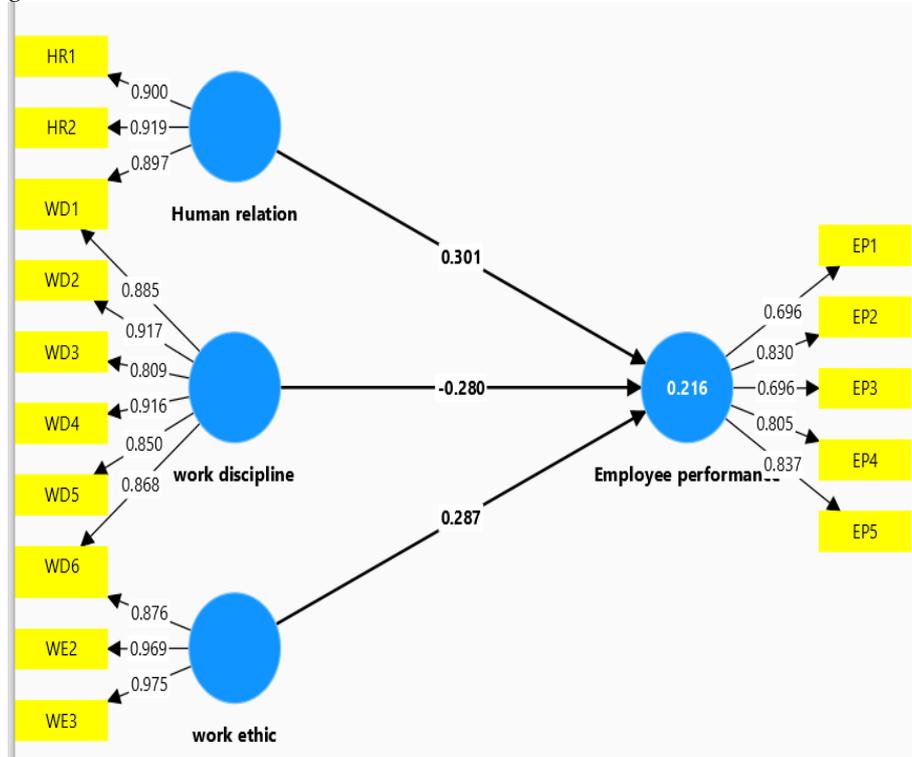
4.1 Results

A total of 250 valid responses from employees in the manufacturing industry in Jawa Tengah Province were analyzed. The respondent profile indicates that the workforce is predominantly male (68%), while female employees account for 32%. In terms of tenure, most respondents have worked for 1–5 years (55%), followed by 5–10 years (33%), and more than 10 years (11%). Regarding age, respondents are primarily between 20 and 25 years (38%) and 25 and 30 years (30%), with the remainder

distributed across older age groups. Most respondents are married (62%), while 38% are unmarried. These characteristics suggest that the sample adequately represents the productive workforce segment in the manufacturing sector.

Figure 2

PLS-SEM Algorithm Results



Prior to hypothesis testing, the measurement model was assessed to ensure construct validity and reliability using SEM-PLS. Convergent validity was evaluated through outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results indicate that all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, with two indicators slightly below this value (0.696), which are still acceptable based on (Hair et al., 2022), who suggest that loadings above 0.50 remain tolerable in exploratory research (see Figure 1).

Table 1

Reliability test results

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Employee performance	0.832	0.843	0.882	0.601
Human relation	0.891	0.904	0.932	0.820
work discipline	0.939	0.957	0.951	0.765
work ethic	0.939	1.047	0.959	0.886

AVE values for all constructs ranged from 0.601 to 0.886, exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.50, thereby confirming adequate convergent validity. Reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for all constructs were above 0.80, indicating that the measurement instruments are reliable and consistent (see Table 1).

Table 2

Hypothesis Testing Results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Human relation -> Employee performance	0.301	0.304	0.110	2.740	0.006
work discipline -> Employee performance	-0.280	-0.275	0.158	1.979	0.045
work ethic -> Employee performance	0.287	0.288	0.172	1.975	0.044

The structural model was evaluated to test the proposed hypotheses by examining path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values obtained through a bootstrapping procedure with a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$. The results indicate that human relations have a positive and significant impact on employee performance ($\beta = 0.301$, $t = 2.740$, $p = 0.006$), thereby supporting H1. Similarly, work ethic has a positive and significant influence on employee performance ($\beta = 0.287$, $t = 1.975$, $p = 0.044$), providing support for H3. Critically, work discipline exhibits a significant adverse effect on employee performance ($\beta = -0.280$, $t = 1.979$, $p = 0.045$). Although the relationship is statistically significant, the direction of the effect contradicts the hypothesized positive relationship proposed in H2. This finding indicates that higher levels of perceived work discipline are associated with lower employee performance in the studied context.

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of how human relations, work discipline, and work ethic jointly influence employee performance in the manufacturing industry. The positive and significant effect of human relations on employee performance ($\beta = 0.301$, $p = 0.006$) strongly supports Hypothesis 1 (H1) and is consistent with prior research emphasizing the importance of interpersonal interactions in the workplace (Algoe, 2019; Alshwayat, D., MacVaugh, J. A., & Akbar, 2020).

In manufacturing settings, where production processes are interdependent and require close coordination, effective communication and mutual trust among employees are essential. Positive human relations foster collaboration, facilitate knowledge sharing, and reduce interpersonal conflict, enabling employees to perform tasks more efficiently and with greater focus on quality and target achievement (Akgunduz & Gürel, 2019). From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports social exchange theory, which posits that positive social interactions lead to reciprocal behaviors that enhance individual and organizational outcomes.

