



THE PERFORMANCE PARADOX: WHEN SUCCESS METRICS HIDE THE TRUTH ABOUT EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCIES

Munawaroh¹, Sukma Pratama^{2*}, Yuyu Humairoh³, Riski Wulandari⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Magister Manajemen, Universitas Bina Bangsa, Indonesia

Corresponding Email: spratama1231@gmail.com²

Abstract

This phenomenological study explores employee engagement dynamics and organisational performance at the Regional Development Planning, Research, and Innovation Agency (BAPPERIDA) of Cilegon City. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 informants, participatory observation, and document analysis. Thematic analysis revealed a performance paradox: despite satisfactory quantitative achievements (78.70% financial realisation; 81.71% program indicators), employee engagement demonstrates severe hierarchical stratification. Officials and planners exhibited high vigour, dedication, and absorption. At the same time, administrative staff showed low engagement and limited understanding of performance (83% did not comprehend SAKIP) three factors enhanced engagement: holistic organisational support, participative leadership, and inclusive performance communication. Qualitative assessment revealed deficiencies in the planning process, weak cross-agency integration, and strategic misalignment. Findings indicate that employee engagement mediates the relationship between formal performance systems and substantive outcomes. Implications include democratising performance literacy and creating inclusive participation mechanisms across all hierarchical levels.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Organisational Performance, Performance Paradox, Regional Planning, Public Sector.

INTRODUCTION

Human resources constitute strategic organisational assets, particularly in regional development planning agencies facing high accountability demands (Destiana, 2023). Employee engagement, a positive psychological state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption, has been identified as a significant predictor of sustainable organisational performance (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Emilisa et al., 2025).

The Cilegon City Government demonstrates satisfactory performance, with 78.70% financial realisation and 81.71% in program indicators (Cilegon City Government, 2025a). However, Government Institution Performance Accountability System (SAKIP) evaluations indicate a paradox: employee understanding and concern regarding performance targets remain severely limited, especially among non-planning staff (Cilegon City Government, 2025b).

Previous research (Emilisa et al., 2025; Kurniawati & Raharja, 2023) confirms the contribution of employee engagement to performance, yet quantitative approaches in private-sector contexts dominate it. Studies on regional planning agencies using phenomenological approaches remain limited. This research fills the gap by exploring: (1) how employees at various hierarchical levels interpret engagement; (2) organisational factors that facilitate/inhibit engagement; (3) the relationship between engagement and substantive performance.

Research contributions include introducing the “performance paradox” framework, providing a deep understanding of engagement dynamics in Indonesian regional planning contexts, and outlining practical implications for public-sector HR management reform.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Sector Organisational Performance

Public sector organisational performance refers to the degree of achievement of strategic objectives and service quality (Asif & Rathore, 2021). Unlike the private sector, public performance is evaluated through complex dimensions: program effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, and stakeholder satisfaction (Kossyva et al., 2023). Performance reform success depends not only on formal measurement instruments but on employee involvement in goal setting and evaluation (Zafar & Rathore, 2024).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is defined as a positive psychological state characterised by vigour (energy and resilience), dedication (strong emotional involvement), and absorption (full concentration) (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The Job Demands-Resources Model posits that job resources, such as supervisor support, autonomy, and role clarity, enhance engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Research shows work engagement correlates positively with performance and reduces turnover intention (Giauque et al., 2022; Kossyva et al., 2023).

Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature, this research integrates: (1) organisational factors (organisational support, participative leadership, performance communication); (2) engagement dimensions (vigour, dedication, absorption); (3) organisational performance (SAKIP indicators and process quality). Working hypothesis: engagement mediates the relationship between formal performance management systems and substantive organisational outcomes.

METHOD

Research Design

This research employs an interpretive phenomenological approach to understand how employees interpret engagement and performance (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Research location at BAPPERIDA Cilegon City, period September-November 2024.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling: 12 informants, including 3 structural officials, 5 functional planners, and 4 administrative staff. Criteria: active employees for a minimum of 2 years, involved in planning/evaluation processes.

