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## Article

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# The Effect of Soft Skills on Organizational Performance: The Mediating Role of Resilient Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study aimed to examine the resilient leadership's ability to mediate the effect of workability, discipline, and communication or soft skills on organizational performance.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This leadership performance assessment study used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) applied to Organizational Behavior with case studies of State companies. Data were collected using in-depth interviews with regional leaders and online questionnaires distributed to participants from State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN) engaged in food logistics in the East Java Province, Indonesia.

**Findings:** This study found a positive and significant effect of workability, discipline, and communication on leadership resilience and organizational performance mediated by leadership improvement. This showed that strong leadership increases the influence of soft skills on the company's organizational performance.

**Research limitations/implications:** This study only assessed the organizational leaders' performance within the scope of the BULOG East Java Regional Office, meaning the research results cannot be generalized. It also tested the differences between samples by comparing the organizational performance of several companies' sectors.

**Originality/value:** This study linked soft skills comprising workability, discipline, communication, and personality, with organizational performance mediated by tough leadership.

*Keywords: Human Resources, Indonesian Logistics Bureau, Organizational Behavior, Resilient, Soft-skills*

## I. Introduction

Studies have confirmed that soft skills directly affect organizational performance. According to Neff and Citrin (2001), the key to success is 90% soft skills and 10% hard skills. Moreover, Vasanthakumari (2019) identified soft-skills attributes as values, motivation, behavior, habits, character, and attitudes. In this regard, some of the organizational soft-skills criteria include

workability, discipline, and communication. Kreitner and Kinicki (2014) defined ability as stable responsibility at maximum achievement. Employees with adequate abilities complete their work properly according to the time or targets set in the work program. Several studies have found that workability positively and significantly affects employees performance (Aisha et al., 2013; Aseanty, 2016; Fahrurrozi et al., 2017; Ratnasari, 2020), while Javed et al. (2013) showed that ability is related to performance.

Subsequently, employees work discipline contributes greatly to the company's improved performance and ultimate success (Njoroge and Ann, 2014). Tzu (1993)

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stated that everything is meaningless when not disciplined by the implementers. Furthermore, studies have shown positive and significant effects of work discipline on performance (Parashakti et al., 2018; Ogen et al., 2018; Lie et al., 2019; Siagian et al., 2020; Vipraprastha et al., 2020). In contrast, Nurlina (2020) did not find a significant effect of discipline on performance.

Regarding communication, Ivancevich et al. (2008) identified three factors a leader could implement to change subordinates' attitudes. These factors are communication skills, conveying messages, and reading situations in motivating subordinates. When leaders communicate their vision effectively, they win the subordinates' trust, helping the satisfaction of communication between leaders and subordinates (Pavitt, 1999). Furthermore, the message must contain affective and cognitive strategies (Hall and Lord, 1995). Algren and Eichhorn (2007) found no difference in communication competence between men and women. Additionally, Young et al. (2014) and Rukmana et al. (2018) found that communication positively and significantly affects performance.

Organizational performance is also influenced by the leader's character, such as resilience. According to Baah (2015), resilient leadership combines transformational and transactional leadership. Subsequently, Gokenbach (2018) stated that leaders with high resilience are successful in their careers and increase organizational performance. Previous studies showed that resilient leadership affects organizational performance. According to Suryaningtyas et al. (2019) and Eliot (2020), organizational resilience is enhanced by resilient leadership, which supports performance Giustiniano et al. (2020). Therefore, there is a correlation between performance, job satisfaction, and leadership (Deluga and Souza, 1991).

This study aimed to examine the human resources in the Bulog Regional Office of East Java, an invaluable asset that significantly contributes to the work unit effectively, efficiently, productively, and competitively. Many employees were recruited in 1997, followed by a new recruitment a few years later, potentially resulting in a gap between the leadership and subordinates. Moreover, changing status to become a public company

requires Perum Bulog to adapt to the times and increase its knowledge about technology and information. The employees structure mostly comprises millennials that must know what is related to technology and information. However, the leader's ability to the low technology utilization causes problems. A leader's role is needed to take different approaches to subordinates and ensure that workability, discipline, communication, and resilience leadership improve organizational performance. Therefore, this study aimed to examine and analyze the influence of soft skills, including workability, discipline, and communication on organizational performance mediated by resilient leadership.

