

The Effect of Soft Skills, Hard Skills, and Compliance on Employee Performance Through Self-Awareness as an Intervening Variable at the Regional Personnel and Human Resource Development Agency (BKPSDM) of Medan City

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INFO ARTIKEL

Riwayat artikel:

Received 15 March 2026

Revised 25 March 2026

Accepted 27 March 2026

Available online 27 March 2026

Keywords:

Soft Skills, Hard Skills, Compliance, Self-Awareness, Employee Performance, PLS-SEM.



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ABSTRACT

Employee performance is a key element in realizing organizational goals and optimizing public services. The Regional Personnel and Human Resource Development Agency (BKPSDM) of Medan City, as a government agency responsible for managing civil servants (ASN), needs to continuously improve employee performance, particularly in the face of bureaucratic reform challenges. This study aims to analyze the effect of soft skills, hard skills, and compliance on employee performance at BKPSDM Medan City, with employee self-awareness as an intervening variable. This research is associative in nature with a quantitative approach. Primary data were collected through questionnaires. The analytical method applied was descriptive statistical analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach. The research population comprised all ASN employees working in 5 divisions at BKPSDM Medan City, totaling 72 employees, with a census (total sampling) technique. Results indicate that hard skills have a positive and significant direct effect on both self-awareness and employee performance. Compliance also positively and significantly affects both self-awareness and employee performance. Self-awareness has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. However, soft skills show a positive

but non-significant effect on both self-awareness and employee performance. In terms of mediation, self-awareness significantly mediates the effect of hard skills and compliance on employee performance, but does not significantly mediate the effect of soft skills on employee performance.

INTRODUCTION

Human Resources (HR) are the most important asset that determines the sustainability and competitiveness of an organization. Without competent and quality HR, organizations will have difficulty in achieving their strategic goals. HR serves as the primary driver of company operations—from strategic planning, work execution, to result evaluation. In an increasingly dynamic business environment, organizations are required to have adaptive, innovative, and highly motivated workforces to compete in a competitive market (Armstrong, 2020).

In the context of regional autonomy, the role of BKPSDM Medan City has become increasingly strategic, as this agency serves as the backbone of ASN management in the region. Credibility and effectiveness of BKPSDM are not only influenced by programs and policies, but also by the quality of services provided in the personnel administration process. The phenomenon underlying this research is the significant gap between the competencies possessed by employees and their implementation in meaningfully improving actual performance.

Based on internal observations and evaluations conducted at BKPSDM Medan City, although employees have adequate technical and non-technical knowledge, their ability to serve the public, collaborate in teams, and communicate effectively with stakeholders still needs

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improvement. The internal audit of 2024 revealed error rates in personnel data processing exceeding the maximum tolerance set in service standards. Input errors, reporting inaccuracies, and lack of data analytical ability were recurring issues.

This phenomenon highlights the critical role of *self-awareness* as a factor that bridges the gap between competency ownership and its implementation in actual performance. Goleman (2020) explains that *self-awareness* is the foundation of emotional intelligence, encompassing the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, strengths and limitations, and the impact of one's behavior on others and work outcomes. Thus, *self-awareness* becomes an enabler allowing competencies to be translated into effective work behaviors.

Previous research has demonstrated mixed findings on the relationships between soft skills, hard skills, compliance, and employee performance. Ibrahim et al. (2017) found that employees with good communication, teamwork, and leadership skills show higher performance. However, studies by Arnu and Sofiyanti (2019) and Putri et al. (2023) found that soft skills do not significantly influence employee performance, highlighting the contextual nature of these relationships. Similarly, Pratama et al. (2022) and Wahyuni (2020) found a significant positive effect of hard skills on performance, whereas Afriandi (2023) and Syaiful (2018) found non-significant effects.

Given these research gaps, this study aims to: (1) analyze the direct effects of soft skills, hard skills, and compliance on employee performance; (2) analyze the effects on self-awareness; (3) examine the mediating role of self-awareness; and (4) contribute empirical evidence from the Indonesian public sector bureaucratic context, particularly in personnel management agencies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Performance

Employee performance is the level at which an individual fulfills the requirements of a job relevant to the role they hold (Robbins & Judge, 2022). Armstrong (2020) affirms that employee performance is the primary foundation of organizational achievement, because without effective individual performance, management strategies and systems will not run optimally. Performance dimensions used in this study include quality of work, quantity of work, timeliness, effectiveness, and cooperation (Mangkunegara, 2019).

