Career Development as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Education Level, Competence, and Employee Performance

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Abstract:

This study aims to determine the effect of education level and competence on employee performance with career development as an intervening variable at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. This study uses a quantitative approach, and the sample used is 77 employees. The sample collection method uses proportional random sampling techniques. Data collected used questionnaires. The data analysis technique used SEM PLS. The results showed that education level affected career development, competence affected career development, education level affected employee performance, competence affected employee performance, career development affected employee performance, education level affected employee performance through career development, and competence affected employee performance through career development at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng

Keywords *: Education Level, Competence, Career Development, Employee Performance*

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1. Introduction

Human resources play a fundamental role in determining the success of an organisation, as employee performance directly influences the achievement of strategic objectives and the effectiveness of operational activities. High-quality human resources enable organisations to fulfil their vision and mission, while declining performance can hinder productivity and negatively affect organisational outcomes (Armstrong & Noble, 2021). Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng, as a regional-owned enterprise responsible for providing clean and drinking water to the community, depends heavily on competent and high-performing employees to maintain service quality and support regional revenue. The company continues to

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strengthen its organisational capacity by improving employee competence and fostering performance achievements that reflect its commitment to public service excellence.

Education level is one of the key factors that shape an employee's capacity to perform tasks and adapt to new job demands. Higher education equips employees with broader knowledge, stronger analytical skills, and greater readiness to take on complex responsibilities. According to Sutrisno (in Mandik, Adolfina, & Sendow, 2019), education level reflects an individual's ability to complete job duties and qualify for specific positions. Empirical findings consistently support this perspective. Studies by Atika and Puspita (2024), Pratama and Noermijati (2024), Ayuni, Sujana, and Novarini (2022), and Adnyana and Jaya (2022) demonstrate that education level significantly enhances career development, enabling employees to plan their professional growth and achieve both material and non-material gains (Rivai in Rozi, 2021). These findings underline the importance of education as a precursor to improved career opportunities and performance outcomes.

Competence is another crucial determinant of employee performance. It encompasses the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to perform tasks effectively (Agustian et al., 2022). Numerous studies highlight competence as a strong predictor of employee performance, including those conducted by Supriyadi and Syaiful (2024), Yuliani and Sari (2024), Hanafi and Rahayu (2024), Idris (2023), Amrin and Hamsal (2024), Tajudin et al. (2023), and Agoes (2019). In addition, competence has been shown to significantly influence career development, as employees with superior skills and expertise have greater opportunities to advance within their organisations. Research by Patriosa, Syekh, and Yamali (2024), Diasana and Suwandana (2023), Susanti and Afifah (2022), and Nuriman (2021) confirms that competence equips employees with the necessary abilities to pursue higher-level roles and fulfil organisational expectations.

Career development itself plays a vital role in enhancing employee performance, as it aligns individual aspirations with organisational objectives. According to Arismunandar and Khair (2020), career development involves structured efforts to assist employees in planning and achieving their future career paths. Empirical studies have shown that well-managed career development significantly improves performance, as demonstrated by Herliani, Irawan, and Ardianto (2024), Purnama (2024), Darmawan and Widiastina (2023), and Kuncorowati and Supardin (2021). In the context of Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng, effective career development is essential to motivate employees, enhance their competencies, and ensure optimal performance outcomes.

Despite extensive research examining education level, competence, and career development, several research gaps remain. First, previous studies show inconsistent findings regarding the strength and direction of influence among these variables.

Second, limited research focuses on the context of regional water service enterprises, particularly Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng, which has unique operational and organisational characteristics. Third, career development has not been widely examined as an intervening variable that may mediate the effects of education and competence on employee performance. These gaps indicate a need for more integrated and context-specific research.

Given these gaps, this study is urgent and offers novelty by analysing the combined influence of education level and competence on employee performance through career development as an intervening variable. The study contributes to strengthening the theoretical understanding of human resource development while providing practical insights for Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng in designing strategies to improve employee capacity and performance. Therefore, the objective of this research is to examine the effects of education level and competence on employee performance, with career development serving as a mediating variable.

