



EGALITARIAN AND FEUDAL LEADERSHIP STYLES AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORK MOTIVATION IN THE OIL PALM PLANTATION INDUSTRY

Dian Wuri Kurniawan^{1,*}, Siti Nur Azizah², and Tora Akadira³

¹Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

²Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Putra Bangsa, Indonesia

³Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

Abstract

This study is based on Self-Determination Theory, which explains how leadership influences employee motivation and performance through the fulfillment of psychological needs. This study aims to analyze the influence of egalitarian and feudal leadership styles on employee performance through work motivation in a plantation company. A quantitative approach was employed using survey data from 150 employees of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test direct and mediation relationships. The results show that egalitarian leadership has a positive and significant influence on employee work motivation and performance, both directly and indirectly through work motivation. Feudal leadership significantly influences work motivation but does not significantly influence employee performance, and the direction of mediation differs from the initial hypothesis. Work motivation positively and significantly influences employee performance and serves as an important mechanism linking leadership and performance. The originality of this study lies in the comparison of egalitarian and feudal leadership in the context of Indonesian plantation organizational culture while integrating Self-Determination Theory to explain the mediating role of work motivation.

Keywords: Egalitarian Leadership, Feudal Leadership, Work Motivation, Employee Performance.

Article Information

Received: January 2026

Revised: February 2026

Accepted: March 2026

*Corresponding Author:

dianwuriuts2@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The palm oil industry is a key sector of the global economy, supplying most of the raw materials needed for the food, chemical, and bioenergy industries (Hidayatno et al., 2025). By 2025, global palm oil production is expected to reach 80.7 million tons, growing by about 2.5 to 3.5 percent annually (Gapki, 2025). The global production structure shows a high level

of concentration, with Indonesia being the largest producer, accounting for around 47 million tonnes or 58% of the world's total production, followed by Malaysia with 25% (Infosawit, 2025). This position provides Indonesia with a strategic advantage, but it also requires the country to continuously strive to improve the industry's efficiency, productivity, and sustainability (Azizah et al., 2025).

At the national level, Indonesia's increase in palm oil production by around 3% by 2025 will be influenced not only by technical factors such as weather conditions and the use of production inputs, but also by the effectiveness of human resource management in plantation organizations (Infosawit, 2025). South Sumatera is one of the main production centers, accounting for around 7% of national production, or approximately 3.29 million tons by 2025 (BPDP, 2025). In the labor-intensive agricultural industry, operational success is highly dependent on employee behavior, which is influenced by the organization's management and leadership systems (Achadi, 2019; Effendi et al., 2026).

The organizational behavior perspective holds that employee performance results from the interaction among leadership style, work motivation, and the organizational environment (Hilmi & Soelistya, 2024). Leadership plays a key role in connecting organizational goals to individual behavior by influencing employees' work attitudes, discipline, and motivation (Kanjanakan et al., 2026; Xue et al., 2022). Empirical observations at PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari indicate a gap in harvest productivity, with the current achievement of 19.5 tons per hectare per year still below the company's target of 22 tons per hectare per year. Internal evaluation shows that differences in leadership styles across work units are one of the factors affecting performance.

In practice, plantation organizations still exhibit two distinct leadership styles: hierarchical feudal leadership and participatory egalitarian leadership. Feudal leadership focuses on compliance, one-way communication, and centralized decision-making to maintain worker discipline, but, over time, can reduce creativity and job satisfaction (Amalia et al., 2025; Hilmi & Soelistya, 2024). On the other hand, egalitarian leadership emphasizes equality, two-way communication, and employee involvement in decision-making, which helps increase intrinsic motivation and proactive work behaviors (Rosanah, 2019; Usman et al., 2021).

Previous studies have shown that leadership style influences employee performance, yet the findings remain inconsistent regarding which leadership approach is most effective in the plantation sector (Asim et al., 2021; Edilpatriz et al., 2025). Moreover, most prior research has focused on general leadership concepts, such as transformational and transactional leadership, without distinguishing culturally relevant leadership characteristics within plantation organizational settings. In addition, many studies primarily examine the direct relationship between leadership and performance, providing limited explanation of the psychological mechanisms underlying this relationship. Therefore, the research gap of this study lies in the limited empirical research that explicitly compares egalitarian and feudal leadership styles within the cultural context of plantation organizations, particularly in private plantation companies, while simultaneously examining the mediating role of work motivation based on Self-Determination Theory to explain how leadership influences employee performance.

In theory, Self-Determination Theory explains that work motivation is a key factor that connects leadership and performance by meeting employees' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017). Participatory leadership tends to increase intrinsic motivation, whereas hierarchical leadership can slow motivation and lower performance quality (Hilmi & Soelistya, 2024; Kanjanakan et al., 2026; R. Liu, 2018; Xue et al., 2022). Recent studies have also shown that work motivation acts as a mediator in the relationship between leadership and employee performance (Dimas et al., 2025; July et al., 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study specifically compares egalitarian and feudal leadership styles in the context of plantation organizations, integrates work motivation as a mediating mechanism based on Self-Determination Theory, and adopts a comparative

approach across work units within a private plantation company. This approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how leadership styles influence employee motivation and performance in a labor-intensive and hierarchical work environment.

THEORITICAL REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Background Theory

Leadership in an organization is an important factor that determines how effectively the organization can achieve its goals (Azizah et al., 2025). From the perspective of Organizational Leadership Theory, leadership is the ability to influence and guide the behavior of organizational members through communication patterns, decision-making processes, and the creation of a work environment (Opez et al., 2022; Zulvia et al., 2026). Leadership style is not just about controlling others, but also about setting work standards and determining the level of employee involvement. Participatory leadership encourages open communication and high employee engagement, whereas hierarchical leadership prioritizes authority, limiting lower-level employee participation (Akadira, 2023; Pizzolitto et al., 2023; Rosanah, 2019).