Soft Skills

Soft skills are non-technical skills related to personal attributes, behaviors, and interpersonal abilities that determine how a person interacts, cooperates, and solves problems (Klaus, 2007). Robles (2012) states that soft skills such as creativity and adaptability are keys to surviving and thriving in the modern workplace. Dimensions include: communication in service, teamwork, empathy and service orientation, and problem-solving (Robles, 2012).

Hard Skills

Hard skills are technical abilities that are specific, measurable, and teachable through formal education, training, or direct experience, forming the basis for performing certain professional tasks (Ledford, 2018). Armstrong (2021) explains that hard skills have three components: knowledge (theoretical understanding), skill (practical ability), and performance standard (understanding of the quality level to be achieved). Dimensions include: personnel data management, information systems and technology, analytical skills, and report writing (Strang, 2023).

Compliance

Compliance is adherence to a set of rules, standards, regulations, policies, and applicable procedures—both internal and external—carried out to avoid punishment, build reputation, and

ensure clean and sustainable operations (Nielsen & Parker, 2012). Tyler's Compliance Theory (1990) emphasizes that compliance with formal authority and rules is an important mechanism for maintaining order, legitimacy, and organizational effectiveness, particularly in the bureaucratic context. Dimensions include: regulatory compliance, SOP compliance, ethics and integrity, good governance principles, and work discipline.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize, understand, and objectively evaluate oneself, including character, emotions, thoughts, strengths, weaknesses, and their impact on others (Goleman, 2020). Eurich (2018) differentiates internal self-awareness (clarity about values, goals, reactions, and strengths/weaknesses) from external self-awareness (understanding how others perceive oneself). Carden et al. (2022) identified key dimensions: cognitive awareness, emotional awareness, openness to criticism, and consistency in competency implementation.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical studies reviewed, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Soft skills have a positive and significant effect on employee performance
- H2: Hard skills have a positive and significant effect on employee performance
- H3: Compliance has a positive and significant effect on employee performance
- H4: Self-awareness has a positive and significant effect on employee performance
- H5: Soft skills have a positive and significant effect on self-awareness
- H6: Hard skills have a positive and significant effect on self-awareness
- H7: Compliance has a positive and significant effect on self-awareness
- H8: Self-awareness mediates the effect of soft skills on employee performance
- H9: Self-awareness mediates the effect of hard skills on employee performance
- H10: Self-awareness mediates the effect of compliance on employee performance

MATERIALS & METHODS

Research Design

This study is associative in nature with a quantitative approach (Sugiyono, 2019). It was conducted at BKPSDM Medan City, located at the Medan City Hall, Jl. Kapt. Maulana Lubis No. 2, Medan, from August 25 to November 1, 2025. The research population comprised all 72 ASN employees working across 5 divisions. Due to the limited population size, a census (total sampling) technique was applied, making all 72 employees the respondents.

Variables and Measurement

The study examined five variables: (1) Soft Skills (X1) — non-technical competencies including communication, teamwork, empathy, and problem-solving; (2) Hard Skills (X2) — technical competencies covering personnel data management, information systems mastery, analytical ability, and report writing; (3) Compliance (X3) — adherence to regulatory, SOP, ethics, governance, and discipline standards; (4) Self-Awareness (Z, intervening) — employees' awareness of their competencies and the importance of consistently implementing them; and (5) Employee Performance (Y) — work results in terms of quality, quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, and cooperation.

All variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Validity testing used Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with loading factor criteria > 0.70, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability with a threshold of > 0.70.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach using SmartPLS 4 software. PLS-SEM was chosen because it does not require multivariate normality assumptions and is suitable for small to medium sample sizes (Ghozali, 2016). Outer model evaluation included convergent validity (AVE > 0.50), discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.90), and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and $\rho_c > 0.70$). Inner model evaluation included R^2 coefficient of determination and f^2 effect size. Hypothesis testing was conducted through bootstrapping with a significance criterion of p-value < 0.05.

RESULT

Respondent Characteristics

A total of 72 respondents participated in this study. The majority of respondents were female (58.3%), with the most common age group being 35–40 years (31.9%). Most respondents held an undergraduate degree (S1) (52.8%), and the most common tenure category was 6–10 years (30.6%).

Outer Model Evaluation

Convergent validity results showed that all loading factors exceeded 0.70, and all AVE values exceeded 0.50, confirming that all constructs achieved adequate convergent validity. Reliability results showed that all Cronbach's Alpha, ρ_a , and composite reliability values exceeded 0.70, indicating that all constructs are reliable. Discriminant validity was evaluated using HTMT ratios, and all values were below 0.90 (the highest being Kinerja Pegawai–Self-Awareness at 0.847), confirming that each construct is sufficiently distinct. Table 1 presents the AVE and reliability results.