2. Theoretical Background

Education Level
The level of education is a long-term process utilising a coordinated, procedural system in which employees learn conceptual and theoretical knowledge for general purposes (Hariandja in Nuruni, 2021) The theory put forward by Wiguna (2020) is that the level of education affects a person's openness to doing and completing work that has been completed properly because sufficient education, information, and skills will be better suited for overcoming the problems faced.

Competence
Competence is the capacity to do tasks and work in the workplace, derived from a combination of skills, knowledge, work attitudes, and their application, all of which align with the job's specific requirements. According to Amrin & Hamsal (2024), competence is the expertise and ability to complete a task. Employees or individuals who are equipped with competence are individuals who can complete their work with high-quality results. In its broadest meaning, competence encompasses knowledge, abilities, and the right attitudes and behaviours required to perform a specific job or trade effectively. Furthermore, Rahmat (2019) said that competence is a fundamental specification because a person's specifications become a comprehensive part of the personality used in various situations.
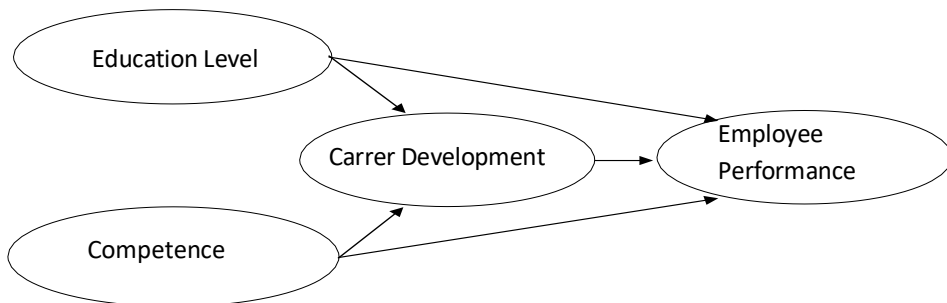
Career Development
Career development is basically arranged for the advancement of the organisation. Every organisation should have the option to realise that its future presence depends on its human resources. Arismunandar & Khair (2020) state that career development provides employees with staffing support to plan and advance their future careers inside the organisation. This benefits employees and the firm by facilitating optimal

personal and professional growth. According to Handoko (Sinambela, 2020) career development refers to the process of personal growth and enhancement that an individual undergoes to attain their chosen professional goals. Career development is the most common way to develop an individual's work further to achieve maximum performance.

Employee's Performance

Performance is a consequence of work that has serious power to achieve important company goals and increase employee loyalty and the economy (Armstrong & Noble, 2021). Employee performance refers to the degree of accomplishment and effectiveness exhibited by an individual or a team within an organization in fulfilling their assigned tasks and responsibilities to successfully attain the organizational objectives while adhering to legal requirements and upholding ethical and moral standards (Sedarmayanti in Burhannudin et al., 2019). In line with this, Vroom in Uman (2019) states that the level of individual progress in completing their job obligations is called the level of progress level of performance in an organization that is appropriate to achieve organizational goals.

Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses
H1 : Education level has a positive on career development
H2 : Competence has a positive effect on career development
H3 : Education level has a positive effect on employee performance
H4 : Competence has a positive effect on employee performance
H5 : Career Development has a positive effect on employee performance
H6 : Education level affects employee performance through career development
H7 : Competence affects employee performance through career development

3. Methodology

This study employs quantitative data to establish cause-and-effect relationships between the examined variables. According to Sinambela (2020), quantitative data refers to information expressed in numerical form, allowing researchers to process

data systematically to produce structured findings. This research was conducted using a quantitative approach at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. The population consisted of 337 employees, and using proportional random sampling with the Slovin formula, a sample of 77 employees was obtained. The sample size was determined using a questionnaire, following Sugiyono (2020), who states that questionnaires are an efficient mechanism for collecting data because they clearly define what is needed and how research variables should be measured. Empirical data were collected through surveys using a 10-point interval scale administered to a representative sample of employees, along with additional statistical data related to human resources and employee performance. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS, focusing on evaluating both the outer model and inner model.

The evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) aims to assess its validity and reliability. The outer model with reflective indicators is evaluated through convergent validity and discriminant validity of the indicators forming the latent constructs, as well as composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha for each indicator block (Ghozali, 2019). Convergent validity requires factor loadings greater than 0.7, indicating that indicators effectively reflect their constructs. Discriminant validity ensures that each construct is distinct from others by comparing factor loadings across constructs. Composite reliability values above 0.7 demonstrate strong internal consistency, while the minimum acceptable AVE value is 0.5, showing that the construct adequately explains the variance of its indicators. Cronbach's alpha values of at least 0.6 indicate reliable internal consistency, and cross-loading results should show that each indicator loads higher on its intended construct than on other constructs.

The structural model (inner model) evaluates the relationships between latent variables and predicts causal effects (Ghozali, 2019). Using the bootstrapping procedure, T-statistics are generated to determine the significance of these relationships. The inner model is assessed by examining the R^2 values, which indicate the percentage of variance explained by the model, and by evaluating predictive relevance using the Stone-Geisser Q-square test. A Q-square value greater than zero signifies that the model has predictive relevance, while a value below zero indicates a lack of predictive capability. Structural path coefficients also provide insight into the strength and direction of relationships between variables.

The operational definitions of the study variables are as follows. The first variable, education level, reflects an individual's creativity, mentality, and behavior in contributing to both formal and informal organizational environments. According to Hendrayani (2020) and Susanti (2020), the education level consists of five indicators: formal education, informal education, appropriate educational background, ability to analyze work, and good understanding of work. The second variable, competence, refers to an individual's level of expertise and skill in performing a specific job. A competent employee can complete tasks with high-quality results. Competence broadly includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for effective

job performance. Based on Wibowo (2019), competence is measured using five indicators: beliefs and values, skills, experience, abilities, and motivation.

Career development is defined as a systematic process to advance an employee's work performance toward optimal achievement. Rivai (2019) outlines five indicators of career development: career requirements, career information, promotion, mutations, and workforce development. The final variable, employee performance, represents the quality and quantity of work produced by individuals in fulfilling their responsibilities. According to Bernardin and Russel (in Budiasa, 2021), employee performance is measured using five indicators: quality, quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, and employee relations.

4. Empirical Findings/Result

In this study, the data used were employees who worked at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. The sample size consisted of 77 individuals. The sampling technique uses proportionate random sampling, which utilises the Slovin formula as an approach.

Table 1. Outer Loading

Indicators	Education Level	Competence	Career Developments	Employee Performance
EL1	0,805			
EL2	0,800			
EL3	0,861			
EL4	0,857			
EL5	0,762			
CE1		0,786		
CE2		0,810		
CE3		0,807		
CE4		0,876		
CE5		0,866		
CT1			0,777	
CT2			0,735	
CT3			0,783	
CT4			0,883	
CT5			0,797	
EP1				0,706
EP2				0,716
EP3				0,816
EP4				0,817
EP5				0,916

Referring to Table 1, it is evident that all indicators are favourable, with the variables of Education Level (EL), Competence (CE), Career Development (CT), and

