
Strategic Leadership and Employee Performance: Unraveling the Mediating Role of Managerial Competence

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effect of strategic leadership on employee performance, with managerial competence as a mediator. A quantitative survey method was employed in this study, involving 65 respondents, all employees of PT. Almeida Putri Rahmat Karawang, using a saturated sampling technique. The research instrument was developed based on indicators for each variable and measured using a Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using a PLS-based SEM approach. The results of the outer model test indicate that all indicators are convergently valid, and the constructs used have met the criteria for reliability and discriminant validity. The R-squared value indicates that employee performance can be explained by the independent variables by 58.4%, while managerial competence explains 17.7%. The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that strategic leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, strategic leadership has a positive and significant effect on managerial competence, and managerial competence also has a significant effect on employee performance. Managerial competence significantly mediates the relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance. These findings emphasize the importance of managerial competency in strengthening the influence of strategic leadership on improving employee performance.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership, Managerial Competence, Employee Performance.

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1. Introduction

In the era of globalization and rapid digital transformation, organizations are increasingly required to possess human resources (HR) that are adaptive, innovative, and highly competitive. Human resource management (HRM) has evolved from an administrative function into a strategic driver that develops employee potential to achieve long-term organizational objectives (Singh et al., 2023; Wang & Xu, 2020).

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Leadership quality and managerial competence are thus critical determinants of how effectively organizations can sustain competitive advantage amid turbulent business environments (Sun et al., 2022; Edison & Komariyah, 2023). Strategic leadership—emphasizing vision creation, environmental scanning, and resource alignment—has emerged as a central capability for enhancing performance and organizational resilience in dynamic contexts (Singh et al., 2023).

PT. Almeira Putri Rahmat Karawang, a company operating in property, transportation, and distribution, exemplifies the challenges faced by many contemporary organizations. Based on HRD data (2025), employee productivity decreased from 98% in 2022 to 95% in 2024, while performance evaluations revealed that only 79% of employees achieved their Key Performance Indicators (KPI). This downward trend indicates inefficiencies linked to leadership effectiveness and managerial competence, which directly affect motivation and work commitment. Similar issues have been reported in other industries, where managerial capacity gaps correlate with declining team productivity and job satisfaction (Dewi & Hidayat, 2021; Alebiosu et al., 2022).

The observed phenomenon aligns with behavioral and human capital theories, which emphasize that employee performance is shaped by the interplay between individual capabilities, motivation, and managerial support (Boyatzis, 2008; González García et al., 2020). Within this framework, strategic leadership plays a pivotal role in aligning employee behavior with organizational strategy. According to Singh et al. (2023), effective strategic leaders not only articulate long-term visions but also mobilize and empower subordinates to achieve shared goals. Moreover, Wang and Xu (2020) argue that strategic leadership enhances innovation through collaborative networks and organizational learning—key factors for sustaining performance in competitive industries.

However, the implementation of strategic leadership practices at PT. Almeira Putri Rahmat Karawang remains suboptimal. Internal audit results (2023) indicate that 37% of employees do not understand the company's vision and mission, suggesting weak strategic communication and ineffective leadership transformation. Nguyen, Le, and Pham (2021) highlight that participative and transformational leadership approaches can significantly strengthen employee engagement and organizational alignment. Similarly, Sun et al. (2022) found that strategic leadership fosters resilience and adaptability in volatile environments, especially during post-pandemic recovery. This underscores the importance of leadership styles that combine strategic foresight with participatory managerial practices.

Beyond leadership, managerial competence serves as an essential intermediary that links leadership effectiveness to employee performance outcomes. Managerial competence encompasses technical expertise, conceptual understanding, emotional intelligence, and decision-making skills (Konigova et al., 2012; Birknerová & Uher, 2022). Boyatzis (2008) further explains that competencies are integrated behavioral patterns that predict effective performance across contexts. Empirical findings show

that managerial competence significantly predicts employee engagement, productivity, and innovative behavior (Alebiosu et al., 2022; Dewi & Hidayat, 2021). Therefore, managers' ability to translate strategic vision into measurable operational actions becomes a crucial determinant of organizational success (Vainieri et al., 2017).