Table 1. Convergent Validity (AVE) and Reliability Results

Construct	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	ρ_a	Composite Reliability	Decision
Soft Skills	0.562	0.921	0.931	0.934	Reliable & Valid
Hard Skills	0.596	0.897	0.905	0.915	Reliable & Valid
Compliance	0.538	0.904	0.916	0.918	Reliable & Valid
Self-Awareness	0.574	0.933	0.937	0.942	Reliable & Valid
Employee Performance	0.581	0.939	0.944	0.948	Reliable & Valid

Source: SmartPLS 4 Data Processing, 2026

Inner Model Evaluation (Coefficient of Determination)

The R^2 value for Employee Performance was 0.774 (strong), meaning the model explains 77.4% of the variation in employee performance. The R^2 value for Self-Awareness was 0.623 (moderate), indicating that 62.3% of the variation in self-awareness is explained by the predictor constructs. These results indicate a strong explanatory power of the model, particularly for the dependent variable of employee performance.

Hypothesis Testing – Direct Effects

The direct effect hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results – Direct Effects

Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistics	P-Value	Decision
Soft Skills → Employee Performance	0.102	0.106	0.070	1.466	0.143	Rejected
Hard Skills → Employee Performance	0.256	0.259	0.084	3.042	0.002	Accepted
Compliance → Employee Performance	0.250	0.252	0.086	2.918	0.004	Accepted
Self-Awareness → Employee Performance	0.441	0.437	0.095	4.642	0.000	Accepted
Soft Skills → Self-Awareness	0.181	0.189	0.096	1.891	0.059	Rejected
Hard Skills → Self-Awareness	0.482	0.478	0.089	5.404	0.000	Accepted
Compliance → Self-Awareness	0.303	0.307	0.092	3.286	0.001	Accepted

Source: SmartPLS 4 Data Processing, 2026

Hypothesis Testing – Indirect Effects (Mediation)

The mediation hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results – Indirect Effects (Mediation via Self-Awareness)

Mediation Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistics	P-Value	Decision
Soft Skills → Self-Awareness → Employee Performance	0.080	0.082	0.044	1.805	0.071	Rejected
Compliance → Self-Awareness → Employee Performance	0.134	0.134	0.049	2.726	0.006	Accepted
Hard Skills → Self-Awareness → Employee Performance	0.213	0.211	0.067	3.182	0.001	Accepted

Source: SmartPLS 4 Data Processing, 2026

DISCUSSION**Effect of Soft Skills on Employee Performance (H1 Rejected)**

Soft skills showed a positive but non-significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.102$, $p = 0.143$), thus H1 is rejected. Within the framework of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, interpersonal aspects such as friendliness and communication ability may function as 'hygiene' factors that maintain a conducive work atmosphere but do not necessarily drive performance-based outcomes. At BKPSDM, where work success is largely determined by procedural

compliance, administrative precision, and technical accuracy, generic soft skills tend to serve as supporting factors rather than primary determinants. This is consistent with findings by Putri et al. (2023) and Arnu and Sofiyanti (2019), and may be attributed to the predominantly administrative and procedural nature of work in government personnel agencies.

Effect of Hard Skills on Employee Performance (H2 Accepted)

Hard skills showed a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.256$, $p = 0.002$), thus H2 is accepted. BKPSDM's work character, which relies heavily on personnel data processing, report preparation, and system-based services, means that hard skills have a relatively direct influence on performance when the job demands accuracy and process precision. This is consistent with Pratama et al. (2022), Wahyuni (2020), and Succi & Canovi (2020). The implication is that BKPSDM should prioritize strengthening hard skills that are most critical to core work processes—particularly data management standardization, document quality control, and systems literacy.

Effect of Compliance on Employee Performance (H3 Accepted)

Compliance showed a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.250$, $p = 0.004$), thus H3 is accepted. Tyler's Compliance Theory (1990) explains that compliance with authority and formal rules is a crucial mechanism for maintaining order and organizational effectiveness, particularly in bureaucratic contexts. At BKPSDM, compliance with SOP—such as in mutation, promotion, and civil servant recruitment processes—directly influences performance by reducing procedural variations, minimizing maladministration risks, and increasing consistency of service output. This aligns with Basri and Rasyid (2023) and Kalatasik et al. (2024).