The relationship between leadership and employee work behavior can be explained through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017). Autonomy refers to employees' sense of freedom in performing their tasks, competence relates to their ability and confidence in completing work effectively, and relatedness reflects the sense of connection and support within the work environment. Leadership practices that provide participation opportunities, constructive feedback, and supportive interactions can strengthen these psychological needs. When these needs are fulfilled, employees tend to develop stronger intrinsic motivation, whereas overly controlling leadership can reduce motivation and limit employee engagement (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Vries et al., 2010). Therefore, work motivation functions as an important psychological mechanism linking leadership influence to employee behavior and performance.

In this study, egalitarian and feudal leadership represent two contrasting leadership approaches. Egalitarian leadership emphasizes equality, participation, and two-way communication, which can strengthen employees' sense of autonomy and relatedness and encourage higher intrinsic motivation. In contrast, feudal leadership emphasizes hierarchy, authority, and compliance, which may limit employee autonomy and reduce participatory involvement in the workplace (Hilmi & Soelistya, 2024; Kanjanakan et al., 2026). From the perspectives of organizational behavior and SDT, work motivation serves as a mediating variable linking leadership style to employee performance. The level of motivation determines the quality of an individual's effort and work results (Liu, 2018; Xue et al., 2022).

Hypothesis Development

Egalitarian Leadership Style Towards Work Motivation

Egalitarian leadership allows employees to participate, share opinions freely, and receive emotional support, helping them feel more valued and engaged in the work (Akadira, 2023). Participatory leadership environments have been shown to strengthen intrinsic motivation by providing trust and involving people in decision-making (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015; Xue et al., 2022). Studies have shown that supportive and participatory leadership has a major impact on increased employee motivation and commitment, which in turn supports the development of high-performance work behaviors (Rosanah, 2019; Rosnawati et al., 2023; Xue et al., 2022). Therefore, the more egalitarian leadership styles are used, the higher the employees' work motivation.

H1: The egalitarian leadership style has a positive and significant effect on the work motivation of employees in the oil palm plantation of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari

Feudal Leadership Style Towards Work Motivation

Feudal leadership, which emphasizes strong control, one-way communication, and strict hierarchies, often limits employee autonomy and reduces self-confidence, thereby

weakening intrinsic motivation (Asim et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). Studies on authoritarian leadership show that dominant, less participatory leadership styles are associated with lower psychological support and reduced work motivation, especially among employees who expect more equal working relationships (Amalia et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022). In addition, research on paternalistic leadership has found that the authoritarian dimension often leads to dissatisfaction, fear, and a tendency to leave the organization, indicating low work motivation (Edilpatriz et al., 2025; Hilmi & Soelistya, 2024). The more strongly the feudal leadership style is applied, the lower the employees' work motivation.

H2: The feudal leadership style has a negative and insignificant effect on the motivation to work in the oil palm plantation of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari.

Egalitarian Leadership Style Towards Employee Performance

Egalitarian leadership is demonstrated by involving lower-level workers, having two-way communication, and sharing power more evenly. This makes employees feel valued and allows them to share ideas during the decision-making process (Toufighia et al., 2024). Participatory or egalitarian leadership has been shown to improve proactive behavior, creativity, and work performance by increasing employees' sense of empowerment and their support from their boss (Kim & Yoon, 2025; Vries et al., 2010). Some recent studies have also shown that democratic or participatory leadership is associated with better employee performance across various sectors, especially as it increases engagement, clarifies roles, and builds work commitment. (Hutagalung et al., 2023; Jejen, 2020).

H3: The egalitarian leadership style has a positive and significant effect on the performance of employees in the oil palm plantation of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari.

Feudal Leadership Style Towards Employee Performance

Feudal leadership in modern organizations is similar to an authoritarian or paternalistic style, emphasizing strict hierarchies, obedience from subordinates, and concentrated decision-making power in the leader (Pizzolitto et al., 2023). Some research suggests that authoritarian leadership can improve discipline and clarity in job roles, especially in environments that require strict adherence to procedures. However, this leadership style can also limit employee creativity and initiative, potentially affecting long-term performance quality (Edilpatriz et al., 2025; Yukl, 2012). Authoritarian leadership negatively impacts employee performance (Edilpatriz et al., 2025; Fernando, 2020; Pizzolitto et al., 2023). This impact is highly dependent on the organization's culture, the nature of the task, and the extent to which workers rely on their leaders' guidance (Li et al., 2024).

H4: The feudal leadership style has a negative and insignificant effect on the performance of employees in the oil palm plantation of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari.

Work Motivation for Employee Performance

According to SDT, work motivation is an internal drive influenced by the fulfillment of employees' basic psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and social connections (McCanally & Hagger, 2024). Recent studies show that internalized intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are positively related to productivity, work quality outcomes, and out-of-role behaviors across various industry sectors (Hoxha & Ramadani, 2024). In addition, various studies in the public and private sectors in Indonesia have shown that work motivation significantly impacts employee performance and productivity (Sanjaya et al., 2025).

H5: Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance in oil palm plantations of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari.

Work Motivation Mediates Egalitarian Leadership Style on Employee Performance

From the perspective of Organizational Behavior Theory, leadership influences employee performance indirectly by shaping attitudes and work behaviors driven by psychological factors, especially work motivation (Achadi, 2019; Tamimi & Sopiah, 2022). According to SDT, participatory leadership and empowerment can meet employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and social connection, thereby fostering sustained work motivation (McCanally & Hagger, 2024). Many real-world studies show that work motivation acts as a key link between leadership and performance (Dimas et al., 2025;

July et al., 2025). So, using equal leadership that encourages employee participation and empowerment will increase their motivation, which in turn leads to better performance.