The results also confirm Hypothesis 3 (H3), demonstrating that work ethic has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.287$, $p = 0.044$). This finding aligns with previous empirical evidence indicating that employees with strong work ethics characterized by diligence, responsibility, and integrity are more committed, motivated, and resilient in their work (Grabowski et al., 2021; Nabhan & Munajat, 2023; Ramlawati et al., 2023). In the manufacturing context, where precision, consistency, and sustained effort are critical, a strong work ethic serves as an intrinsic motivational force that drives employees to maintain high performance standards even in the absence of close supervision. Theoretically, this supports self-determination theory, which highlights the role of internalized values and intrinsic motivation in enhancing performance outcomes.

The most critical and theoretically challenging finding of this study concerns work discipline, which was found to have a negative and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = -0.280$, $p = 0.045$), contrary to Hypothesis 2 (H2) and much of the existing literature (Pisriwati et al., 2024; Puspitasari et al., 2025). This unexpected result suggests that work discipline, as perceived by employees in the sampled organizations, may not function as a performance-enhancing mechanism but rather as a performance-inhibiting one.

One plausible explanation lies in the rigidity of disciplinary implementation. When discipline is enforced through strict rules, excessive monitoring, and punitive sanctions, employees may experience reduced autonomy and psychological pressure. In such conditions, employees tend to prioritize rule

compliance over problem-solving and initiative, which is particularly detrimental in dynamic manufacturing environments that require flexibility and rapid responses to operational challenges. This interpretation is consistent with studies suggesting that excessive control undermines employee engagement and adaptive behavior (Jang & Kim, 2025; Stoverink et al., 2020).

A second explanation relates to the punitive orientation of discipline. If disciplinary systems emphasize punishment rather than guidance and development, employees may perceive discipline as unfair or distrustful (Bugdol, 2018). This perception can erode morale, weaken organizational commitment, and foster a compliance-driven rather than commitment-driven workforce (Sangwa & Mutabazi, 2025). As a result, employees may perform only at minimum acceptable levels to avoid sanctions, rather than striving for excellence. This finding extends previous research by demonstrating that not only the absence of discipline but also the misapplication of discipline can negatively affect performance.

A third explanation concerns the lack of employee involvement in rule-setting and disciplinary processes. When employees are excluded from establishing work standards and procedures, they are less likely to internalize organizational rules as meaningful or legitimate (Borry, 2017). In contrast, involving employees in standard-setting can promote self-discipline, shared responsibility, and ownership of work processes (Langer, 2023). Thus, the statement that “involving employees in standard-setting could yield positive outcomes” refers to a shift from externally imposed control to internally motivated compliance, which aligns discipline with autonomy and trust.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding challenges the traditional assumption that work discipline is uniformly beneficial, underscoring the importance of distinguishing between supportive discipline and coercive discipline. The adverse effect observed in this study suggests that discipline must be understood as a contextual and behavioral construct whose impact depends heavily on organizational culture and leadership practices. Overall, the integrated analysis demonstrates that human relations and work ethic serve as reinforcing forces that enhance employee performance. In contrast, the improper implementation of work discipline can undermine these positive effects. These findings highlight that the three factors do not operate in isolation; instead, their interaction determines whether the work environment becomes empowering or restrictive. Consequently, organizations should adopt a balanced approach that emphasizes supportive interpersonal relationships, cultivates strong work ethics, and redesigns disciplinary systems to be developmental, participative, and aligned with employee empowerment.

5. Conclusion

Overall, this study has successfully captured an intriguing dynamic that propels employee performance in the manufacturing sector. Quality interpersonal relationships and a robust work ethic have emerged as steadfast performance catalysts. The more harmonious employees' relationships with their colleagues and superiors, the higher their dedication and integrity, and consequently, the higher their performance. This finding, in line with previous theory and research, underscores the uplifting influence of a positive social environment and intrinsic values within an individual (Steg, 2016).

However, this study uncovered a significant surprise. Work discipline, which in this context refers to adherence to rules and procedures, is long considered a pillar of productivity and negatively affects performance. This means that rigid rules and procedures can reduce employee performance. This does not mean that discipline is unimportant, but rather suggests that how it is implemented in the companies studied may be problematic. Suppose discipline is viewed solely as a means of control and punishment, rather than a guide to better performance. In that case, it will stifle initiative and lower morale, ultimately harming overall productivity (Bugdol, 2018).

In terms of implications, these findings offer valuable lessons for managers. First, investing in building a cohesive team and healthy communication is key. Second, companies must actively develop and value work ethics such as honesty and responsibility. Most crucially, management needs to reform the disciplinary system completely. The approach must shift from punitive to nurturing. Employees need to understand the 'why' of a rule and be involved in the process, so that discipline is born of self-awareness, not fear, fostering a positive work environment (Bob-Manuel et al., 2024).

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The findings and their implications are primarily applicable to the context of the manufacturing industry in Jawa Tengah.

Moreover, we cannot definitively establish long-term cause and effect due to the simultaneous data collection. Therefore, advocating for future research to bridge these gaps is imperative. Similar research could be conducted in other sectors to compare the results. A qualitative approach, such as in-depth interviews with employees, is necessary to delve into their personal experiences and feelings regarding the company's disciplinary system. Long-term research would also be beneficial to observe how the relationships between these variables evolve, reinforcing the importance of continuous learning and improvement in this field.

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