Effect of Self-Awareness on Employee Performance (H4 Accepted)

Self-awareness showed a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.441$, $p = 0.000$), with the largest f^2 effect size (0.324), making it the most dominant practical predictor of employee performance. This finding confirms that self-awareness acts as the critical 'enabler' bridging competency ownership and actual performance implementation at BKPSDM. Goleman's (2020) framework and Eurich's (2018) distinction between internal and external self-awareness are both supported. This is consistent with Sutton (2016), Saragih and Siahaan (2021), and Darmarini et al. (2024).

Effect of Soft Skills on Self-Awareness (H5 Rejected)

Soft skills showed a positive but non-significant effect on self-awareness ($\beta = 0.181$, $p = 0.059$), thus H5 is rejected. Interpersonal skills do not always automatically transform into intrapersonal awareness. In the bureaucratic BKPSDM context, soft skills may manifest as role-based competencies such as formal communication and service ethics, which run parallel—not necessarily linearly—with deeper self-reflection. This is consistent with Dharma (2021) and Sutrisno (2022).

Effect of Hard Skills on Self-Awareness (H6 Accepted)

Hard skills showed the strongest positive and significant effect on self-awareness ($\beta = 0.482$, $p = 0.000$, $f^2 = 0.343$), thus H6 is accepted. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997) provides a strong theoretical grounding: mastery experience succeeding in technical tasks provides employees with objective feedback about the quality of their work (correct/incorrect, precise/imprecise), thereby fostering self-awareness about competencies, limitations, and required quality standards. In the technical-administrative context of BKPSDM, this dynamic is particularly strong. From a human resource management perspective, these findings confirm that investing in technical training (hard skills) is not merely about enhancing expertise, but rather a crucial tool in performance management and employee development (Susila et al., 2024). With

increased self-awareness through the mastery of hard skills, employees within the BKPSDM can objectively assess their own skill gaps. From a managerial standpoint, this facilitates leaders in conducting talent mapping and designing career development programs based on real needs, while also motivating employees to proactively take responsibility for improving their technical capabilities to achieve high standards of service quality.

Effect of Compliance on Self-Awareness (H7 Accepted)

Compliance showed a positive and significant effect on self-awareness ($\beta = 0.303$, $p = 0.001$), thus H7 is accepted. Kelman's (2019) three-level compliance theory explains that internalization—the highest level—occurs when employees genuinely believe in the rules. Employees who deeply understand and are committed to compliance develop stronger self-reflection on their own work behavior and responsibility. This supports the pathway from compliance to internalized self-awareness.

Mediation Effects (H8 Rejected, H9 and H10 Accepted)

Self-awareness significantly mediates the effect of hard skills (indirect effect = 0.213, $p = 0.001$) and compliance (indirect effect = 0.134, $p = 0.006$) on employee performance, supporting H9 and H10. This confirms that when employees possess strong technical competencies and compliance understanding, and simultaneously develop self-awareness through objective work feedback and internalized values, performance improves more substantially. However, self-awareness does not significantly mediate the effect of soft skills (indirect effect = 0.080, $p = 0.071$), rejecting H8, consistent with the non-significant direct paths from soft skills. These findings provide critical insights into how self-awareness serves as a pivotal mechanism that transforms technical proficiency and regulatory compliance into superior individual performance (Marlina et al., 2026). The evidence suggests that providing employees with hard skills and procedural knowledge is insufficient unless accompanied by a management system that fosters objective self-reflection and the internalization of corporate values. These results are congruent with the findings of Reni (2026), who argues that the efficacy of human capital development in modern organizations is significantly moderated by an individual's psychological readiness to align their technical capabilities with organizational expectations. Therefore, management practitioners should strategically integrate self-awareness development into their performance management systems to ensure that competency gains are effectively translated into sustainable productivity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes: (1) Soft skills have a positive but non-significant effect on both employee performance and self-awareness at BKPSDM Medan City; (2) Hard skills have a positive and significant effect on both employee performance and self-awareness; (3) Compliance has a positive and significant effect on both employee performance and self-awareness; (4) Self-awareness has the most dominant positive and significant effect on employee performance; (5) Self-awareness significantly mediates the effects of hard skills and compliance on employee performance, but does not significantly mediate the effect of soft skills.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is the empirical confirmation that self-awareness functions as a critical intervening mechanism in the competency-performance relationship within a public sector bureaucratic context. Practically, BKPSDM is recommended to: (a) reorient soft skills training from generic service etiquette to performance-based operational soft skills; (b) strengthen hard skills most critical to core work processes; (c) transform compliance from administrative obligation to organizational quality culture; and (d) develop

mechanisms that strengthen self-awareness through routine feedback, work reflection, and coaching from supervisors.

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