

## The Effect of Competence, Transactional Leadership Style, and Organizational Culture on Business Sustainability, With Employee Performance as a Mediating Variable, at Mercu Buana University

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**ABSTRACT**

This study is motivated by the increasing challenges faced by higher education institutions in maintaining business sustainability amid global competition, technological transformation, and declining student enrollment. Human resource quality, leadership style, and organizational culture are considered important factors in supporting institutional sustainability through improved employee performance. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of competence, transactional leadership style, and organizational culture on business sustainability, with employee performance serving as a mediating variable at Mercu Buana University. This research employed a quantitative approach using a causal research design. Data were collected from 218 lecturers and educational staff selected through stratified random sampling. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software. The findings revealed that competence, transactional leadership style, and organizational culture positively and significantly affect employee performance and business sustainability. Employee performance also significantly influences business sustainability and successfully mediates the relationship between the independent variables and sustainability. Organizational culture emerged as the strongest predictor of business sustainability. The study concludes that strengthening employee competencies, implementing effective transactional leadership, and developing a collaborative organizational culture are essential strategies for improving employee performance and ensuring the long-term sustainability of higher education institutions.

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### INTRODUCTION

Universities as educational institutions have a strategic responsibility in producing quality human resources while maintaining the sustainability of their organization. According to Yuliantini and Suryatiningsih (2021), human resources are a determining factor for the success of organizational management. Ferreira et al. (2020) state that human resources are the most important strategic asset and source of an organization's competitive advantage, including university business. Nawangsari et al. (2023) define business sustainability as a stable condition that includes growth, continuity, and protection of business continuity and development.

Mercu Buana University (UMB), as a leading private university in Indonesia, faces real challenges in maintaining the sustainability of its business. Data from the Academic Information System (SIA-UMB) shows a significant downward trend in the admission of new S1 students during the 2018–2025 period. The cumulative decrease of 29.58% (from 2,741 to 1,930 students) indicates a serious challenge to the competitiveness and sustainability of the institution.

Of the total 482 UMB employees who have been certified, only 378 lecturers have Lecturer Certification (Serdos) and 104 education staff have expertise certification. This condition shows that there is still a lot of room for human resource competency development. A pre-survey of 15 respondents showed that 66.7% of respondents considered competency development programs to be not optimal in improving business sustainability, and 66.7% stated that organizational culture was not fully supportive of collaboration and teamwork.

This research has novelty in terms of developing a research model using employee performance mediation variables, as well as research objects in the context of private universities which are still limited in the literature. The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of competence, transactional leadership style, and organizational culture on business sustainability with employee performance as a mediating variable at Mercu Buana University.

The grand theory that is the foundation of this research is the Human Capital Theory (HCT) proposed by Becker (1964). This theory emphasizes that human resources are not just operational costs, but strategic assets that can be developed through sustainable investment. Organizations that invest in employee competency development will gain a long-term competitive advantage. In the framework of the Resource-Based View (RBV), competence is a strategic resource that is able to create an organization's competitive advantage.

Business Sustainability is defined as the strategic and operational capacity of an organization to not only survive, but also develop and create value sustainably in the long term through three dimensions: economic (profit), social (people), and environment (planet), known as the Triple Bottom Line (TBL). Competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes of individuals in carrying out work effectively. Transactional leadership emphasizes the exchange relationship between leaders and subordinates through a reward and punishment system based on performance achievement (Harsoyo, 2022). Organizational culture is a system of shared values, beliefs, and norms that influence the behavior of organizational members (Alblooshi et al., 2023). Employee Performance is the result of work achieved by employees in carrying out tasks based on quality, quantity, timeliness, and cooperation (Mangkunegara, 2023).

Higher education institutions increasingly face pressure to maintain organizational sustainability amid global competition, digital transformation, changing labor-market demands, and rising expectations for accountability (Kramar, 2022; Yong et al., 2020; Zhao & Zou, 2021). Universities are no longer viewed only as academic institutions, but also as knowledge-based organizations that must manage human resources, leadership, culture, and performance to remain competitive. OECD notes that higher education systems are increasingly assessed through access, participation, completion, resources, and institutional outcomes, showing that sustainability in universities depends on both academic quality and organizational capacity.