## II. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Performance describes the achievement of program implementation or activity policies in realizing the goals, objectives, vision, and mission outlined in an organization's strategic planning (Chiu and Lin, 2019). This implies that employees play an important role in performing the company's growth and development activities to maintain survival. Furthermore, employees performance affects a company's or agency's progress or setbacks. An organization's success or failure in fulfilling its social responsibilities starts with employees, especially the leadership strategy in increasing effectiveness and efficiency.

Soft-skills is an inherent character that requires hard work to change, but it develops and could be honed and improved with work experience to improve organizational performance (Neff and Citrin, 2001). Some soft-skills characteristics include workability, discipline, and communication. Workability examines an employees' performance according to the job demands, environment, and individual physical and mental resources (Hersey and Blanchard, 1995). Robbins (2006) defined workability as an individual's capacity to perform job tasks.

Discipline is the key to the success or failure of

organizational goals. Luthans (2014) divided discipline into self-discipline, arising because employees feel as part of the team and their needs are considered by the organization. The study also identified command discipline, which arises because of coercion from superiors. In this case, a rule does not have to be forced to achieve organizational goals, but a discipline should be accompanied by coercion.

Effective communication between leaders and subordinates creates a positive impression and increases perceptions regarding the leaders' performance (Crino and White, 1981; Rao et al., 1995; Conger and Kanungo, 1998; Gardner and Martinko, 1988). Anderson & Martin (1995), employees interact through communication with coworkers and managers to fulfill interpersonal needs.

Studies have shown that workability, discipline, and communication are related to resilient leadership. Baka (2021) found an increase in workability among shift and non-shift workers with good leadership, implying a relationship between workability and resilient leadership. According to Ondari et al. (2016) and Rahayu (2020), work discipline was positively and significantly related to leadership, while Flauto (199) found a relationship between communication and leadership.

Javed et al. (2013) found that employees performance is affected by various factors, such as workability. Aisha et al. (2013), Aseanthy (2016), Fahrurrozi et al. (2017), and Ratnasari (2020) found that workability positively and significantly affects performance. Furthermore, Agbo (2020) found that work discipline improved organizational performance in Nigerian Breweries Plc. Work discipline helps the company control employees behavior by reducing time and resource wastage. Similarly, Setyaningdyah et al. (2013); Dapu (2015); Parashakti et al. (2018); Ogen et al. (2018); Hakim et al. (2019); Lie et al. (2019); Bagis et al. (2020); Siagian et al. (2020) and Vipraprastha et al. (2020) found that work discipline positively and significantly affects performance.

Otieno et al. (2015) conducted a study at the Kenya Department of Horticulture and found that employees communication significantly determines organizational

performance. Other studies found that women have better language skills than men (Case, 2005; Abrami et al., 2008; Willingham, 2008). Women in leadership positions use excellent language skills to communicate with their juniors and carefully choose the words to say. This is because words are a powerful weapon in expressing opinions, spelling out the necessary actions, and motivating employees. Therefore, the right words have great power to touch others and help the organization run smoothly through efficient and effective communication. According to Gondal and Shahbaz (2012), strong inter-departmental communication improves organizational performance, while Muda et al. (2014) and Rukmana et al. (2018) found a significant influence of communication on organizational performance.

Max Weber emphasized the need for efficiency in completing tasks, especially standardization. Henri Fayol's theory in the early 1900s with the administrative management concept related to labor division with harmonized organizational goals for company productivity. In 1950, Douglas McGregor developed the X & Y Management Theory that emphasized more on a team environment with individual professional development. These theories indicate the importance of emphasizing resilient leadership that motivates employees to perform better than expected to achieve organizational goals (Baah, 2015). The resilient leadership theory is the best leadership approach to meeting organizational needs. Organizations must show their performance irrespective of prevailing conditions, meaning that resilient leadership is essential for performance. According to Baykal (2018), leadership is a positive behavior considered a good guide to presenting an adaptive and resilient organization and a source of performance.

