

LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORK ENGAGEMENT IN FIRST-INSTANCE COURTS IN THE SERANG REGION

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ABSTRACT

Employee performance is an important factor in supporting the effectiveness of public sector organizations, including judicial institutions. Previous studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) and employee performance, indicating the need to examine the mechanism through which LMX may influence employee performance. This study aims to examine the effect of LMX on employee performance and the mediating role of Work Engagement in First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region. This study employed explanatory quantitative design. Data was collected from 120 active non-judge State Civil Apparatus (ASN) through a questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The results show that LMX has a positive and significant effect on employee performance and Work Engagement. Work Engagement also has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. Furthermore, Work Engagement mediates the relationship between LMX and employee performance. These findings indicate that the quality of leader–employee relationships are associated with employee performance both directly and through Work Engagement as a mediating mechanism. The study provides empirical evidence on the role of Work Engagement in explaining the relationship between LMX and employee performance in the context of First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region.

Keywords: employee performance; leader–member exchange; work engagement.

INTRODUCTION

One of the elements that defines the efficacy of public sector organizations, particularly judicial institutions, is employee performance. In the judicial environment, employee performance is not only related to the completion of administrative tasks but also supports the timely resolution of cases, the quality of services provided to justice seekers, and the realization of accountable judicial

governance. (Henderson & Jeong, 2024) explain that employee performance is influenced not only by technical abilities but also by the quality of social relationships and psychological conditions that develop in the workplace. Therefore, improving employee performance requires attention to organizational behavioral factors that can encourage employees to perform optimally.

In public service organizations such as courts, maintaining consistent employee performance is important because employees are required to carry out their responsibilities within formal procedures and accountability requirements. Based on the Government Agency Performance Reports (LKjIP) of the First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region for the 2021–2024 period, the achievement of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) showed variations across periods and organizational units. This variation indicates that organizational performance was not entirely consistent over time. Although fluctuations in organizational performance may be influenced by various organizational and environmental factors, the phenomenon provides a basis for examining employee-related factors that may contribute to differences in performance outcomes. One factor that is relevant to examine is Leader–Member Exchange (LMX), which refers to the quality of the relationship between leaders and subordinates.

Previous studies have reported a positive relationship between Leader–Member Exchange and employee performance (Latifoglu et al., 2023; Zakiy, 2024). However, other studies have

found that LMX does not have a significant direct effect on employee performance (Maharani & Saladin, 2025; Swandana et al., 2024). These inconsistent findings indicate an empirical gap regarding the direct relationship between LMX and employee performance. More importantly, the inconsistency raises a theoretical question concerning how the quality of leader–subordinate relationships are translated into employee performance. A high-quality exchange relationship may provide employees with social resources such as trust, support, recognition, and access to information, but these resources may first influence employees' psychological involvement in their work before being reflected in performance outcomes. Therefore, examining an intervening psychological mechanism is necessary to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the LMX–employee performance relationship.

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, LMX represents the quality of social exchange between leaders and subordinates. When employees experience positive exchanges with their leaders through trust, support, recognition, and reciprocal contributions, they may respond by developing positive attitudes and psychological involvement

toward their work. Thus, the consequences of high-quality LMX may not be limited to direct changes in employee performance but may also operate through employees' psychological responses to the quality of the exchange relationship.

Work Engagement is therefore positioned as a mediating variable because it represents a psychological mechanism through which the social resources obtained from high-quality LMX may be translated into work-related behavior and performance. Employees who experience supportive relationships with their leaders may demonstrate greater vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work. These psychological conditions can encourage employees to invest greater effort and attention in completing their responsibilities, which may subsequently contribute to employee performance. In this sense, LMX represents the quality of social exchange, Work Engagement represents the employees' psychological response to that exchange, and Employee Performance represents one of the potential outcomes of the exchange process. This relationship provides a theoretical basis for examining Work Engagement as a mediator between LMX and Employee Performance.