At PT. Almeida Putri Rahmat Karawang, the lack of sufficient managerial skills among supervisors and line managers—particularly in strategic planning and data-driven performance evaluation—has hindered the alignment between corporate strategy and operational execution. This reflects a gap between leadership intentions and field-level implementation competence. Supriyadi, Nugroho, and Santoso (2022) emphasized that managerial competence mediates the relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance, strengthening the practical translation of leadership strategies into tangible outcomes. Similarly, Amrullah (2021) found that managerial competence and learning orientation collectively improve job performance through enhanced entrepreneurial leadership capabilities.

Previous studies have indeed explored leadership–performance relationships, but most have concentrated on transformational or situational leadership rather than the strategic dimension (Nguyen et al., 2021; Shahzad et al., 2022). Additionally, empirical research focusing on managerial competence as a mediating variable between strategic leadership and employee performance remains limited, especially within Indonesian service and distribution sectors. Studies such as Alebiosu et al. (2022) and Birknerová and Uher (2022) have analyzed managerial competencies in manufacturing or European contexts, leaving contextual and cultural nuances underexplored. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into how strategic leadership influences employee performance through managerial competence in Indonesian organizations.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to examine the effect of strategic leadership on employee performance with managerial competence as a mediating variable at PT. Almeida Putri Rahmat Karawang. Theoretically, this research extends strategic leadership theory by integrating the Resource-Based View (RBV) and human capital perspectives, emphasizing managerial capabilities as critical organizational assets (Singh et al., 2023; Wang & Xu, 2020). Practically, this study contributes to developing an adaptive leadership model that fosters performance excellence in the digital and post-pandemic era (Edison & Komariyah, 2023; Triansyah et al., 2023). Through this dual contribution, the study seeks to provide actionable insights into how strategic leadership, mediated by managerial competence, can drive sustainable employee performance.

2. Theoretical Background

a. The Effect of Strategic Leadership on Employee Performance

Strategic leadership plays a pivotal role in establishing an organizational vision, directing resources, and cultivating a performance-oriented climate. According to Singh et al. (2023), strategic leadership encompasses the ability to anticipate

environmental changes, articulate a compelling vision, and align human resources with long-term organizational goals. This leadership style enhances employee motivation, clarifies roles, and improves communication, all of which contribute to higher individual and team performance. Shahzad et al. (2022) further found that strategic and transformational leadership foster performance through increased organizational commitment and knowledge sharing.

Empirical studies in the Indonesian context, such as Edison and Komariyah (2023), also demonstrate that the effective application of strategic leadership strengthens company performance, particularly in the service and tourism sectors, by improving employee engagement and productivity. Similarly, Nguyen, Le, and Pham (2021) emphasized that participative and strategic leadership approaches can enhance employee engagement, leading to superior performance outcomes. Sun, Chen, and Li (2022) also confirmed that strategic leadership contributes to organizational resilience, which is essential for sustaining employee performance in turbulent environments.

Collectively, these studies underscore that leaders capable of aligning strategy with operational activities significantly improve employee performance. The ability to communicate a clear vision and empower subordinates ensures better coordination and accountability across organizational levels.

H1: *Strategic leadership has a positive effect on employee performance.*

b. The Effect of Strategic Leadership on Managerial Competence

Strategic leadership not only determines organizational direction but also facilitates the development of managerial competence through continuous learning and capability building. Wang and Xu (2020) asserted that strategic leaders promote collaboration, innovation, and learning among managers, enabling them to make informed strategic decisions. Amrullah (2021) found that managerial competence and learning orientation are strongly influenced by leadership behavior that encourages knowledge acquisition and entrepreneurial thinking.

Singh et al. (2023) emphasized that modern strategic leadership integrates adaptive learning systems to enhance managerial capability, particularly in volatile business environments. Similarly, Supriyadi, Nugroho, and Santoso (2022) highlighted that strategic leadership significantly shapes managerial competence by fostering effective decision-making, planning, and supervisory skills. The work of Birknerová and Uher (2022) also suggested that managerial competence is aligned with leaders' personality traits, implying that strategic leaders who demonstrate emotional intelligence and self-awareness can better cultivate competent managers.

These findings collectively indicate that strategic leadership fosters managerial competence by embedding a culture of continuous learning, mentoring, and strategic thinking. Leaders who prioritize competency development ensure that managers possess the necessary technical, conceptual, and interpersonal skills to achieve organizational objectives.