H6: Work motivation mediates the positive influence of egalitarian leadership style on employee performance in oil palm plantations of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari

Work Motivation Mediates Feudal Leadership Style on Employee Performance

From the perspective of Organizational Behavior Theory, leadership style shapes employee attitudes, behaviors, and involvement in an organization. Feudal leadership, characterized by high control and low participation, often creates a work environment that limits employee autonomy, which can affect how employees respond to job demands and develop motivation (Saffariz et al., 2025). While it can improve discipline in the short term, this approach can decrease engagement and performance quality in the long run. According to SDT, feudal leadership does not support the fulfillment of employees' basic psychological needs, especially autonomy and social connections, which weakens intrinsic motivation (Ryan, 2017). Some studies have shown that dominant and non-engaged leadership lowers employee motivation, which in turn leads to decreased work performance (Asim et al., 2021). Thus, work motivation acts as a negative mediator in the relationship between feudal leadership and employee performance (Liu et al., 2024; Zulvia et al., 2026).

H7: Work motivation mediates the positive influence of feudal leadership style on employee performance in oil palm plantations of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari

Model Development

This research model was developed by adapting the conceptual framework of the Rosnawati et al. (2023) and Hilmi & Soelistya (2024), and then adjusted to suit the organizational context and work culture in Indonesia. The model of this study is presented in Figure 1.

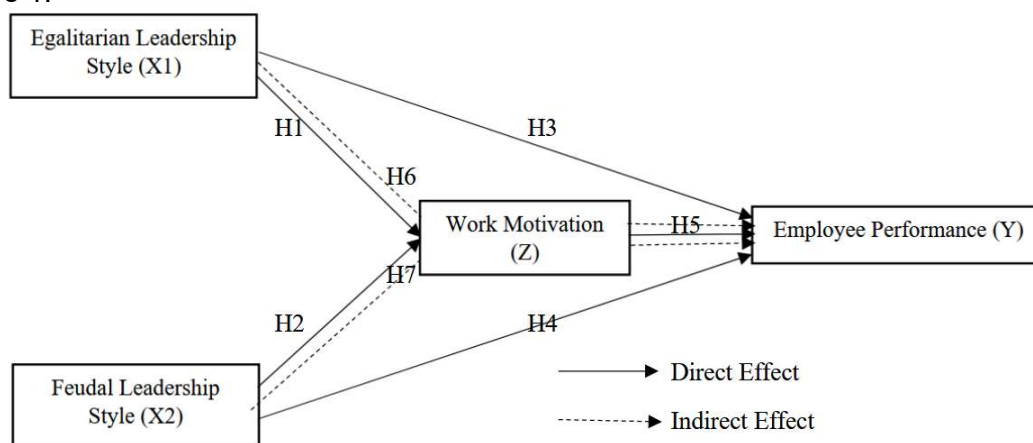


Figure 1.
Research Models

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a quantitative, descriptive study of operational employees of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari who work under egalitarian and feudal leadership styles. This study used purposive sampling with the following participant criteria: operational employees with at least 1 year of work experience and working under direct supervision. Sample size is determined based on recommendations from Hair et al. (2019) for SEM-PLS, which suggests the use of five to ten times the number of indicators. With 21 statement items, the minimum sample size is 105 respondents; this study uses 150 respondents to improve the stability of the analysis.

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure variables of egalitarian leadership style, feudal leadership style, work motivation, and employee performance. The

questionnaire was given directly to the respondents, and the collected data were checked for completeness of answers before analysis.

Table 1.
Research Variables and Indicators

Variables	Indicators	Statement	Sources
Egalitarian Leadership Style	Participation in Decision Making	6 Items	(Usman et al., 2021; Vries et al., 2010; Yukl, 2012)
	Two Way Communication		
Feudal Leadership Style	Centralized Authority	6 Items	(Edilpatriz et al., 2025; Vries et al., 2010; Yukl, 2012)
	One Way Communication		
Work Motivation	Need for Achievement	3 Items	(Deci et al., 2017)
Employee Performance	Quality of Work	6 Items	(Asim et al., 2021; Liu, 2018)
	Work Quantity		
	Punctuality		

The research data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3, which enabled testing complex models with medium sample sizes and handling latent reflective and formative constructs. The analysis includes evaluating the measurement model (outer model) to assess the validity and reliability of the construct using factors such as loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha. This analysis also involves evaluating structural models (inner models) to test relationships among variables using values such as R-squared, f-squared, and t-statistics from bootstrapping (Hair et al., 2023; Harahap et al., 2023). In addition, mediation was tested to examine the role of work motivation as an intermediate variable in the relationships between egalitarian and feudal leadership styles and employee performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Data Analysis

The demographic data table provides information on the distribution of respondents. Those characteristics are based on four respondents' demographic variables: gender, education, departments, and length of service. Demographic data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Respondent Demographics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Genders		
Male	133	88,67
Women	17	11,33
Total	150	100
Education		
Elementary School	30	20,00
Junior High School/Equivalent	41	27,33
High School/Equivalent	61	40,67
Diploma	2	1,33
Bachelor	16	10,67
Total	150	100
Departments		
Estate Manager	1	0,67
Assistant Head	1	0,67
Division I Assistant	1	0,67

IC Division Assistant	1	0,67
Division II Assistant	1	0,67
Workshop Assistant	1	0,67
Environment, Health, and Safety Assistant	1	0,67
Geographic Information System Assistant	1	0,67
Foreman I	3	2,00
Harvest Foreman	6	4,00
Fertilizer Foreman	2	1,33
Care Foreman	3	2,00
Spraying Foreman	2	1,33
Foreman Nursery	1	0,67
Castrate Foreman	1	0,67
Foreman Tebas	1	0,67
Foreman (General)	2	1,33
Division Clerk	3	2,00
Harvest Clerk	4	2,67
Nursery Clerk	1	0,67
Administrative Personnel	11	7,33
Tractor Operator	7	4,67
Mechanics	2	1,33
Loader	1	0,67
Harvester	94	62,67
Total	150	100
Length of service		
1-3 Years	73	48,67
4-6 Years	55	36,67
7-9 Years	17	11,33
10-12 Years	3	2,00
13-15 Years	2	1,33
Total	150	100

Most of the respondents in the study were male (88.67%), and the highest level of education among them was high school or equivalent (40.67%). Most respondents worked as harvesters (62.67%), while others held positions such as supervisors, administrative roles, and technical jobs. Most respondents were employees with 1–3 years (48.67%) or 4–6 years (36.67%) of experience. In general, the characteristics of respondents reflect workers in plantation operations with a relatively early to intermediate level of secondary education and work experience.