Based on the empirical, theoretical, and contextual gaps described above, this study examines how Leader–Member Exchange influences Employee Performance among State Civil Apparatus in First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region, both directly and indirectly through Work Engagement. The study specifically positions Work Engagement as a mediating mechanism to explain how the quality of leader–subordinate exchange may be translated into employee performance. The study contributes to the existing literature by integrating LMX, Work Engagement, and Employee Performance within the context of First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region, a public-sector judicial setting characterized by formal procedures, organizational accountability, and structured work relationships. This approach provides an empirical examination of the psychological mechanism underlying the relationship between leader–subordinate exchange and employee performance in this specific institutional context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains that relationships between individuals are developed through reciprocal exchanges in which favorable

treatment may encourage reciprocal positive responses. In organizational settings, the exchange between leaders and employees can be reflected in the quality of Leader–Member Exchange (LMX). When leaders provide trust, support, recognition, and opportunities for employees to contribute, employees may perceive the relationship as valuable and respond through positive work attitudes and behaviors. Thus, LMX can be understood as a form of social exchange quality between leaders and subordinates. In this study, SET provides the theoretical foundation for the proposed relationships among LMX, Work Engagement, and Employee Performance.

High-quality LMX may provide employees with social resources that encourage greater psychological involvement in their work, reflected in Work Engagement. This engagement may subsequently encourage employees to devote greater energy, dedication, and attention to their work, which can be reflected in higher Employee Performance. Therefore, the proposed model positions LMX as the quality of social exchange, Work Engagement as a psychological response to that exchange, and Employee Performance as an outcome

that may emerge from the exchange process.

Employee Performance

According to (Qalati et al., 2022), Employee performance is the capacity of an individual to do work activities that lead to task completion and support the organization's main goals, and increase productivity. Several indicators are used to measure employee performance, including quality, quantity, accuracy, time efficiency, attendance, and collaboration with colleagues (Zakiy, 2024), (Gunadi *et al.*, 2025) and (Baskara & Fauji, 2025). Employee performance reflects an individual's behavior and attitudes in the workplace, which are influenced by various factors, including how well leaders and subordinates get along (LMX).

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, employee performance can be viewed as one form of reciprocal response to favorable treatment within the organization. When employees experience supportive and trusting relationships with their leaders, they may perceive that the organization values their contribution and may reciprocate through greater effort and commitment in performing their work. Therefore, the

quality of leader–subordinate exchange may be associated with employee performance because employees can respond to favorable social exchanges through behaviors that support the accomplishment of organizational responsibilities. The degree to which a company can grow and maintain its competitiveness is largely dependent on this performance, as well as in supporting its respective core business, particularly in government institutions (Latifoglu et al., 2023).

Leader Member Exchange (LMX)

A two-way exchange relationship between leaders and subordinates is known as Leader Member Exchange (LMX) within an organizational work unit, developed through interpersonal interactions, communication, and reciprocal influence. This relationship is characterized by closeness and trust between leaders and team members, mutual loyalty and respect, appreciation of skills, leader understanding, and contributions from both parties for mutual benefit. LMX relationships are unique to each leader–subordinate dyad, as each employee may have a different quality of relationship with their leader, which ultimately influences work engagement,

job satisfaction, and employee performance within the organization (Jufrizen et al., 2024). The Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) indicators in this study were adapted from the measurement instrument used by (Zakiy, 2024), which was developed with reference to previous LMX measurement literature. In the present study, not all indicators available in the source instrument were used; instead, the researcher selected indicators considered relevant to the context of formal work relationships in judicial and government institutions. The LMX construct was measured using seven indicators: role clarity, leader understanding, recognition of employee potential, support in problem solving, leader contribution to subordinates, trust, and relationship effectiveness. These indicators were selected to represent relevant aspects of leader–subordinate interaction, support, trust, and reciprocal contribution within the research context.