H2: *Strategic leadership has a positive effect on managerial competence.*

c. The Effect of Managerial Competence on Employee Performance

Managerial competence is a critical determinant of employee performance because competent managers effectively translate strategic goals into operational actions. Boyatzis (2008) defined managerial competence as a set of behavioral and cognitive abilities that enable individuals to perform roles effectively. According to Dewi and Hidayat (2021), managerial competence — particularly in communication, planning, and problem-solving — has a direct and significant influence on team productivity and employee performance.

Alebiosu et al. (2022) demonstrated that managerial competence positively affects employee behavioral outcomes, including motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Their findings affirm that competent managers improve coordination, resource utilization, and the quality of work processes. In a related study, González García et al. (2020) proposed a framework of managerial competencies in the healthcare sector that enhances staff performance through clear communication, empathy, and technical proficiency. Vainieri et al. (2017) also found that top management competencies directly explain performance variations in public health organizations, emphasizing the strategic role of managerial skills in achieving results.

In Indonesia, Triansyah, Hejin, and Stefania (2023) reinforced that managerial capability remains one of the most influential factors in employee performance, highlighting the importance of competence-based HR development.

H3: *Managerial competence has a positive effect on employee performance.*

d. The Mediating Role of Managerial Competence in the Relationship between Strategic Leadership and Employee Performance

From the lens of Human Capital Theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV), strategic leadership is instrumental in building human competencies that drive performance (Sudirman, Aisha, Siswanto, & Monang, 2019). Strategic leaders create learning systems, design development programs, and establish performance-oriented cultures that shape managerial competence (Konigova, Urbancova, & Fejfar, 2012). Supriyadi et al. (2022) empirically confirmed that managerial competence mediates the relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance, demonstrating that leadership influences performance more effectively when it enhances managerial skills.

Zhang, Qing, Wang, and Chun (2023) found similar results in their study on HR director competence, showing that leadership impact on organizational performance is strengthened when managerial competence mediates this relationship. Likewise, Alebiosu et al. (2022) and Amrullah (2021) supported that managerial competence functions as an intermediary mechanism translating strategic intentions into actionable performance. Wang and Xu (2020) added that collaborative strategic leadership develops managers capable of innovation, which ultimately enhances team and organizational performance.

Edison and Komariyah (2023) emphasized that effective strategic implementation requires managers who possess both leadership understanding and operational competence. Therefore, the mediating role of managerial competence bridges the gap between strategic intent and performance realization.

H4: *Managerial competence mediates the relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance.*

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a mediation model to explain the relationships among the variables. Strategic leadership (X) is assumed to have a direct effect on employee performance (Y) as well as an indirect effect through managerial competence (Z) as a mediating variable. Visually, the relationship among the variables can be illustrated as follows:

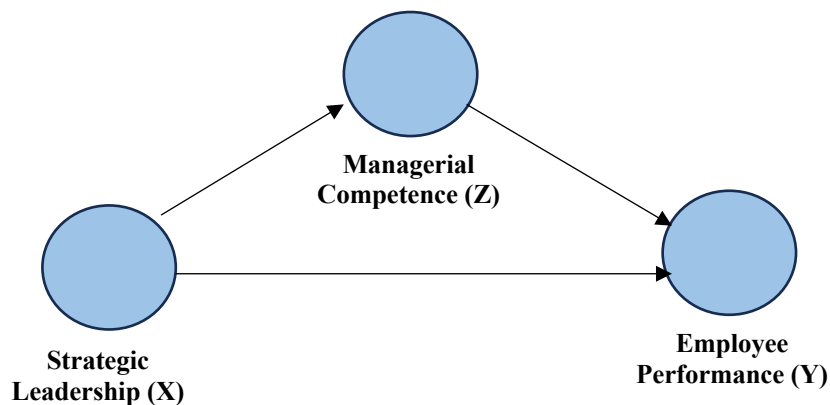


Figure 1. Research Model

This model is based on the theoretical view that strategic leadership fosters the development of managerial competence, which in turn enhances employee effectiveness and productivity in achieving organizational goals.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach using a survey method aimed at examining the effect of strategic leadership on employee performance, with managerial competence serving as a mediating variable. The population of the study consists of all 65 employees of PT. Almeida Putri Rahmat Karawang, including operational, administrative, and managerial staff. Since the population size is relatively small, a saturated sampling technique was applied, meaning that all members of the population were included as respondents.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, comprising 15 statements based on indicators of strategic leadership, managerial competence, and employee performance, adapted from previously validated and relevant research sources.