Measurement Model Analysis

In this study, the measurement model was evaluated using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach to ensure that each indicator accurately represents the underlying construct (Razak et al., 2024). The analysis results show that all constructs meet the reliability criteria. Cronbach's alpha value ranges from 0.872 to 0.969, and the Composite Reliability (CR) value ranges from 0.969 to 0.977. All of these values are above the minimum threshold of 0.70 as stated by Hair et al. (2014). Convergent validity is also met, as indicated by the high loadings of the indicators (0.900-0.960) and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values (0.839-0.914), all above the threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). These findings confirm that all indicators in the research model are valid and reliable in representing the construct being measured.

Table 3.
Outer Model Results

Variable	Code	Loadings
Egalitarian Leadership Style (Cronbach's α = 0.962 CR= 0.969 and AVE= 0.839)		
Employees are involved in decision-making	X1.1.1	0.925
My opinion is appreciated in meetings.	X1.1.2	0.933
My boss is open to criticism and suggestions from employees	X1.1.3	0.932
Communication between superiors and subordinates is two-way and open	X1.2.1	0.900
I feel comfortable communicating with my boss	X1.2.2	0.907
Information from the boss is conveyed clearly and easily understandable	X1.2.3	0.900
Feudal Leadership Style (Cronbach's α = 0.969 CR= 0.975 and AVE= 0.867)		
Important decisions are only made by superiors	X2.1.1	0.912
The power is completely in the hands of my superiors	X2.1.2	0.935
All activities must be approved by their superiors first	X2.1.3	0.936
Communication from superiors is one-way instruction	X2.2.1	0.941
Employers rarely ask for opinions from employees	X2.2.2	0.925
Superiors prefer to give orders rather than discuss	X2.2.3	0.938
Work Motivation (Cronbach's α = 0.953 CR= 0.969 and AVE= 0.914)		
I have a strong drive to achieve the work targets set	Z.1	0.956
I feel that the salary, benefits, and work facilities are enough for my needs	Z.2	0.960
My work accomplishments are appreciated, recognized, and rewarded	Z.3	0.952
Employee Performance (Cronbach's α = 0.872 CR= 0.977 and AVE= 0.878)		
My work always meets the set quality standards	Y.1.1	0.937
I am always thorough and accurate in getting the job done	Y.1.2	0.946
I was able to achieve the set production target	Y.2.1	0.944
My daily work productivity is satisfactory	Y.2.2	0.952
I can complete work on deadline	Y.3.1	0.931
I am disciplined in obeying working hours	Y.3.2	0.912

Using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, validity is considered met when the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct is higher than its correlation with other constructs (Hair et al., 2014). In accordance with Harahap et al. (2023), this helps prevent overlap between variables. The results of the discriminant validity test using the Fornell-Larcker criterion show that all constructs in the model have a higher AVE than their correlation with other constructs. These values are: egalitarian leadership (0.916), feudal leadership (0.931), employee performance (0.937), and work motivation (0.956). These findings indicate that each construct has a high level of differentiation and explains its indicators more strongly than other constructs in the model, indicating that discriminant validity is met.

Table 4.
Fornell-Larcker Criterion Results

	(X1)	(X2)	(Y)	(Z)
Egalitarian Leadership (X1)	0,916			
Feudal Leadership (X2)	0,964	0,931		
Employee Performance (Y)	0,976	0,956	0,937	
Work Motivation (Z)	0,935	0,937	0,943	0,956

Structural Model Analysis

The coefficient of determination, or R-squared, is used to assess how well a model explains the variation in the dependent variable. The R-Square value shows that the model

has a strong ability to explain the data, with work motivation explained by 89.2% through leadership variables and employee performance by 96.0% through variables in the research model. This shows that the model has very high predictive power.

Table 5.
R-Square Test Results (R2)

	R- Square	R-Square Adjusted
Employee Performance (Y)	0,960	0,960
Work Motivation (Z)	0,892	0,892

In addition, Table 6 shows the model's effect size and predictive relevance. The f-Square value ranges from 0.019 to 0.704, indicating that the variables' influence varies from low to high according to Cohen's criteria (Billah, 2022). The effect size (f^2) showed that the egalitarian leadership style (X1) had a large impact on employee performance ($f^2 = 0.704$), the feudal leadership style (X2) had a small impact ($f^2 = 0.019$), and work motivation (Z) had a moderate impact ($f^2 = 0.126$).

The acceptance of the hypothesis in this study is determined based on the criteria P-value < 0.05 as a significant condition (hypothesis accepted/confirmed) and P-Value > 0.05 as a condition of insignificance (hypothesis rejected/not confirmed), as well as the suitability of the direction of influence with the hypothesis proposed (Hair et al., 2023). The test results showed that the egalitarian leadership style had a positive and significant effect on work motivation ($T = 4.142$; $p = 0.000$), thereby confirming H1. Feudal leadership style also had a significant effect on work motivation ($T = 4.706$; $p = 0.000$), but it did not match the hypothesis direction, so H2 was not confirmed.