Work Engagement

Work engagement is a pleasant, satisfying mental state relating to one's job that is marked by vigor, dedication, and immersion. This positive psychological state associated with work is defined as

Work Engagement, which, according to (Zakiy, 2024) is characterized by enthusiasm and energy at work, dedication to one's job, and deep involvement in carrying out work tasks. This variable reflects the level of employees' psychological attachment to their work. Work Engagement is also theoretically related to Employee Performance because employees who are energetic, dedicated, and psychologically absorbed in their work are more likely to invest effort and attention in completing their responsibilities. In the context of Social Exchange Theory, positive psychological responses may represent employees' reciprocal reactions to favorable organizational relationships and may subsequently be reflected in work-related behavior. Therefore, higher Work Engagement is expected to contribute to better Employee Performance because engaged employees are more likely to persist in completing tasks, maintain their involvement, and direct their effort toward achieving organizational objectives.

Based on the preceding theoretical relationships, Work Engagement is positioned as a mediator rather than merely as an additional predictor because it represents the psychological process through which the quality of leader–

subordinate exchange may be translated into employee performance. LMX describes the quality of the social exchange between leaders and employees, while Work Engagement reflects how employees psychologically respond to the resources and treatment received through that relationship. When employees experience high-quality exchanges with their leaders, they may become more energetic, dedicated, and absorbed in their work; these conditions can subsequently encourage greater effort and involvement in completing work responsibilities. Thus, the mediating role of Work Engagement provides an explanation of how LMX may influence Employee Performance both directly and through employees' psychological engagement with their work

Research Framework

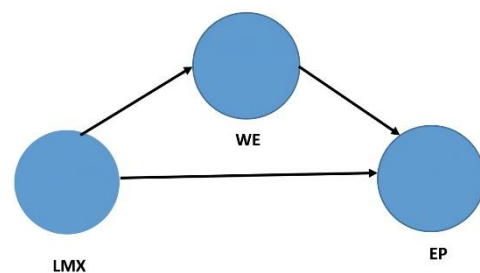


Figure 1. Research Framework

The proposed research framework illustrates the relationships among Leader–Member Exchange, Work Engagement, and Employee Performance. LMX is positioned as the independent

variable because it represents the quality of social exchange between leaders and employees. Work Engagement (WE) is positioned as the mediating variable because it represents the psychological response through which the quality of LMX may be translated into work-related behavior. Employee Performance (EP) is positioned as the dependent variable representing the work outcomes associated with these relationships. Accordingly, the framework proposes that LMX may influence Employee Performance directly and indirectly through Work Engagement. The quality of interactions between leaders and subordinates is a crucial basis for promoting work engagement, which is ultimately anticipated to have a favorable effect on enhancing employee performance in First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region, according to this empirical research framework.

Hypothesis Development

The following four hypotheses are put out in this study based on the research framework:

LMX and Employee Performance.

High-quality LMX is characterized by trust, mutual support, communication, recognition, and reciprocal contributions

between leaders and employees. These exchanges may provide employees with information, assistance, and social support that facilitate the completion of work responsibilities. From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, employees may reciprocate favorable treatment from their leaders through greater effort and positive work behavior. Therefore, higher-quality LMX is expected to be associated with better Employee Performance.

H1: Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance.

LMX and Work Engagement.

The quality of leader–subordinate relationships may influence employees' psychological involvement in their work. When leaders provide support, trust, recognition, and opportunities for employees to contribute, employees may perceive the exchange relationship positively and respond with greater enthusiasm, dedication, and involvement in their work. Consistent with Social Exchange Theory, favorable treatment from leaders can generate reciprocal positive attitudes from employees. Therefore, higher-quality LMX is expected to be associated with higher Work Engagement.

H2: Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) has a positive and significant effect on Work Engagement

Work Engagement and Employee Performance

Work Engagement reflects employees' psychological involvement in their work through vigor, dedication, and absorption. Employees who are highly engaged are more likely to devote sustained effort and attention to their responsibilities and remain involved when completing challenging tasks. These characteristics may support the quality, quantity, timeliness, and collaborative aspects of Employee Performance. Therefore, higher Work Engagement is expected to be associated with better Employee Performance.

H3: Work Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance.

The Mediating Role of Work Engagement.

The preceding relationships suggest that LMX may influence Employee Performance not only directly but also through employees' psychological engagement with their work. High-quality exchanges with leaders can provide social resources such as trust, support,

recognition, and communication, which may strengthen employees' Work Engagement. Higher Work Engagement can subsequently encourage employees to invest greater effort, dedication, and attention in completing their responsibilities. Thus, Work Engagement represents a psychological mechanism that can connect the quality of leader–subordinate exchange with Employee Performance. Based on this theoretical argument, Work Engagement is expected to mediate the relationship between LMX and Employee Performance.