The global issue of university sustainability is closely related to the ability of institutions to adapt to demographic, economic, and technological changes (Marlapa et al., 2024; Oyewobi, 2023; Widayanto & Nugroho, 2021). World Bank data on tertiary enrollment shows that participation in higher education remains an important indicator of national human capital development, but competition among institutions becomes stronger as students gain more choices across public, private, online, and international education providers (Dameria & Ekawati, 2022). Therefore, universities must strengthen internal capabilities so that they can retain students, improve service quality, and sustain long-term institutional growth (Emita et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 202; Nurbaya et al., 2020)

In the context of private higher education, business sustainability becomes more complex because institutional survival is strongly influenced by student enrollment, employee productivity, service innovation, and public trust. The manuscript shows that Mercu Buana University experienced a decline in new undergraduate student admissions from 2,741 students in 2018 to 1,930 students in 2025, representing a cumulative decrease of 29.58%. This decline indicates a serious challenge for competitiveness and institutional sustainability.

The specific issue addressed in this research concerns how competence, transactional leadership style, and organizational culture influence business sustainability through employee performance. At Mercu Buana University, only 378 lecturers have lecturer certification and 104 education staff have expertise certification from a total of 482 certified employees. In addition, a pre-survey of 15 respondents showed that 66.7% perceived competency development programs as not optimal, while 66.7% stated that organizational culture had not fully supported collaboration and teamwork.

Previous studies have confirmed the importance of human resources in supporting organizational performance and sustainability. Al Mehrzi and Singh (2022) found that competency development improves employee performance through work engagement, while Al Koliby et al. (2023) showed that competence contributes to sustainable performance through innovation. In addition, research by Nguyen et al. (2021) and Truong et al. (2024) emphasized that organizational culture positively affects organizational performance and sustainability, especially when cultural values support adaptability, consistency, and shared commitment.

Other studies also highlight the role of leadership in strengthening employee performance and organizational continuity. Gupta and Patil (2023) found that transactional leadership contributes to operational efficiency by clarifying roles, rewards, and performance expectations. Taba et al. (2023) also linked leadership style and innovation culture with business sustainability in Indonesia. These findings suggest that leadership is not only a managerial practice, but also a mechanism for directing employee behavior toward institutional goals.

Although previous studies have examined competence, leadership, organizational culture, employee performance, and sustainability, there remains a research gap in explaining these variables within the context of private higher education institutions (Thompson et al., 2024). Many studies focus on companies, SMEs, public organizations, or general employee performance, while fewer studies examine how employee performance mediates the relationship between internal organizational factors and business sustainability in universities (Lee & Kim, 2024; Saluy et al., 2022). This gap is important because universities have unique

characteristics involving academic staff, administrative staff, educational services, and long-term institutional reputation (Purnomo et al., 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2023).

The urgency of this research lies in the need for private universities to respond strategically to declining student admissions, increasing competition, and demands for quality educational services. If competence development, leadership practices, and organizational culture are not managed effectively, employee performance may decline and weaken institutional sustainability. Therefore, this study is urgent because it provides empirical evidence for university management to identify the internal factors that most strongly support business sustainability.

The novelty of this research is found in the development of a mediation model that places employee performance as an intervening variable between competence, transactional leadership style, organizational culture, and business sustainability. The study also offers a contextual contribution by focusing on Mercu Buana University as a private higher education institution facing real sustainability challenges. This approach strengthens the relevance of Human Capital Theory and Resource-Based View by showing that internal human resources and organizational capabilities can become strategic assets for long-term sustainability.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of competence, transactional leadership style, and organizational culture on business sustainability, both directly and indirectly through employee performance. The objective is to provide empirical evidence on whether employee performance mediates these relationships in the context of Mercu Buana University. The contribution and benefit of this research are expected to support the development of stronger competency programs, clearer leadership systems, and a collaborative organizational culture so that private universities can improve employee performance and achieve sustainable institutional growth.