Studies on the relationship between organizational resilience and leadership are still limited. Cheese (2016) stated that creating a resilient organization requires modern leaders to communicate the vision and mission, provide stability, empower employees, and respond to issues and challenges. According to Föster and Duchek (2017), Suryaningtyas et al. (2019), and Eliot (2020), organizational resilience is enhanced by resilient leadership. Moreover, Capello and Hashim (2018) stated that there is no easy path to success for

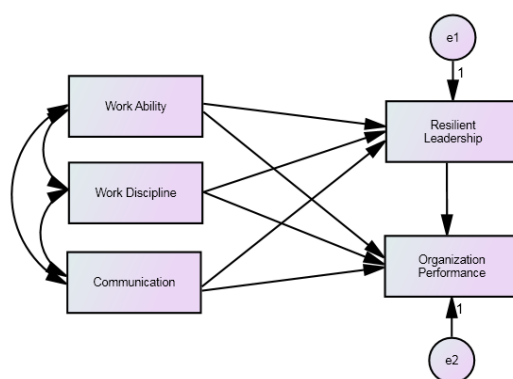
these leaders because their resilience helps overcome difficulties, loneliness, discriminatory treatment, and confrontation with others. Maddi and Khoshaba (2005) showed that high-handedness is the essence of resilience. A resilient person turns a potential problem and adversity into a profitable opportunity.

Resilient leadership is based on each individual and collective because a strong group does not guarantee strength unless it has a collaborative, socially supportive culture and a resilient leader (Giustiniano et al., 2020). According to Lee (1996), leadership in government agencies is positively related to employees performance. Deluga and Souza (1991) found that performance, job satisfaction, and leadership were correlated.

Eliot (2020) found that a resilient leader impacts the company's workforce to become a strategic advantage in improving performance. This indicates that resilient leadership mediates organizational performance.

This study formulated the following hypotheses (Figure 1):

- H<sub>1</sub>:** Workability positively affects resilient leadership.
- H<sub>2</sub>:** Work discipline positively affects resilient leadership.
- H<sub>3</sub>:** Communication positively affects resilient leadership.
- H<sub>4</sub>:** Workability positively affects organizational performance.
- H<sub>5</sub>:** Work discipline positively affects organizational performance.
- H<sub>6</sub>:** Communication positively affects organizational performance.
- H<sub>7</sub>:** Resilient leadership positively affects organizational performance.
- H<sub>8</sub>:** Workability positively affects organizational performance through resilient leadership.
- H<sub>9</sub>:** Work discipline positively affects organizational performance through resilient leadership.
- H<sub>10</sub>:** Communication positively affects organizational performance through resilient leadership.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

### III. Methods

The study population comprised government employees of the Indonesian Logistics Bureau, East Java Regional Office. It has thirteen branches and one regional office totaling 558 employees. Study samples were determined through stratified sampling using a formula of Taro Yamane (Kothari, 2004). A total of 160 respondents were obtained, comprising ten people from each branch office and thirty from regional offices.

Data were collected using questionnaires delivered online in Google Form. The workability indicators were adapted from Fitz (1987), Hersey and Blanchard (1995), Robbins (2006), and Gibson et al. (2009). The work discipline indicators were adapted from Mangkunegara and Octorent (2015), and the communication indicators were extracted from Rogers (1998). Additionally, the resilient leadership indicators followed Baah (2015), while the organizational performance indicators were extracted from Levine et al. (1983), Richard et al. (2009), Jahanshahi et al. (2012), and Slavkovic and Babic (2013).

## IV. Results

### A. Respondent Data

Table 1 shows the respondents' descriptions based on demographics, gender, age, position, and education.