H4: Work Engagement mediates the relationship between Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) and Employee Performance.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed an explanatory quantitative research design to examine the relationships among Leader–Member Exchange (LMX), Work Engagement, and Employee Performance. The study was conducted at three First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region, namely the Serang Religious Court, the Serang Administrative Court, and the Serang District Court. Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.

The population consisted of 141 active non-judge State Civil Apparatus (ASN) working at the three First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region. Saturated sampling was employed by inviting all members of the defined population to participate. The questionnaire was distributed using Google Forms, and 120 complete questionnaires were considered usable for analysis. Respondents were active non-judge ASN working at one of the three courts and willing to participate in the study.

The study measured three constructs: LMX as the independent variable, Work Engagement as the mediating variable, and Employee Performance as the dependent variable. LMX was measured using seven indicators adapted from Zakiy (2024), namely role clarity, leader understanding, recognition of employee potential, support in problem solving, leader contribution to subordinates, trust, and relationship effectiveness. Work Engagement was initially measured using seven indicators. Based on the distributional evaluation, three indicators were excluded due to excessive kurtosis, resulting in four retained indicators (WE1.2, WE1.4, WE1.6, and WE1.7). Employee Performance was measured using five indicators (EP1.1–EP1.5). All

items were presented in Indonesian and measured using a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very low agreement) to 10 (very high agreement).

Data analysis consisted of descriptive analysis and PLS-SEM. The measurement model was evaluated using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, HTMT, and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The structural model was assessed using VIF and R^2 , while hypothesis testing and mediation analysis were conducted using bootstrapping at a 5% significance level. Outer loading ≥ 0.70 , AVE ≥ 0.50 , reliability values ≥ 0.70 , HTMT < 0.90 , and VIF < 5.00 were used as the assessment criteria.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of 141 active non-judge State Civil Apparatus (ASN) working at the three First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region were included in the defined population. Through saturated sampling, questionnaires were distributed to all members of the population, and 120 complete questionnaires were considered usable for further analysis.

The respondent characteristics were described based on gender, age, educational background, and length of service. The majority of respondents were

male, comprising 73 respondents (60.8%), while 47 respondents (39.2%) were female. In terms of age, the largest group was respondents aged 41–50 years, consisting of 48 respondents (40.0%). Regarding educational background, 73 respondents (60.8%) held a bachelor's degree (S1). In terms of length of service, the largest group had 11–20 years of work experience, comprising 39 respondents (32.5%). These characteristics indicate that the respondents represented employees with varied demographic and work-experience backgrounds within the three First-Instance Courts.

Outer Loadings

Table 1. Results of Outer Loadings

Indicator	WE	EP	L-MX
WE1.2	0,920		
WE1.4	0,939		
WE1.6	0,889		
WE1.7	0,932		
EP1.1		0,895	
EP1.2		0,916	
EP1.3		0,931	
EP1.4		0,844	
EP1.5		0,888	
L-MX1.1			0,746
L-MX1.2			0,930
L-MX1.3			0,924
L-MX1.4			0,920
L-MX1.5			0,828
L-MX1.6			0,885
L-MX1.7			0,915

The results of the outer loading assessment are presented in Table 1. All retained indicators have outer loading values above the recommended threshold of 0.70, with values ranging from 0.746 to

0.939. These results indicate that the indicators adequately represent their respective constructs and meet the criteria for convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

Table 2. Result HTMT Test

	HTMT	Result
L-MX <-> EP	0,737	Valid
WE<-> EP	0,886	Valid
WE <-> L-MX	0,711	Valid

Table 3. Result Fornell-Larcker Test

	EP	L-MX	WE	Result
EP	0,906			Valid
L-MX	0,716	0,881		Valid
WE	0,829	0,692	0,944	Valid

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. As shown in Table 2, the HTMT values range from 0.711 to 0.886, all of which are below the threshold of 0.90. This indicates that the constructs in the model demonstrate adequate discriminant validity.