## **METHOD**

This study used quantitative causal design to analyze the influence of independent variables on dependent variables through mediated variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The research population is all certified lecturer and non-lecturer employees at Mercu Buana University which totals 482 people. The sample was determined using the stratified random sampling technique with the Slovin formula at an error rate of 5%, resulting in a sample of 218 respondents, consisting of 90 lecturers and 128 education staff.

The data was collected through a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale disseminated through Google Forms. Variable operationalization refers to the following dimensions and indicators: Business Sustainability is measured through economic, social, and environmental dimensions with 9 indicators; Competency is measured through the dimensions of knowledge, skills, and attitudes with 9 indicators (Giovanni & Ali, 2024); Transactional Leadership Style is measured through the dimensions of contingent reward and management by exception with 6 indicators (Harsoyo, 2022); Organizational Culture is measured through the dimensions of engagement, consistency, adaptability, and mission with 12 indicators (Tulcanaza-Prieto et al., 2021); Employee Performance is measured through the dimensions of work quality, work quantity, punctuality, and cooperation with 8 indicators (Mangkunegara, 2023).

The data analysis method uses Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software. The analysis was carried out in two stages:

external model evaluation (convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability test) and inner model evaluation (multicollinearity, effect size, R-square, Q-square, GoF, and hypothesis test through bootstrapping).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Description of Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 218 respondents consisting of lecturer and non-lecturer employees of Mercu Buana University. The characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2 to Table 5 below.

**Table 1. Description of Respondents by Gender**

| Yes | Gender   | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|----------|-----------|------------|
| 1   | Male     | 117       | 53,67%     |
| 2   | Women    | 101       | 46,33%     |
|     | Quantity | 218       | 100%       |

*Source: Primary data processed by researchers (2026)*

**Table 2. Description of Respondents by Age**

| Yes | Age            | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|----------------|-----------|------------|
| 1   | < 29 years old | 4         | 1,83%      |
| 2   | 30–39 Years    | 96        | 44,04%     |
| 3   | 40–49 Years    | 60        | 27,52%     |
| 4   | > 50 Years     | 58        | 26,61%     |
|     | Total          | 218       | 100%       |

*Source: Primary data processed by researchers (2026)*

**Table 3. Description of Respondents Based on Employment Status**

| Yes | Employment Status           | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1   | Lecturer                    | 90        | 41,28%     |
| 2   | Education Personnel (Staff) | 128       | 58,72%     |
|     | Total                       | 218       | 100%       |

*Source: Primary data processed by researchers (2026)*

**Table 4. Description of Respondents by Work Unit**

| Yes | Work Unit  | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|--|-----------|------------|
| 1   | Bureau/Rectorate (88 staff + 9 bureau lecturers) | 96        | 44,04%     |
| 2   | Faculty (80 lecturers + 43 staff)                | 122       | 55,96%     |
|     | Total  | 218       | 100%       |

*Source: Primary data processed by researchers (2026)*

Respondents were dominated by men (53.67%), with the majority aged 30–39 years old (44.04%). Education personnel represented 58.72% of the total respondents, while based on work units, 55.96% came from Faculty units.

### Measurement Model Test Results (Outer Model)

#### Validity and Reliability Tests

The convergent validity test was carried out by looking at the outer loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. All indicators have an outer loading > 0.70, except for EP5 and EP8 which are removed from the model. After dropping, all indicators meet the convergence validity requirements. Table 6 presents the results of outer loading after the dropping process.