Employee Performance (EP) said to be feasible. All indicators of Education Level (EL) are 0.805, 0.800, 0.861, 0.857, and 0.762 > 0.70. The competency indicator (CE) is 0.786, 0,810, 0,807, 0,876, and 0,866 > 0,70. Career Development (CT) indicators are 0.777, 0.735, 0.783, 0.883, and 0.797, all > 0.70. Employee Performance (EP) 0.706, 0.716, 0.816, 0.817 and 0.916 > 0.70. The highest research indicator is (EP5) with a value of 0.916, with an indicator of the relationship between employees, where this indicates that the relationship between employees at work is significant to be able to advance the agency because good cooperation between employees will be established properly if there is a good relationship between each other at work which will help improve their performance. In contrast, the lowest indicator is employee performance (EP1), which is a quality indicator that indicates that the employee's work quality in completing each job given is not too optimal. This is evidenced by the fact that there is still certain work when it must be completed that day. So, all research indicators have a value > 0.70, and all indicators are valid.
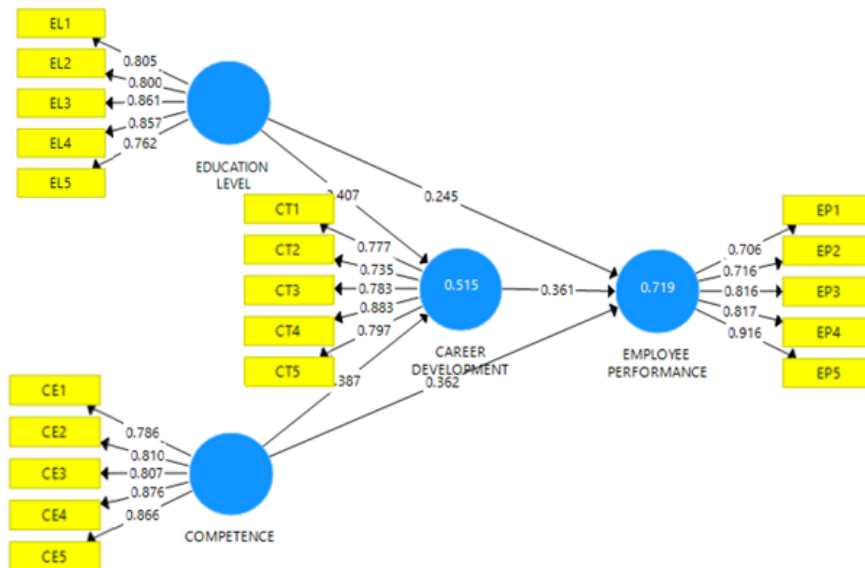
Figure 1. Loading Factor Value

According to the discriminant validity value, it can be explained that each variable has a different value, with the education level variable of 0.818, the level of education on employee performance at 0.711, and the level of education on career development at 0.752. competence of 0.830, competence on employee performance of 0.751, competence on career development of 0.745, career development of 0.796, career development on employee performance of 0.755, and employee performance of 0.798. All variables in the study are above the standard that has been used, namely 0.70

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

| Variabel	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Employee Performance	0,637
Competence	0,688
Career Developments	0,634
Education Level	0,669

Source : Data Processed SEMPLS

According to the table, it is evident that each variable has an AVE value > 0.500, with each variable such as the level of education obtaining a value of 0.669, career development is 0.634, competence is 0.688, employee performance is 0.637, from these results above the variable is declared valid. The following can explain the value of each variable from the composite reliability table.

Table 3. Composite Reliability And Cronbach Alpha

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Employee Performance	0,857	0,897
Competence	0,890	0,917
Career Developments	0,855	0,896
Education Level	0,876	0,910

Source: Data Processed SEM PLS
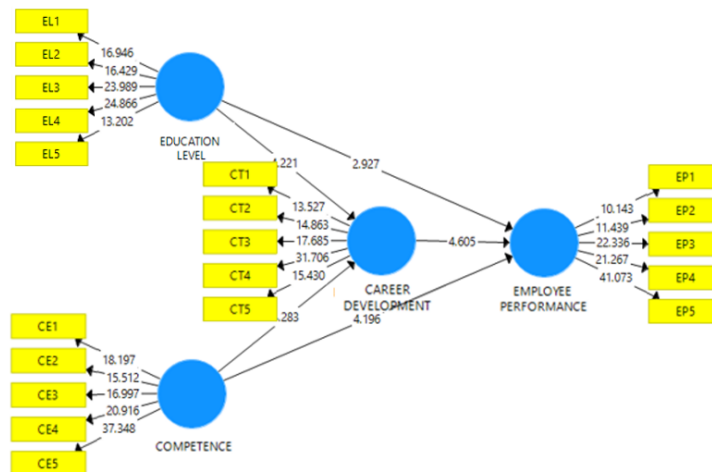
Figure 2. Inner Model