Data Collection

Data were collected through: (1) Semi-structured interviews (45-90 minutes per informant); (2) Participatory observation in coordination meetings and Musrenbang forums; (3) Document analysis (LAKIP, LKPI, RKA, meeting minutes).

Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006): data familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, definition, and writing. MAXQDA software is used for data management.

Trustworthiness

Credibility is maintained through source and method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Dependability through audit trails documenting the entire analysis process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Hierarchical Stratification of Employee Engagement

Findings reveal employee engagement is dynamic but unevenly distributed. Officials and planners demonstrate high vigour: *“During Musrenbang, I often work overtime voluntarily. This document will guide development for 5 years. I cannot be careless.”* (P4, Senior Planner)

Dedication appears through pride and work, meaning: *“When the legislature approves RKPD without major revisions, I feel proud. That proves our analysis was solid.”* (P5, Planner)

Conversely, administrative staff show low engagement with limited understanding: *“I handle routine administration. If asked about SAKIP, honestly I don't understand. That's the planners' territory.”* (P9, Administrative Officer)

Observations confirm: in meetings, planners dominate substantive discussions while administrative staff remain passive. Aligns with Kurniawati & Raharja (2023): *engagement is difficult to foster when employees do not understand the link between tasks and performance.*

Voice Recognition as Engagement Catalyst

Engagement increases when employees feel heard: *“When asked to present to the Mayor, I felt motivated. That's appreciation for our expertise.”* (P5, Planner)

Contrasting with ignored contributions: *“I once suggested improving the documentation system, but there was no response. Eventually I just follow the routine.”* (P11, Administrative Staff)

Findings strengthen procedural justice theory (Colquitt et al., 2001): voice in decision-making increases commitment. In BAPPERIDA's context, employee voice recognition becomes a catalyst for emotional engagement.

Selective Participative Leadership

Leadership demonstrates a participative style toward planners: *“Our Agency Head is very approachable. He helps us think, not just give orders.”* (P3, Section Head)

However, administrative staff experience directive leadership: *“My interaction with leadership is rare and formal. There's no substantive discussion about my work.”* (P9, Administrative Officer)

It reflects participative leadership stratification; leadership style varies across hierarchical levels. Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) explains that planners enjoy in-group status through high-quality exchanges, while administrators remain out-group.

Performance Communication Gap

Planners have a strong SAKIP understanding: *“We must understand performance indicators. Every program has clear targets we monitor.”* (P1, Division Head)

Administrative staff demonstrate performance illiteracy: *“SAKIP? I don't even know what it stands for. As long as my work is completed on time, that's what matters.”* (P10, Finance Staff)

No formal mechanisms exist for socialising performance to all employees. It creates sensemaking fragmentation (Weick, 1995): different groups operate in different realities. Asif & Rathore (2021) emphasise: performance reform fails without employee understanding and buy-in.

Performance Paradox: Numbers versus Substance

Despite good quantitative achievements, planners express qualitative concerns: *“Numerically we're good. But planning quality? Cross-agency coordination often isn't synchronised. Programs don't align with strategic priorities.”* (P2, Secretary). *“There's pressure to choose easily achievable indicators so performance looks good. That's gaming the system.”* (P5, Planner)

Findings reveal a performance-substance gap; satisfactory metrics do not reflect substantive effectiveness. Reflects ceremonial conformity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983): ritualistic SAKIP compliance without quality planning transformation.

Unrecognised Extra-Role Behaviours

Planners demonstrate organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB): *“Approaching deadlines, everyone helps across divisions. We don't care if it's not our job description. The important thing is the document is completed with quality.”* (P4, Planner)

However, these behaviours are not formally recognised: “*Appreciation is usually verbal. For formal evaluation, what is assessed is individual SKP achievement. So extra effort is not measured.*” (P5, Planner)

OCB Theory (Organ, 1988) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) explain that, without formal recognition, OCB is at risk of decline. Represents strategic potential BAPPERIDA has not utilised.