**Table 5. Outer Loading Test Results After Dropping**

| Variable                            | Indicator                    | Loading Factor | Remarks |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|---------|
| Competencies (X1)                   | KPT1–KPT9                    | 0,847 – 0,929  | Valid   |
| Transactional Leadership Style (X2) | GKT1–GKT6                    | 0,841 – 0,930  | Valid   |
| Organizational Culture (X3)         | BO1–BO12                     | 0,742 – 0,865  | Valid   |
| Business Sustainability (Y)         | BS1–BS9                      | 0,712 – 0,830  | Valid   |
| Employee Performance (Z)            | EP1, EP2, EP3, EP4, EP6, EP7 | 0,782 – 0,877  | Valid   |

Source: Data Processed using SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

Discriminant validity was tested using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The entire root value of AVE is greater than the correlation between constructs, and the HTMT value of the entire variable pair is below 0.90, so the discriminant validity is met. Table 7 presents the AVE value and reliability of the construct.

**Table 6. AVE, Cronbach's Alpha, and Composite Reliability values**

| Variable                            | AVE   | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | Remarks          |
|-------------------------------------|-------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Competencies (X1)                   | 0,765 | 0,962            | 0,963                 | Valid & Reliable |
| Transactional Leadership Style (X2) | 0,771 | 0,940            | 0,945                 | Valid & Reliable |
| Organizational Culture (X3)         | 0,655 | 0,952            | 0,955                 | Valid & Reliable |
| Business Sustainability (Y)         | 0,599 | 0,916            | 0,919                 | Valid & Reliable |
| Employee Performance (Z)            | 0,712 | 0,919            | 0,922                 | Valid & Reliable |

Source: Data Processed using SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

All variables had AVE values of  $> 0.50$ , Cronbach's Alpha  $> 0.70$ , and Composite Reliability  $> 0.70$ , so that the research model was declared valid and reliable.

### Structural Model Test Results (Inner Model)

The evaluation of the inner model included tests of multicollinearity, effect size, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), and Goodness of Fit (GoF). The results of the multicollinearity test showed that all VIF values were below 3.3, so there were no multicollinearity problems. Table 7 presents the results of the effect size,  $R^2$ , and  $Q^2$  tests.

**Table 7. Summary of Inner Model Test Results**

| Indicator                  | Variables/Relationships                          | Value | Categories         |
|----------------------------|--|-------|--------------------|
| Effect Size ( $f^2$ )      | Organizational Culture → Business Sustainability | 0,892 | Large              |
|                            | Competencies → Employee Performance              | 0,206 | Medium             |
|                            | Employee Performance → Business Sustainability   | 0,186 | Medium             |
| R-Square ( $R^2$ )         | Business Sustainability (Y)                      | 0,554 | Moderate           |
|                            | Employee Performance (Z)                         | 0,534 | Moderate           |
| $Q^2$ Predictive Relevance | Business Sustainability (Y)                      | 0,323 | Strong             |
|                            | Employee Performance (Z)                         | 0,367 | Strong             |
| Goodness of Fit (GoF)      | Overall Model                                    | 0,690 | Large ( $> 0.36$ ) |

Source: Data Processed using SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

The  $R^2$  Business Sustainability value of 0.554 indicates that 55.4% of the variance of this variable can be explained by competence, transactional leadership style, organizational culture, and employee performance. The GoF value of 0.690 is in the large category, indicating an excellent model suitability.

### Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was carried out through bootstrapping with 5,000 repetitions at a significance rate of 5%. The hypothesis is accepted if the t-value of the  $> 1.96$  (t-table with  $df = 213$ ) and the p-value  $< 0.05$ . Table 8 presents the results of hypothesis testing for direct influence.

**Table 8. Testing the Direct Influence Hypothesis**

| Hypothesis | Path   | Koef. (O) | T-Statistics | P-Value | Remarks  |
|------------|--|-----------|--------------|---------|----------|
| H1         | Competencies → Business Sustainability             | 0,240     | 2,762        | 0,006   | Accepted |
| H2         | Transactional Kep. Style → Business Sustainability | 0,331     | 5,189        | 0,000   | Accepted |
| H3         | Organizational Culture → Business Sustainability   | 0,685     | 12,826       | 0,000   | Accepted |

|    |  |       |       |       |          |
|----|--|-------|-------|-------|----------|
| H4 | Employee Performance → Business Sustainability | 0,422 | 3,492 | 0,000 | Accepted |
| H5 | Competencies → Employee Performance            | 0,484 | 4,497 | 0,000 | Accepted |
| H6 | Transactional Style → Employee Performance     | 0,194 | 2,990 | 0,003 | Accepted |
| H7 | Organizational Culture → Employee Performance  | 0,236 | 2,532 | 0,011 | Accepted |