Based on bootstrapping results, the r square value of career development is 0.550, or 55%, and employee performance is 0.719 or 71,9%. These results are followed by hypothesis testing, which can be seen from the acquisition of the path coefficient results of each variable that is :

Table 4. R-Square Value

Variabel	R Square
Career development	0,515
Employee performance	0,719

Source: Data Processed SEM PLS

Hypothesis Testing

the significance of the estimated parameters provides very useful information about the relationship between the variables zang becomes the basis of the relationship in testing the relationship is the value contained in the output of the research variables in this case bootsrap mode is carried out on the sample boostrap testing is also intended to minimize the problem of non-normality of research data.

Table 5. Path Coefficients

Variabel	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Competence > Employee Performance	0,362	4,196	0,000
Competence > Career Development	0,387	4,283	0,000
Career Development > Employee Performance	0,361	4,605	0,000
Education Level > Employee Performance	0,245	2,927	0,004
Education Level > Career Development	0,407	4,221	0,000

Source: Data Processed SEM PLS

Table 5 reveals that each research variable has a positive impact. The education level positively impacts employee performance, with a coefficient of 0.245. Competence positively impacts employee performance, with a coefficient of 0.362. Additionally, the level of education positively affects career development, with a value of 0.407. Competence positively impacts employee performance, with a coefficient of 0.387. Finally, career growth positively impacts employee performance, with a coefficient of 0.361. Based on this presentation, it is evident that the calculated t-value exceeds the critical t-value of 1.96. Therefore, it can be inferred that the research is valid. Indirect effect testing can be known from the results of the indirect effect of research, namely:

Table 6. Indirect Effect Test Results

Mediation of Career Development Variables on Relationship :	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Education Level > Employee Performance	0,147	3,053	0,002
Competence > Employee Performance	0,140	2,969	0,003

Source: Data Processed SEM PLS

The test results on the mediating variable, namely career development from the independent variable of education level on employee performance, obtained a value of 0.147 with a t-value of 3.053 and p values of 0.002, while the mediation between the career development variable and the correlation between competency and employee performance was 0.140, with a t-value of 2.969 and a p-value of 0.003. From the results above, the value of t > 1.96 indicates that the research has a positive and substantial impact.

5. Discussions

The Influence of Education Level on Career Development
The findings of this study show that the level of education has a positive and significant effect on the career development of employees at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. This indicates that employees' educational attainment contributes meaningfully to their career advancement. Education equips employees with knowledge, analytical skills, and a deeper understanding of their roles, enabling them to meet career requirements more effectively. Furthermore, higher educational qualifications support employees in carrying out developmental activities throughout their career, which ultimately enhances their work outcomes.

These findings are consistent with Hariandja in Nuruni (2021), who states that a worker's education level can increase an organisation's competitiveness and support improved organisational performance. Education is described as a process that shapes abilities, mentality, and behaviour to support both formal and informal organisational environments. Similar results were reported in studies by Adnyana & Jaya (2023), Ayuni et al. (2022), Jefirstson (2022), and Elis (2022), who found that education level positively influences career advancement across different organisational contexts. Their studies emphasise that adequate education, supported by sufficient information and skills, increases employees' openness and readiness to complete work responsibilities, supporting their career growth.

The Influence of Competence on Career Development
The results of this study demonstrate that competence has a positive and significant impact on career development at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. Employees with higher competence—reflected in their skills, knowledge, experience, abilities, and motivation—are better equipped to perform their roles effectively, which supports their career advancement. Competence enhances employees' contribution to organisational goals and strengthens their readiness to take on more complex responsibilities.

These findings align with the opinion of Amrin & Hamsal (2024), who explain that competence represents an individual's ability to complete tasks with high-quality outcomes. Competence involves adequate information, strong abilities, and appropriate attitudes and behaviour. Supporting research by Andhika (2021), Dwiyanti (2019), Hasmi (2021), and Tajudin et al. (2023) also confirms that

competence has a positive and significant influence on career development, highlighting that competent employees are more likely to progress in their careers.