The data showed that 70.0% of the respondents were male, 51.3% were aged between 31-and 40 years, 77.5% had a bachelor's degree in education, 36.3% had positions as staff, while 54.4% had served for more than ten years.

### B. Path Analysis

Table 2 shows the results of testing the direct effects of workability, work discipline, and communication on resilient leadership. The table also exhibits

the results of testing the effect of workability, work discipline, communication, and resilient leadership on performance.

Table 2 shows that all variables are significant with positive coefficients, meaning workability, work discipline, and communication increase resilient leadership and performance.

Table 3 shows the results of the indirect mediating effect of resilient leadership on workability, work discipline, and communication on performance. The results show a significant effect, meaning that resilient leadership mediates the effect of workability, work discipline, and communication on performance.

Table 4 shows the recapitulation of testing the direct, indirect, and total effect of exogenous variables of workability, work discipline, and communication on endogenous variables of resilient leadership and performance. The total effect of the independent

**Table 1.** Respondents Demographic Data

Demographics	Description	Distribution	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	112	70.0
	Female	48	3.0
Age	21-30 year	38	23.8
	31-40 year	82	51.3
	41-50 year	28	17.5
	51-60 year	12	7.5
last education	Senior High School	17	10.6
	Diploma	8	5.0
	Bachelor	124	77.5
	Master	11	6.9
Position	Head of Division	3	1.9
	Branch Manager	9	5.6
	Deputy Branch Manager	12	7.5
	Section Chief	36	22.5
	Head of Warehouse	14	8.8
	Head of processing unit	28	17.5
	Staff	58	36.3
Years of service	0-5 years	45	28.1
	6-10 years	28	17.5
	> 10 years	87	54.4
Total		160	100

**Table 2.** Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Regression Model	Direct Effect	Critical Ratio	Sig.
H <sub>1</sub>	Workability (X <sub>1</sub> ) → Resilient leadership (Z)	0.375	4.833	0.000 **
H <sub>2</sub>	Work discipline (X <sub>2</sub> ) → Resilient leadership (Z)	0.213	2.698	0.007 **
H <sub>3</sub>	Communication (X <sub>3</sub> ) → Resilient Leadership (Z)	0.218	3.189	0.001 **
H <sub>4</sub>	Workability (X <sub>1</sub> ) → Performance (Y)	0.227	2.616	0.009 **
H <sub>5</sub>	Work Discipline (X <sub>2</sub> ) → Performance (Y)	0.203	2.409	0.016 *
H <sub>6</sub>	Communication (X <sub>3</sub> ) → Performance (Y)	0.182	2.465	0.014 *
H <sub>7</sub>	Resilient leadership (X) → Performance (Y)	0.241	2.912	0.004 **

Note: \*\* and \* are significant at  $\alpha = 1\%$  and  $5\%$

**Table 3.** Indirect Effect Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Regression Model	Indirect Effect	Critical Ratio	Sig.
H <sub>8</sub>	Workability (X <sub>1</sub> ) → Resilient leadership (Z) → Performance (Y)	0.158	3.454	0.001 **
H <sub>9</sub>	Work discipline (X <sub>2</sub> ) → Resilient leadership (Z) → Performance (Y)	0.090	2.698	0.008 **
H <sub>10</sub>	Communication (X <sub>3</sub> ) → Resilient leadership (Z) → Performance (Y)	0.092	3.090	0.003 **

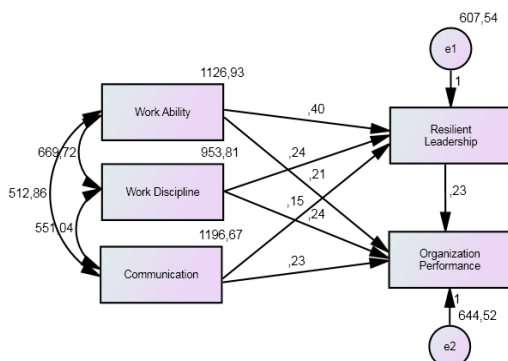
Note: \*\* significant at  $\alpha = 1\%$

**Table 4.** Direct, Indirect and Total Effects

Regression Model	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Workability (X <sub>1</sub> ) → Performance (Y)	0.227	0.158	0.385
Work Discipline (X <sub>2</sub> ) → Performance (Y)	0.203	0.090	0.293
Communication (X <sub>3</sub> ) → Performance (Y)	0.182	0.092	0.274

variables is 38.5%, 29.3%, and 27.4% for workability, work discipline, and communication, respectively.