Source: Data Processed using SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

**Table 9. Indirect Influence Hypothesis Testing (Mediation)**

| Hypothesis | Mediation Path  | Koef. (O) | T-Statistics | P-Value | Remarks  |
|------------|---|-----------|--------------|---------|----------|
| H8         | Competencies → EP → Business Sustainability             | 0,204     | 2,961        | 0,003   | Accepted |
| H9         | Transactional Kep. Style → EP → Business Sustainability | 0,082     | 2,452        | 0,014   | Accepted |
| H10        | Organizational Culture → EP → Business Sustainability   | 0,100     | 2,655        | 0,008   | Accepted |

Source: Data Processed using SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

All ten hypotheses in this study are accepted empirically and theoretically. Competencies have a positive and significant effect on Business Sustainability (H1,  $\beta = 0.240$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ) and Employee Performance (H5,  $\beta = 0.484$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). These findings are in line with Al Mehrzi and Singh (2022) who prove competency development improves employee performance, as well as Al Koliby et al. (2023) who show competence improves sustainable performance through innovation. In the perspective of Human Capital Theory, competence is a strategic investment that generates added value for the organization.

Transactional leadership style has a positive and significant effect on Business Sustainability (H2,  $\beta = 0.331$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and Employee Performance (H6,  $\beta = 0.194$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). A clear reward and punishment system in transactional leadership has proven effective in maintaining operational stability and consistency in achieving short-term targets (Gupta & Patil, 2023). Leadership that provides clarity of roles and job expectations encourages employees to work in a disciplined and directed manner, which ultimately contributes to the sustainability of the business.

Organizational culture is the factor with the greatest influence on Business Sustainability (H3,  $\beta = 0.685$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) with a large effect size ( $f^2 = 0.892$ ). These findings are in line with Nguyen et al. (2021) and Truong et al. (2024) who prove that organizational culture has a significant positive effect on sustainable performance. A strong organizational culture creates internal stability, behavioral consistency, and adaptability to change which are key prerequisites for long-term business sustainability. Employee Performance has a significant effect on Business Sustainability (H4,  $\beta = 0.422$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), confirming the role of employee performance as a link between organizational capabilities and sustainable business outcomes.

The results of the mediation test showed that Employee Performance significantly mediated the influence of the three independent variables on Business Sustainability. Competency mediation through Employee Performance (H8,  $\beta = 0.204$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) shows that competence has a more optimal impact on business sustainability when it is manifested in real performance. The mediation of transactional leadership styles (H9,  $\beta = 0.082$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ) and organizational culture (H10,  $\beta = 0.100$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ) through Employee Performance confirms that leadership effectiveness and cultural values must be articulated through employee performance to have an optimal impact on business sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

This study empirically proves that competence, transactional leadership style, and organizational culture have a positive and significant effect on business sustainability and employee performance at Mercu Buana University; employee performance has a positive and significant effect on business sustainability; and employee performance was proven to significantly mediate the influence of the three independent variables on business sustainability, with the model having good predictive capabilities ( $R^2$  Business Sustainability = 55.4%; GoF = 0.690 large category). The practical implication of these findings is that UMB management needs to prioritize three strategic interventions: first, strengthening structured and sustainable competency training and certification programs, especially digital and professional competencies; second, leadership capacity development at all managerial levels through clear reward system-based leadership training programs and consistent performance evaluations; third, strengthening an organizational culture that is oriented towards learning, collaboration, and innovation in order to create a work environment conducive to sustainable performance improvement; Because organizational culture is proven to be the factor with the strongest influence on business sustainability ( $\beta = 0.685$ ). Further research is suggested to add other variables such as job satisfaction, compensation, or organizational commitment, as well as extend the object of the research to other higher education institutions to improve the generalizability of the findings.

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