The collected data were analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling method based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS version 4.0 software. The analysis was conducted in two stages: (1) the **outer model** assessment to evaluate construct validity and reliability, and (2) the **inner model** assessment to test the relationships among latent variables. The testing included convergent validity, reliability, and discriminant validity, as well as the analysis of the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients, and mediation testing through bootstrapping. The significance criteria were set at a t-statistic value ≥ 1.96 and a p-value < 0.05 at a 95% confidence level.

4. Empirical Findings/Result

Outer Model

Data analysis was conducted using a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS). To determine validity and reliability, the outer model must first be tested. This outer model testing aims to evaluate the validity of each indicator and test the reliability of the constructs used in the research model. The criteria used in assessing the outer model include convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. This validity and reliability testing was conducted to ensure that the data obtained met statistical feasibility requirements so that it could be used for the next stage of testing, namely hypothesis analysis.

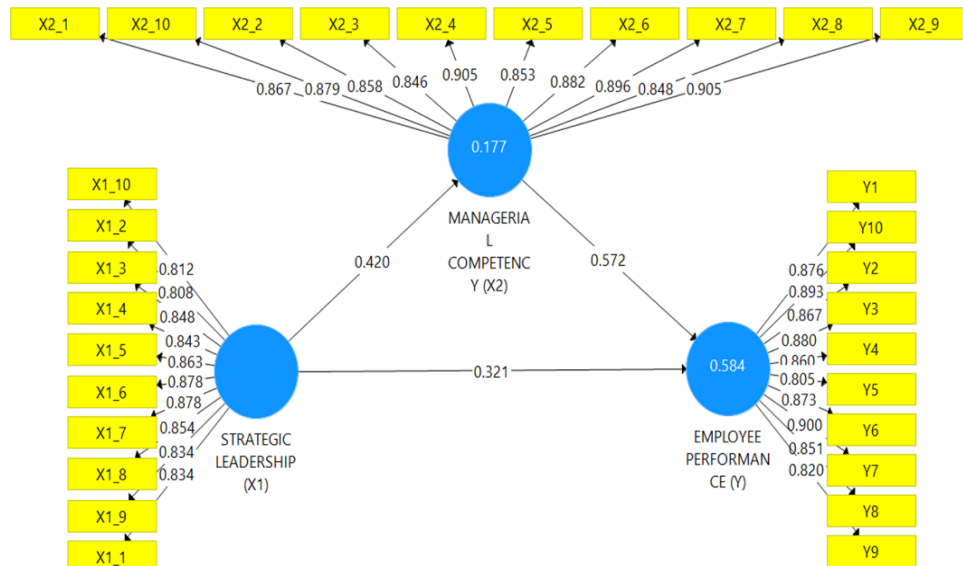


Figure 2. SEM PLS Algorithm Results

In the construct validity testing phase using SEM PLS 3.0, the criterion used to assess convergent validity was the loading factor value (outer loading) with a minimum threshold of ≥ 0.70 . Based on the test results, as shown in the figure above, all indicators in this study demonstrated loading factor values that met this criterion. Therefore, it can be concluded that all indicators used are convergently valid.

Table 1. Reliability Test Results

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Employee Performance (Y)	0,962	0,963	0,967	0,745
Managerial Competence (X2)	0,966	0,968	0,970	0,764
Strategic Leadership (X1)	0,956	0,961	0,962	0,715

Source: Data processing results, 2025

The results of the reliability test for the three constructs, namely Employee Performance (Y), Managerial Competence (X2), and Strategic Leadership (X1), show that all Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability values are above the threshold of 0.70, indicating excellent internal consistency for each construct. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs also exceed the minimum threshold of 0.50, indicating that each construct is able to explain more than 50% of the variance in its indicators. Thus, all constructs in this model meet the requirements for reliability and convergent validity, making it suitable for further testing.