Furthermore, egalitarian leadership styles had a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($T = 8.107$; $p = 0.000$; $f^2 = 0.704$), thereby confirming H3. The influence of feudal leadership style on employee performance was not significant ($T = 1.381$; $p = 0.168$; $f^2 = 0.019$), so H4 was confirmed in the model. Work motivation had a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($T = 4.115$; $p = 0.000$; $f^2 = 0.126$), thereby confirming H5. In the mediation test, work motivation mediated the relationship between egalitarian leadership style and employee performance ($T = 2.715$; $p = 0.007$), thereby confirming H6. In contrast, the mediation of work motivation in the relationship between feudal leadership style and employee performance was statistically significant ($T = 3.290$; $p = 0.001$), but in the opposite direction, so H7 was not confirmed.

Table 6.
Structural Equation Model Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	P-Value	Explanation	f2
H1	X1 → Z	4,142	0,000	Confirmed	
H2	X2 → Z	4,706	0,000	No	
H3	X1 → Y	8,107	0,000	Confirmed	0,704
H4	X2 → Y	1,381	0,168	Confirmed	0,019
H5	Z → Y	4,115	0,000	Confirmed	0,126
H6	X1 → Z → Y	2,715	0,007	Confirmed	
H7	X2 → Z → Y	3,290	0,001	No	

The image shows the results of a structural model that explains the relationships among egalitarian and feudal leadership styles, their effects on employee motivation, and their impact on employee performance. The model also shows the path coefficient and explanatory power of the endogenous variables in the study.

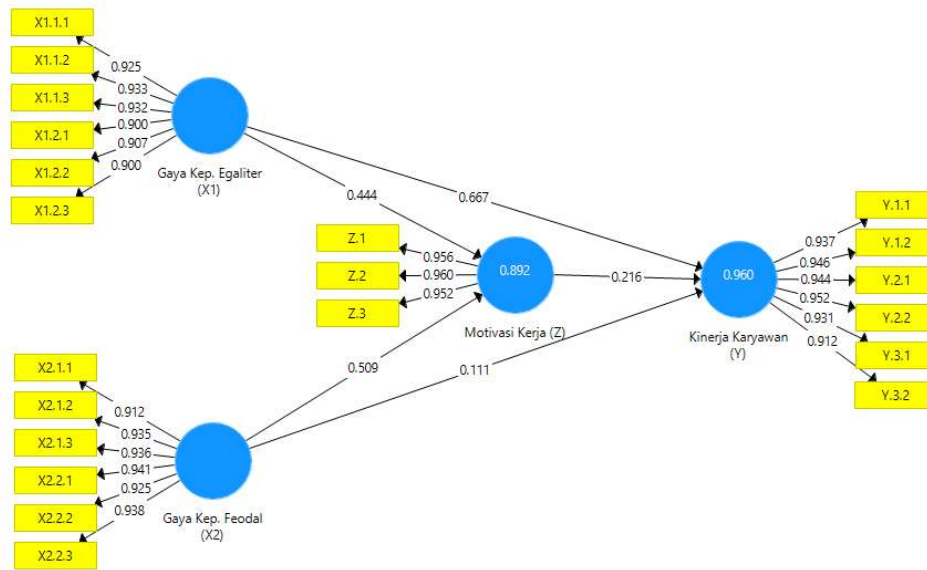


Figure 2.
Path Model in Research

Discussions

The results of the study show that the egalitarian leadership style has a positive and significant influence on employee work motivation, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1 (H1). Open, participatory, and fair leadership makes employees feel valued and involved in the work process, thereby increasing their motivation and enthusiasm. In the context of plantation work that requires high coordination and physical effort, two-way communication and leadership support are important factors in building employee motivation. These findings align with SDT, which posits that motivation increases when people's needs for autonomy, competence, and connection are met (Deci et al., 2017). The findings of this study are also in line with Amundsen & Martinsen (2015), who found that empowering leadership boosts employee motivation, Xue et al. (2022), which shows that egalitarian leadership reinforces the meaning that employees find in their work, and Rosnawati et al. (2023), which proves that participatory leadership has a positive influence on employee motivation in the organization.

The study's results show that the feudal leadership style has a positive, significant influence on employee work motivation. However, Hypothesis 2 (H2) is rejected because the direction of influence is not in accordance with expectations. The hypothesis initially predicted a negative relationship. In a hierarchical plantation work environment, clear and centralized leadership can provide clear instructions, a sense of security, and job stability, thereby increasing employee extrinsic motivation. Nonetheless, SDT explains that feudal leadership often fails to meet the need for autonomy, leading to short-term motivation (Deci et al., 2017). These findings differ from those of Asim et al. (2021) and Amalia et al. (2025), which suggest that authoritarian leadership typically lowers employee motivation.

The results of direct testing indicated that egalitarian leadership had a positive and significant influence on employee performance, thereby supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3). These findings show that the more equal leadership is applied, the better employee performance. At PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari, equal leadership is demonstrated through open two-way communication, involving employees in the work process, and sharing responsibilities more evenly, so that employees feel valued and responsible for their work. Participatory leadership helps strengthen teamwork, increase initiative, and encourage work commitment in a production goal-based work environment. In theory, these results align with SDT, which emphasizes the importance of meeting the needs for autonomy, competence, and interconnectedness in promoting optimal work behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2020). These findings also align with previous research showing that equitable or participatory leadership

can improve employee performance by empowering and engaging workers (Hutagalung et al., 2023; Kim & Yoon, 2025; Toufighia et al., 2024).