The Fornell–Larcker results in Table 3 provide further evidence of discriminant validity. The square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than its correlations with the other constructs. Therefore, LMX, Work Engagement, and Employee Performance can be empirically

distinguished from one another in the measurement model.

Reliability and AVE

Table 4. Composite Reliability Test Results

	Cronb ach's alpha	rho_a	rho_c	AVE
EP	0,927	0,930	0,948	0,821
L-MX	0,952	0,964	0,960	0,776
WE	0,938	0,940	0,961	0,890

Table 4 presents reliability and convergent validity results. All constructs have Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability values above 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The AVE values range from 0.776 to 0.890, exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.50. These findings indicate that the measurement model demonstrates adequate reliability and convergent validity.

Test Results for the Structural

Model (Inner Model)

Table 5. Results of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Test

	EP	L-MX	WE
EP			
L-MX	1,918		1,000
WE	1,918		

Table 6. Results of the Coefficient of Determination Test (R²)

	R-square	R-square adjusted
EP	0,726	0,721
WE	0,479	0,474

The structural model was assessed using VIF and R² values. As shown in Table 5, the VIF values range from 1.000 to 1.918, which are below the threshold of 5.00. This indicates that multicollinearity does not pose a concern among the predictors in the structural model.

As presented in Table 6, the R² value for Work Engagement is 0.479, indicating that LMX explains 47.9% of the variance in Work Engagement. Meanwhile, the R² value for Employee Performance is 0.726, indicating that LMX and Work Engagement jointly explain 72.6% of the variance in Employee Performance. The remaining variance is attributable to other factors not included in the research model.

Bootstrapping Test Results

The significance of direct and indirect effects between the variables in the study model is assessed using the bootstrapping test. If the t-statistic value is higher than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05 at a 5% significance level, the hypothesis is deemed accepted.

Table 7: Path Coefficients Test Results

	β	SD	t-value	p-value
L-MX -> EP	0,273	0,107	2,542	0,011
L-MX -> WE	0,692	0,093	7,461	0,000
WE -> EP	0,640	0,104	6,162	0,000
L-MX -> WE -> EP	0,443	0,096	4,614	0,000
Total Effect L-MX -> EP	0,716	-	10,993	<0.001

Table 7 shows that Leader–Member Exchange has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.273$, $t = 2.542$, $p = 0.011$). LMX also has a positive and significant effect on Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.692$, $t = 7.461$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, Work Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.640$, $t = 6.162$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that all three hypothesized direct relationships are statistically supported. The analysis also shows a positive and significant indirect effect of LMX on Employee Performance through Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.443$, $t = 4.614$, $p < 0.001$). This result provides evidence that Work Engagement functions as an intervening mechanism in the relationship between LMX and Employee Performance. The specific type of mediation is further assessed based on the direct, indirect, and total effects.

Leader–Member Exchange's Impact on Employee Performance

The results show that Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.273$, $t = 2.542$, $p = 0.011$). This finding indicates that the quality of leader–subordinate relationships are associated with employee performance in the First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region. In this context, high-quality LMX may facilitate clearer work interactions, access to supervisory support, recognition of employee contributions, and trust in carrying out assigned responsibilities. These relational conditions can help employees understand expectations and perform their tasks more effectively.

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, the findings can be understood through the reciprocal nature of workplace relationships. When employees perceive constructive treatment from their leaders, such as support, trust, recognition, and assistance in solving work-related problems, they

may respond through positive work behaviors and greater contribution to organizational goals. Thus, LMX provides a relational mechanism through which interactions between supervisors and employees can be reflected in employee performance.

This finding is in line with previous studies by (Jufrizen et al., 2024), (Latifoglu et al., 2023), (Sa'adah & Rijanti, 2022), (Ülbeği & İplik, 2025) and (Zakiy, 2024) which reported a positive relationship between LMX and employee performance. In the context of First-Instance Courts, however, the finding is particularly relevant because employees perform within a formal public-sector structure in which coordination between supervisors and subordinates is required to ensure the effective completion of administrative and organizational responsibilities. The result therefore suggests that formal organizational structures do not eliminate the relevance of interpersonal exchange between leaders and employees.