The next test, discriminant validity, is demonstrated by the diagonal value of $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$, which is higher than the correlation between the constructs. The test results are as follows:

Table 2
Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Lacker)

	Employee Performance (Y)	Managerial Competence (X2)	Strategic Leadership (X1)
Employee Performance (Y)	0,863		
Managerial Competence (X2)	0,706	0,874	
Strategic Leadership (X1)	0,561	0,420	0,845

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025

Based on the results of the discriminant validity test using the Fornell and Larcker criteria, the root mean squared value of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct, namely Employee Performance (0.863), Managerial Competence (0.874), and Strategic Leadership (0.845), was higher than the correlations between the other constructs in each column and row. This indicates that each construct has good discriminant validity, as it is able to distinguish itself from other constructs in the model. Therefore, it can be concluded that the results of the discriminant validity test for the model above have met the criteria and are considered valid.

Inner Model Analysis

The R-Square is an indicator used to assess the extent to which independent variables influence the dependent variable in a structural model. The R-Square value reflects the model's predictive ability; the higher the value, the better the model's ability to explain the affected variable. According to Juliandi (2018), an R-squared value of 0.75 indicates a strong or substantial model, a value of 0.50 is categorized as moderate, and a value of 0.25 indicates a weak model. Based on the analysis conducted using SmartPLS 3.0, the R-squared values for the endogenous latent variables are listed in the following table, which serve as the basis for evaluating the quality of the structural model to be developed.

Table 3. R² test results

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Employee Performance (Y)	0,584	0,570
Managerial Competence (X2)	0,177	0,163

Source: Data processing results, 2025

Based on data processing using SmartPLS 3.0, the R-square value for the Employee Performance (Y) variable was 0.584, indicating that 58.4% of the variation in employee performance can be explained by the independent variables in the model, while the remaining 41.6% is explained by factors outside the model. This value falls into the moderate category according to the R-square interpretation criteria. Meanwhile, the Managerial Competence (X2) variable had an R-square value of 0.177, meaning that only 17.7% of the variation in managerial competency is explained by the constructs that influence it, and falls into the weak category. The slightly lower Adjusted R-square values (0.570 for Y and 0.163 for X2) indicate that adjustments have been made to the number of predictors in the model, but the differences are not significant, so the model remains fairly stable.

Hypothesis Testing

This test aims to determine the magnitude and direction of the influence between variables in the structural model through path coefficient analysis. This process is used to evaluate the significance of the relationships between constructs and to test the validity of formulated hypotheses, both direct and indirect. In this study, testing was conducted to determine the strength of the independent variables' contribution to the dependent variable, including any possible mediation effects. Based on the data analysis using SmartPLS 3.0 software, the visualization of the hypothesis testing results, both direct and indirect, is displayed using the following path coefficient diagram.

Table 4. Partial Effect Test Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Managerial Competence (X2) -> Employee Performance (Y)	0,572	0,574	0,088	6,501	0,000

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Strategic Leadership (X1) -> Employee Performance (Y)	0,321	0,323	0,094	3,406	0,001
Strategic Leadership (X1)-> Managerial Competence (X2)	0,420	0,430	0,092	4,584	0,000

Source: Data processing results, 2025

Based on the path coefficient test, it was found that Managerial Competence (X2) has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance (Y) with an original sample value of 0.572, a t-statistic of 6.501, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a highly significant effect. Furthermore, Strategic Leadership (X1) also has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance (Y) with an original sample value of 0.321, a t-statistic of 3.406, and a p-value of 0.001, indicating a significant effect at the 0.05 level. Furthermore, Strategic Leadership (X1) was shown to have a positive and significant effect on Managerial Competence (X2) with an original sample value of 0.420, a t-statistic of 4.584, and a p-value of 0.000. These results indicate that higher strategic leadership will further enhance managerial competence, ultimately positively impacting employee performance.