Based on the results of the direct influence test, the feudal leadership style had a negative, but non-significant, impact on employee performance, thereby accepting Hypothesis 4 (H4). These results show that feudal leadership does not really help improve employee performance at PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari. Leadership styles that emphasize strict hierarchy, compliance, and centralized decision-making often limit employee initiative and creativity, resulting in suboptimal performance even when work discipline is maintained. In theory, feudal leadership corresponds to an authoritarian style that focuses on control and obedience, which, in the long run, can slow down the quality of individual performance. These findings are in line with previous research showing that authoritarian leadership negatively influences employee performance (Edilpatriz et al., 2025; Pizzolitto et al., 2023), although the impact can be moderated by organizational culture and the nature of the work (Wang et al., 2022). These results suggest that a more participatory leadership style is more effective in improving employee performance over time.

Based on the direct test results, work motivation has a positive and significant influence on employee performance, thereby supporting Hypothesis 5 (H5). These findings suggest that higher work motivation is associated with better performance. At PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari, highly motivated employees tend to be more enthusiastic, persistent, and responsible in achieving their work targets. In theory, motivation is the driving force that determines how hard a person works and how long they keep trying (Deci et al., 2017). These results also align with SDT, which highlights that meeting the needs for autonomy, competence, and social connection increases internal motivation, which, in turn, leads to better performance (McCanally & Hagger, 2024). These findings are supported by research from Hoxha & Ramadani (2024) and Sanjaya et al. (2025), which shows that work motivation significantly improves employee productivity and quality performance.

Based on the results of the indirect influence test, work motivation was found to mediate the relationship between an egalitarian leadership style and employee performance, thereby accepting Hypothesis 6 (H6). These findings show that equivalent leadership not only improves performance directly but also increases employee work motivation. Participatory and supportive leadership can create a work environment that encourages employee engagement, responsibility, and motivation, thereby improving performance. In theory, the Organizational Behavior perspective holds that leadership's influence on performance operates through psychological factors, such as work motivation (Tamimi & Sopiah, 2022). These results are also aligned with SDT, which highlights that meeting the needs for autonomy, competence, and social connection improves employee motivation and performance (McCanally & Hagger, 2024). These findings are supported by research from Dimas et al. (2025) and July et al. (2025), which suggests that work motivation acts as an important mediator in the relationship between participatory leadership and employee performance.

Based on the results of the indirect influence test, the feudal leadership style was found to have a positive and significant impact on employee performance through work motivation. However, Hypothesis 7 (H7) was rejected because the empirical direction of its influence did not match the initial hypothesis, which predicted negative relationships. These findings show that, in the context of PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari, feudal leadership can still improve performance through extrinsic work motivation, especially in a hierarchical work environment that emphasizes discipline and target achievement. The perspective of organizational behavior theory holds that leadership with high control can foster a certain level of compliance and work engagement, thereby helping achieve short-term performance (Saffariz et al., 2025). However, according to SDT, feudal leadership tends to fail to meet the needs of autonomy and social connection, resulting in more external and less sustainable motivation (Deci et al., 2017). These results differ from those of Asim et al. (2021) and Liu et al. (2024), who found that authoritarian leadership usually lowers motivation and performance. However, some studies show that the motivation to act as a mediator is strongly influenced by the organization's cultural context and the job's characteristics.

From a managerial perspective, the findings of this study provide important implications for plantation management in improving employee motivation and performance. Plantation companies are encouraged to gradually adopt more egalitarian leadership practices at the supervisory and field management levels. In operational environments such as oil palm plantations, this can be implemented by encouraging two-way communication between supervisors and field workers, involving employees in operational discussions related to harvest targets and work planning, and providing opportunities for workers to express suggestions or feedback during routine briefings. Such practices can help build a sense of trust, strengthen employee engagement, and increase intrinsic motivation. Over time, the adoption of more participatory leadership practices can contribute to higher productivity, stronger teamwork, and more sustainable employee performance in plantation organizations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research analysis, egalitarian leadership styles consistently have a positive and significant impact on employee motivation and performance, both directly and through their role as a motivational mediator. On the other hand, feudal leadership styles positively influence employee motivation but do not directly affect employee performance, and the resulting mediation pathway does not align with the initial hypothesis. Work motivation is an important factor that improves employee performance and also serves as a psychological mechanism linking leadership to performance. In general, these findings suggest that egalitarian leadership is a more effective and sustainable approach to improving employee performance at PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari. In contrast, feudal leadership tends to be situational and leads to greater extrinsic motivation.

Theoretically, this study supports the relevance of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in explaining the relationship between leadership, work motivation, and employee performance by meeting basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In addition, findings on the positive influence of feudal leadership on motivation offer new insights, showing that leadership effectiveness depends on the organizational context and work culture. This study also contributes to leadership research by providing empirical evidence on the comparative roles of egalitarian and feudal leadership styles in a culturally hierarchical industry, such as the oil palm plantation sector, thereby enriching the literature on contextual leadership in labor-intensive organizational environments. In practice, companies are advised to develop more egalitarian leadership by improving two-way communication, empowering employees, and involving them in decision-making. At the same time, they must limit feudal leadership practices to prevent them from inhibiting employee engagement and creativity in the long run.

As a recommendation, PT Sumatera Sawit Lestari should strengthen its strategy to increase employee motivation by implementing a fair reward system, fostering a supportive work environment, and conducting ongoing performance evaluations. Feudal leadership can be used in limited situations where strict discipline is required, but it should be combined with a participatory approach. Further research is recommended to include additional variables, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational culture, and to expand the research subject to achieve broader generalizability.