The Influence of Education Level on Employee Performance
The study findings reveal that education level positively and significantly influences employee performance at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. Education enhances employees' capabilities, enabling them to produce higher-quality work. Employees with higher levels of education tend to have better problem-solving skills, a deeper understanding of their job responsibilities, and greater readiness to adapt to organisational demands. Thus, educational attainment supports employees in delivering optimal performance.

Hariandja in Nuruni (2021) supports this view, noting that the education level of workers strengthens organisational development and improves performance outcomes. Similar results are reported by Wirawan (2019), Marpaung (2021), Sari (2019), Adnyana (2022), Lisda (2020), and Anisa (2024), all of whom conclude that education level has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

The Influence of Competence on Employee Performance
The results of the study confirm that competence positively and significantly affects employee performance at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. Employees with strong competence tend to demonstrate better work quality, higher accuracy, and improved service delivery. Their skills and abilities also foster stronger work motivation, enabling them to contribute more effectively to organisational achievements.

This finding is aligned with the viewpoint of Abdi & Wahid (2019), who state that employees with stronger skills not only enhance their self-image but also contribute to the improvement of the organisation. Additional studies by Idris (2023), Sutuguna (2023), and Hanafi & Rahayu (2024) also support the conclusion that competence plays a significant role in improving employee performance.

The Influence of Career Development on Employee Performance
The study demonstrates that career development has a positive and significant influence on employee performance at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. Career development provides employees with increased knowledge, experience, and motivation, enabling them to perform more effectively. When employees feel supported in advancing their careers, they tend to show higher commitment and productivity, which improves overall organisational performance.

This aligns with the opinion of Kuncorowati & Supardin (2021), who argue that career development is a systematic process aimed at improving employee performance and organisational progress. Career development is essential because it reinforces the importance of human resources as drivers of organisational success. Similar findings are supported by Joko (2019), Darmawan & Widiastina (2023), Herliani (2024),

Kusuma (2024), and Purnama (2024), who collectively confirm that career development contributes to better employee performance.

The Influence of Education Level on Employee Performance Through Career Development

The findings indicate that education level positively influences employee performance through career development at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. Employees with higher education tend to engage more actively in career development efforts, which further strengthens their ability to perform well. Education increases employees' openness to learning and adaptability, enabling them to meet the demands of career advancement and organisational tasks more effectively.

According to Wiguna (2020), education level affects a person's ability to complete tasks successfully because education enhances knowledge, information, and technical skills. This result is supported by studies from Apsari et al. (2023), Mailina et al. (2020), and Susanti (2022), which show that education level significantly influences employee performance through its role in supporting career development. These studies emphasise that career progress—such as promotions—requires adequate educational qualifications, which in turn affects work performance.

The Influence of Competence on Employee Performance Through Career Development

The study findings show that competence positively and significantly influences employee performance through career development at Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng. Employees with strong competence are more likely to engage in career development activities, such as training, which enhances their capabilities and supports better performance. Competence enables employees to complete tasks more effectively, aligning with organisational objectives.

These results are reinforced by research from Afiyati (2020), Sukmaningsih (2022), Nuriman (2021), Sari (2024), and Apsari et al. (2023), which collectively conclude that competence enhances employee performance through career development. Competence—including skills, abilities, and work-related behaviours—serves as a foundation for employees to progress in their careers and continue improving their performance.

5. Conclusion

The level of education and competence can affect performance in an organisation, improve work quality and quantity, and impact employee career development. From this research, many things must be given more attention, especially in achieving organisational performance through the level of education, because education plays a very important role in increasing efficiency and allowing companies to maximise competitiveness. Besides the level of education, employee competence is one of the important factors determining the organisation's progress because competent

employees can develop the personality and knowledge to do something precisely. Every Perumda Air Minum Tirta Hita Buleleng employee must own career development or career planning in an organisation. This development is needed because the demands of the current and future work of preparing for the employee's career path is required to take part in all internal training activities and institutions that are partners of the organisation. This activity is carried out in the long term for a series of positions. Future research is expected to add the latest variables not examined in this study and their direct impact on the company.

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