CONCLUSIONS

Research reveals a performance paradox at BAPPERIDA: satisfactory quantitative indicators (78.70%; 81.71%) coexist with fragmented engagement and substantive quality deficits. Employee engagement demonstrates severe hierarchical stratification: officials and planners are highly engaged, while administrative staff are disengaged, with 83% performance illiteracy.

Three key factors enhance engagement: holistic organisational support, participative leadership, and inclusive performance communication. Conversely, communication gaps and limited participation inhibit engagement. Engagement functions as a critical mediator between formal performance systems and substantive outcomes. Uneven distribution undermines the quality of planning and innovation.

Theoretical contributions: introducing the performance paradox framework, extending engagement theory to Indonesian public-sector contexts, and demonstrating that satisfactory metrics do not guarantee organisational health.

Research has limitations: (1) single-case design with limited generalizability; (2) 3-month temporal snapshot; (3) potential social desirability bias in self-reports; (4) limited exploration of individual factors moderating organisational factor-engagement relationships.

REFERENCES

- Alhazmi, A. A., & Kaufmann, A. (2022). Phenomenological qualitative methods applied to the analysis of cross-cultural experience in novel educational social contexts. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 785134. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.785134>
- Asif, A., & Rathore, K. (2021). Behavioural drivers of performance in public-sector organisations: A literature review. *SAGE Open*, 11(1), 2158244021989283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244021989283>
- Badarani, P., Mukhsin, M., & Imron, A. (2025). The effect of organisational culture on organisational performance at Statistics Indonesia (BPS) in Banten Province. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Studies*, 8(6), 4532–4544. <https://doi.org/10.47191/jefms/v8-i6-53>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The job demands-resources model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3), 309–328. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733115>
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. Wiley.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Cilegon City Government. (2025a). *Mayor's accountability report of Cilegon City 2024*. Cilegon: Cilegon City Government.
- Cilegon City Government. (2025b). *Performance accountability evaluation report of Cilegon City Government 2024*. Cilegon: Cilegon City Government.

- Colquitt, J. A., Conlon, D. E., Wesson, M. J., Porter, C. O., & Ng, K. Y. (2001). Justice at the millennium: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 425–445. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.425>
- Destiana, R. (2023). Leadership and human resource development in the public sector. *Dialogue: Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Publik*, 5(1), 437-460. <https://doi.org/10.14710/dialogue.v5i1.15762>
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147-160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>
- Emilisa, N., Hilalluddin, A., Andrianto, H., & Apriansyah, H. (2025). The influence of artificial intelligence and leadership on sustainable organisational performance. *AKADEMIK: Jurnal Mahasiswa Ekonomi & Bisnis*, 5(3), 1281-1292. <https://doi.org/10.37481/jmeh.v5i3.1493>
- Giauque, D., Renard, K., Cornu, F., & Emery, Y. (2022). Engagement, exhaustion, and perceived performance of public employees. *Public Personnel Management*, 51(3), 263-290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00910260211073154>
- Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), 219–247. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843\(95\)90036-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(95)90036-5)
- Kossyva, D., Theriou, G., Aggelidis, V., & Sarigiannidis, L. (2023). *Outcomes of engagement: A systematic literature review*. *Heliyon*, 9(6), e17565. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e17565>
- Kurniawati, N. I., & Raharja, E. (2023). The influence of employee engagement on organisational performance: A systematic review. *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics*, 20, 203-213. <https://doi.org/10.37394/23207.2023.20.20>
- Mulyana, D., Ahman, E., Sojanah, J., & Santoso, B. (2024). Optimising government workforce performance. *Atestasi: Jurnal Ilmiah Akuntansi*, 7(2), 1304-1325. <https://doi.org/10.57178/atestasi.v7i2.958>
- Organ, D. W. (1988). *Organisational citizenship behaviour: The good soldier syndrome*. Lexington Books.
- Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3(1), 71-92. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015630930326>
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organisations*. SAGE Publications.
- Zafar, M. M., & Rathore, K. (2024). Factors driving the performance of public sector organisations. *Journal of Excellence in Social Sciences*, 3(1), 12–29. <https://doi.org/10.69565/jess.v3i1.191>