REFERENCES

- Achadi. (2019). Pengaruh Kualitas Interaksi, Disiplin Dan Lingkungan Kerja Terhadap Peningkatan Kinerja. *Value Added: Majalah Ekonomi Dan Bisnis*, 15(1), 1–9.
- Akadira, T. (2023). Implementasi Kepemimpinan Transformatif Dan Perbaikan Mutu Pendidikan Pada Program Sekolah Penggerak Di Indonesia. *Management Studies and Entrepreneurship Journal*, 4(December 2022), 378–387.
- Amalia, R. N., Daulay, G. S., & Kuswandi, A. (2025). Gaya Kepemimpinan Otoriter Terhadap Stres Kerja. *Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu Akademik*, 2(4), 635–640.
- Amundsen, S., & Martinsen, Ø. L. (2015). Linking Empowering Leadership to Job

- Satisfaction , Work Effort , and Creativity: The Role of Self-Leadership and Psychological Empowerment. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 22(3), 304–323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051814565819>
- Asim, M., Zhiying, L., Nadeem, M. A., & Ghani, U. (2021). How Authoritarian Leadership Affects Employee ' s Helping Behavior? The Mediating Role of Rumination and Moderating Role of Psychological Ownership. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(September), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.667348>
- Azizah, S. N., Xiang, Y., & Hui, Z. (2025). Employee Wellbeing and Work Productivity : The Role of Psychological Capital. *Journal Markcount Finance*, 3(1), 62–73.
- Billah, M. M. (2022). *Teaching and Research Methods for Islamic Economics and Finance*. Routledge: Abingdon-on-Thames, England, UK.
- BPDP. (2025). *Kontribusi Industri Kelapa Sawit Terhadap Ekonomi Sumatera Selatan: Industri kelapa sawit bisa menjadi sumber penggerak pertumbuhan ekonomi yang berkelanjutan*. www.bpdp.or.id. <https://www.bpdp.or.id/kontribusi-industri-kelapa-sawit-terhadap-ekonomi-sumatera-selatan>
- Deci, E. L., Olafsen, A. H., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-Determination Theory in Work Organizations: The State of a Science. *The Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4, 19–43.
- Dimas, K., Baskara, W., & Suwandana, I. G. M. (2025). The Role of Work Motivation Mediation on the Influence of Leadership on Employee Performance. *Formosa Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (FJMR)*, 4(8), 4059–4072.
- Edilpatriz, Syahrizal, & Siregar, T. R. Y. (2025). Authoritarian Leadership And Employee Job Performance : A Moderated Mediation Of Job Role Clarity, Trust In Leaders and Power Distance. *Jurnal Aplikasi Bisnis Dan Manajemen (JABM)*, 11(2), 614–624.
- Effendi, J., Wiliasih, R., Hariyadi, H., Fariyanti, A., Nawireja, I. K., Adawiyah, W. R., Qoyum, A., & Hasanah, I. (2026). Determinants of Smallholder Farmers to Participate in the People ' s Palm Oil Replanting Program in Indonesia : Do Non-Economic Factors Dominate ? *Sustainability*, 18(1373), 1–17.
- Fernando, F. (2020). *Pengaruh Gaya Kepemimpinan Terhadap Kinerja Karyawan PT. Perkebunan Mitra Ogan (Kebun Peninjauan Inti)*. Universitas Sriwijaya.
- Gapki. (2025). *Outlook Industri Sawit Indonesia 2026: Prospek, Tantangan, dan Strategi Menghadapi Era Baru Pasar Global*. www.gapki.id. <https://gapki.id/news/2025/11/17/outlook-industri-sawit-indonesia-2026-prospek-tantangan-dan-strategi-menghadapi-era-baru-pasar-global/>
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, J. B., & Anderson, R. E. (2019). Multivariate Data Analysis (Sixth Edition). In *Gedrag & Organisatie* (Vol. 19, Issue 3). Cengage Learning EMEA. Annabel Ainscow. <https://doi.org/10.5117/2006.019.003.007>
- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2017). *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Thousand Oaks. Sage, 165.
- Hair, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Hopkins, L., & Kuppelwiesier, V. G. (2014). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) An Emerging Tool in Business Research. *European Business Review*, 26(2), 106–121.
- Hair, J. R., F, S., M Ringle, C. M., & Gudergan, S. P. (2023). Advanced issues in partial least squares structural equation modeling. *Sage Publications*, 6(May), 297.
- Harahap, D., Afandi, A., & Siregar, T. M. (2023). The Islamic Banking Customers' Intention To Use Digital Banking Services: an Indonesian Study. *Journal of Islamic Monetary Economics and Finance*, 9(3), 533–558. <https://doi.org/10.21098/jimf.v9i3.1673>
- Hidayatno, A., Setiawan, A. D., Subroto, A., Saheruddin, H., Wardono, S., Romijn, H., Naraski, T., Rahman, I., Arga, B., Omar, A., Komarudin, K., Rahmah, A., Julio, N., & Zafira, Z. (2025). Exploring the food-versus-fuel debate in Indonesia ' s palm oil industry toward sustainability : A model-based policymaking approach. *Energy Nexus*, 19(November 2024), 100511. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nexus.2025.100511>
- Hilmi, H. Z., & Soelistya, D. (2024). The Effect of Authoritarian Leadership Style and Employee Training on Employee Training on Employee Performance Mediated by Work Motivation at PT . Ume Persada Indonesia. *Al-Kharaj: Journal of Islamic Economic and*