Next, a mediation test was conducted, with the following results:

Table 5. Mediation Test Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Strategic Leadership (X1) -> Managerial Competence (X2) - > Employee Performance (Y)	0,240	0,245	0,061	3,947	0,000

Source: Data processing results, 2025

Based on the results of the mediation test, the indirect path between Strategic Leadership (X1) and Employee Performance (Y) through Managerial Competence (X2) showed a positive and significant effect. The original sample value was 0.240, with a t-statistic of 3.947 and a p-value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 significance level. This indicates that Managerial Competence (X2) significantly mediates the relationship between Strategic Leadership (X1) and Employee Performance (Y). Thus, strategic leadership not only has a direct impact on employee performance but also has an indirect impact through increased managerial competence.

5. Discussion

The Effect of Strategic Leadership on Managerial Competence

Strategic leadership also exerts a significant influence on managerial competence. Leaders who emphasize strategic thinking, knowledge sharing, and learning culture create an environment conducive to the development of managerial capabilities. Such environments promote cognitive flexibility, decision-making ability, and people management skills.

This finding is in line with research showing that strategic leadership strengthens managers' interpretive and analytical capacities, encouraging collaboration and adaptive learning (Wang & Xu, 2020; Amrullah, 2021; Birknerová & Uher, 2022). Supriyadi, Nugroho, and Santoso (2022) further note that visionary leaders serve as mentors who foster managerial learning through guidance and reinforcement of organizational values. Thus, strategic leadership not only directs organizational strategy but also builds managerial capability as a core enabler for successful strategy execution.

The Effect of Managerial Competence on Employee Performance

The analysis confirms that managerial competence significantly contributes to employee performance. Competent managers plan effectively, coordinate teams, provide constructive feedback, and solve problems efficiently. These managerial skills directly translate into better task performance, enhanced productivity, and improved job satisfaction among employees.

The competency-based theory supports this result, suggesting that competence—an integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes—drives individuals to perform effectively (Boyatzis, 2008). Empirical evidence shows that managerial competence enhances communication, supervision, and decision-making, which in turn improves work quality and effectiveness (Dewi & Hidayat, 2021; Alebiosu et al., 2022). Moreover, studies in health and service sectors have demonstrated that managerial competence correlates strongly with service quality and organizational outcomes (González García et al., 2020; Vainieri et al., 2017). These findings highlight that managerial competence functions as the operational backbone translating strategy into day-to-day performance.

The Mediating Role of Managerial Competence

Managerial competence serves as a crucial mediating mechanism linking strategic leadership to employee performance. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV), human competencies are strategic resources that transform leadership vision into organizational capability (Sudirman et al., 2019; Konigova et al., 2012). When leaders establish learning environments, empower employees, and model strategic thinking, they indirectly enhance performance through the competence of their managerial staff.

This mediation mechanism aligns with the view that leadership effects are maximized when managerial competence is strengthened (Zhang et al., 2023; Alebiosu et al., 2022; Amrullah, 2021). In other words, strategic leadership operates not only through inspiration or vision but also through competence-based systems that enable consistent and effective implementation. Therefore, managerial competence bridges the gap between strategic intent and operational outcomes, translating leadership direction into concrete behavioral performance.

6. Conclusions

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that strategic leadership plays a crucial role in improving organizational performance. Strategic leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, demonstrating that leaders who are able to articulate a clear vision, set strategic goals, and motivate their subordinates contribute directly to enhanced employee outcomes. Furthermore, strategic leadership also has a positive and significant effect on managerial competence, reflecting its capacity to foster critical managerial skills such as decision-making, coordination, and problem-solving. Managerial competence, in turn, significantly influences employee performance, indicating that competent managers are better able to plan, organize, and control work activities effectively. Moreover, managerial competence mediates the relationship between strategic leadership and employee performance, showing that the effectiveness of leadership in achieving performance goals is strengthened when managerial skills are well-developed and aligned with organizational strategy. These findings suggest that leadership effectiveness is not only determined by the ability to set direction but also by the capability to translate strategic vision into operational excellence through managerial competence.

In line with these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed. First, it is important to strengthen the role of strategic leadership through continuous training that emphasizes long-term visioning, environmental analysis, and strategic decision-making. Second, organizations should systematically develop managerial competencies through structured and sustainable training programs focusing on the core functions of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling. Third, companies need to design an integrated career development and talent management system that promotes managerial competence as a key mediating factor for enhancing employee performance. Finally, organizations should embed strategic leadership principles and managerial values into their corporate culture to ensure consistency between strategic direction and implementation across all organizational levels.

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