Figure 2 shows the path analysis test results.

**Figure 2.** Coefficient of Direct and Indirect Effect Path

## V. Discussion

Workability, which positively affects resilient leadership, is the capacity to work and has an important role in the company (Robbins, 2006). The constantly evolving environment and technology require employees to adapt to changes. Training and development are how the workforce develops new work abilities to deal with changes. This makes employees resilient leaders when given responsibilities, enabling them to work effectively and efficiently according to their abilities (Hersey and Blanchard, 1995). Mumford et al. (2000) stated that leaders need work skills to solve organizational problems in an increasingly dynamic world. Workability positively impacts all employees,

giving institutions a strategic advantage (Eliot, 2020).

Work discipline positively and significantly affects resilient leadership. Schein (2011) found that leaders play a role in improving abilities, commitments, skills, understanding of organizational values, and teamwork to achieve work performance. Communication positively and significantly affects resilient leadership. This implies that effective communication between subordinates and leaders creates positive impressions and good perceptions about leader performance (Gardner and Martinko, 1988; Rao et al., 1995; Conger and Kanungo, 1998).

Workability positively and significantly affects performance. In line with this, macro Human Resource Development improves human capabilities to achieve the nation's development goals, while micro resources involve educating, training, and managing personnel or employees to achieve an optimal result. Furthermore, workability is related to the physical and mental abilities to work. Employees must have certain qualifications because not everyone has the skills required to complete the job. These results support Aisha et al. (2013), Javed et al. (2013), Aseanthy (2016), Fahrurozi et al. (2017), and Ratnasari (2020), which found that workability positively and significantly affects performance.

Work discipline positively and significantly affects performance. Managers use work discipline to communicate with employees to increase one's awareness and willingness to comply with organizational regulations and applicable norms. These results support Hartono & Zubaidah (2017), which found a positive effect of work discipline on performance. The study found that higher work discipline increases performance. However, this contradicts Nurlina's (2020), which found that work discipline had no significant effect on performance.

The results showed that communication positively and significantly affects performance. Communication is the transfer of information verbally or indirectly through media to inform and change attitudes and opinions. These results support Young et al. (2014) and Rukmana et al. (2018), which found that communication positively and significantly affects performance.

Resilient leadership significantly and positively affects performance. Good leadership increases employees'

performance due to the cooperation and coordination between the management and staff towards realizing organizational goals. Resilient leadership has a pertinent role because it is collective (Giustiniano et al., 2020).

Workability, work discipline, and communication affect performance mediated by resilient leadership. This shows that resilient leadership mediates the effect of workability, work discipline, and communication on performance. The calculation of path coefficient analysis indicates that the indirect relationship exceeded the direct relationship, meaning the effect of workability on performance is most effective through resilient leadership. This is in line with Suryaningtyas et al. (2019), which found that strong leadership increases organizational resilience.

## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aimed to analyze the influence of soft skills, comprising workability, discipline, and communication on organizational performance through resilient leadership. The analysis of 160 respondents from the Indonesian Logistics Bureau of the East Java Regional Office found that soft skills and resilient leadership positively and significantly impact organizational performance. Moreover, resilient leadership mediates the influence of soft skills on organizational performance.

This study was implemented in thirteen branches and one regional office. It was only conducted in one organization, the Indonesian Logistics Bureau of the East Java Regional Office, meaning it cannot be generalized to government institutions. Furthermore, this study was about organizational performance related to decision making, though most respondents were staff not related to decision making. Therefore, future studies should compare the performance of several government or private organizations by focusing on employees related to decision-making.

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