- Business*, 6(3), 396–412.
- Hoxha, S., & Ramadani, R. (2024). The Impact of Intrinsic Motivation on the Sustainable Extra-Role Performance with the Mediating Role of Job Engagement. *Sustainability*, 16(7643), 1–18.
- Hutagalung, D. S., Pratiwi, E., & Parapat, S. (2023). Hubungan antara Gaya Kepemimpinan Demokratis dan Kinerja Karyawan : Studi Kasus di Lingkungan Kerja. *Jurnal Ekonomi, Akutansi, Dan Manajemen Nusantara (JEAMA)*, 2(1), 13–16.
- Infosawit. (2025). *USDA Proyeksikan Produksi Sawit Indonesia Naik Jadi 47 Juta Ton pada 2025/26*. www.infosawit.com.
- Jejen, L. (2020). Peran gaya kepemimpinan partisipatif dan keterlibatan kerja terhadap peningkatan kinerja sumber daya manusia. *Jurnal Manajemen Dan Bisnis*, 1(2), 1–23.
- Juli, V. N., Rahmati, I. D., Basith, R., & Khan, F. (2025). The Mediation Role of Work Motivation: The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and the Work Environment on Employee Performance. *Media Ekonomi*, 25(2), 60–70.
- Kanjanakan, P., Wang, P. Q., Zhu, D., & Kim, P. B. (2026). Authoritarian versus benevolent leadership styles: A moderated mediation model of paternalistic leadership, engagement, job status and hospitality employee service performance. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 132(June 2025), 104365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2025.104365>
- Kim, S., & Yoon, D.-Y. (2025). Impact of empowering leadership on adaptive performance in hybrid work: a serial mediation effect of knowledge sharing and employee agility. *Frontiers in Psychology*, January, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1448820>
- L'opez, M. Angeles C., Rodríguez, P. V., & Quiño'a-Piñero, L. (2022). An approach to employees' job performance through work environmental variables and leadership behaviours. *Journal of Business Research*, 140, 361–369. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.11.006>
- Li, P., Yin, K., Shi, J., Damen, T. G. E., & Taris, T. W. (2024). Are Bad Leaders Indeed Bad for Employees? A Meta - Analysis of Longitudinal Studies Between Destructive Leadership and Employee Outcomes. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 191(2), 399–413. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05449-2>
- Liu, B., Zhou, S., Wang, D., Liu, H. J., Edwards, D. J., & Chen, Y. (2024). Authoritarian leadership in projects: An integrated model to understand the team members' task and innovative performance. *Project Leadership and Society*, 5(July), 100162. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.plas.2024.100162>
- Liu, R. (2018). The Impact of Job Embeddedness on Employee's Performance The Regulation Study of Relational Embeddedness. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 6, 8–23. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jhrss.2018.61023>
- Mcanally, K., & Hagger, M. S. (2024). Self-Determination Theory and Workplace Outcomes: A Conceptual Review and Future Research Directions. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(428), 1–20.
- Pizzolitto, E., Verna, I., & Venditti, M. (2023). Authoritarian leadership styles and performance: a systematic literature review and research agenda. In *Management Review Quarterly* (Vol. 73, Issue 2). Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-022-00263-y>
- Razak, S., Nasuka, M., Syahabuddin, Arsyad, K., & Darwis, M. (2024). Strengthening Zakah Compliance Among Indonesian Muslims Through the Role Ofinstitutional Capabilities. *Journal of Islamic Monetary Economics and Finance*, 10(3), 497–520. <https://doi.org/10.21098/jimf.v10i3.2081>
- Rosanah. (2019). Participatory Leadership And Motivation In Effecting Employee Performance. *Jurnal Manajemen Dan Perbankan*, 6(3), 18–36.
- Rosnawati, Latif, M., & Anwar, K. (2023). The Influence of Participatory Leader Behaviour, Achievement Orientation and Work Motivation on Teacher Job Satisfaction in Madrasah. *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 07(04), 1395–1407.
- Ryan, R. M. (2017). The Oxford Handbook of Self-Determination Theory. In *The Oxford Handbook of Self-Determination Theory* (Issue June).

- <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197600047.001.0001>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- Saffariz, I., Agus, E., & Sumaryono, S. (2025). The role of leadership styles in shaping work engagement : Mapping multi-sectoral trends through bibliometric and systematic review. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 12(June), 101757. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.101757>
- Sanjaya, R. A., Firlana, H., & Priyatno, M. B. (2025). Faktor Motivasi Kerja Yang Mempengaruhi Produktivitas Pegawai Sektor Publik di Indonesia. *Jurnal Lentera Bisnis*, 14(2), 2022–2038. <https://doi.org/10.34127/jrlab.v14i2.1571>
- Tamimi, M., & Sopiah. (2022). Entrepreneurship and Business Management The Influence of Leadership Style on Employee Performance : A Systematic Literature Review. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Business Management*, 1(2), 128–138.
- Toufighia, S. P., Sahebib, I. G., Govindanc, K., Lina, M. Z. N., Vanga, J., & Brambinia, A. (2024). Participative leadership, cultural factors, and speaking-up behaviour: An examination of intra-organisational knowledge sharing. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, 9, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2024.100548>
- Usman, M., Ghani, U., Cheng, J., Farid, T., & Iqbal, S. (2021). Does Participative Leadership Matters in Employees ' Outcomes During COVID-19? Role of Leader Behavioral Integrity. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(May), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.646442>
- Vries, R. E. de, Bakker, A. P., & Oostenveld, W. (2010). Leadership = Communication ? The Relations of Leaders ' Communication Styles with Leadership Styles , Knowledge Sharing and Leadership Outcomes. *J Bus Psychol*, 25, 367–380. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-009-9140-2>
- Wang, D., Wang, L., Wei, S., Yu, P., Sun, H., & Jiang, X. (2022). Effects of Authoritarian Leadership on Employees ' Safety Behavior : A Moderated Mediation Model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(May), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.846842>
- Xue, H., Luo, Y., Luan, Y., & Wang, N. (2022). A meta-analysis of leadership and intrinsic motivation : Examining relative importance and moderators. *Frontiers in Psychology*, August, 1–13.
- Yukl, G. (2012). Effective Leadership Behavior: What We Know and What Questions Need More Attention. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, November, 66–85.
- Zulvia, D., Wardi, Y., & Rino. (2026). Leadership Styles and Employee Performance : A Systematic Literature Review of Empirical Studies. *Owner: Riset & Jurnal Akutansi*, 10(1), 412–421.