The Leader–Member Exchange Impact on Work Engagement

The results show that Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) has a positive and significant effect on Work Engagement ($\beta = 0.692$, $t = 7.461$, $p <$

0.001). This finding indicates that the quality of the relationship between leaders and employees is associated with employees' level of work engagement in the First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region. High-quality LMX may provide employees with greater access to leader support, recognition, communication, trust, and assistance in dealing with work-related problems. These relational conditions can create a more supportive work environment in which employees are more willing to invest their energy, attention, and involvement in their work.

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, this relationship can be understood through the principle of reciprocity. When employees perceive that their leaders provide support, trust, recognition, and constructive assistance, they may respond by developing more positive attitudes and greater involvement in their work. In this context, LMX represents a form of social exchange that can contribute to employees' psychological engagement with their work. Thus, the relationship between leaders and employees is not limited to the completion of formal job responsibilities but may also shape how employees invest themselves in their work.

This finding is consistent with previous studies by (Mulligan et al., 2021), (Jufrizen et al., 2024), and (Zakiy, 2024), which reported a positive relationship between LMX and Work Engagement. The present finding extends this evidence to the context of First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region. In judicial organizations, employees operate within a formal and structured public-sector environment, where work responsibilities and procedures are clearly defined. Nevertheless, the results indicate that interpersonal exchanges between leaders and employees remain relevant to employees' engagement with their work.

The finding also suggests that improving Work Engagement cannot be viewed solely as an individual employee responsibility. The quality of leader-employee interactions may provide an important relational context for employees to develop stronger involvement in their work. Therefore, maintaining open communication, providing appropriate support, recognizing employee contributions, and building trust may help create working conditions that encourage employees to remain engaged in carrying out their responsibilities.

Work Engagement Impact on Employee Performance

The results show that Work Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.640$, $t = 6.162$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that employees with higher levels of work engagement tend to demonstrate better performance in the First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region. Work engagement reflects employees' psychological involvement in their work, which can be manifested through greater energy, dedication, and concentration when carrying out their responsibilities. Such involvement may encourage employees to devote greater effort and attention to completing their assigned tasks.

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, employees' engagement with their work can be viewed as part of a reciprocal process within the organization. When employees experience a supportive working environment and perceive positive treatment from the organization and its leaders, they may respond through greater involvement and contribution to their work. In this sense, Work Engagement represents an important psychological mechanism through which positive

workplace experiences can be translated into employee behavior and performance.

This finding is consistent with previous studies by (Hendrik et al., 2021), (Rabuana & Yanuar, 2023), (Lussa et al., 2023) and (Zakiy, 2024), which reported a positive relationship between Work Engagement and Employee Performance. The present study provides further evidence of this relationship in the context of First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region. Although employees work within a formal public-sector environment with established procedures and responsibilities, their level of psychological involvement in their work remains relevant to the achievement of individual performance.

The finding also has practical implications for employee management in the First-Instance Courts. Efforts to improve employee performance should therefore not focus solely on formal work procedures and task supervision but should also consider conditions that support employees' engagement with their work. Providing opportunities for employees to participate in their work, recognizing their contributions, maintaining supportive communication, and facilitating the completion of work responsibilities may help sustain Work

Engagement and, consequently, employee performance.

The Mediating Function of Work Engagement in the Association between Employee Performance and Leader-Member Exchange

The results indicate that Work Engagement mediates the relationship between Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Employee Performance. The direct effect of LMX on Employee Performance is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.273$, $t = 2.542$, $p = 0.011$), while the indirect effect of LMX on Employee Performance through Work Engagement is also positive and significant ($\beta = 0.443$, $t = 4.614$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the total effect of LMX on Employee Performance is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.716$, $t = 10.993$, $p < 0.001$). Because both the direct and indirect effects are significant and have the same positive direction, the mediation pattern is classified as complementary mediation.

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, this mediating relationship can be understood as a reciprocal process between leaders and employees. High-quality LMX provides employees with relational resources such as trust, support, recognition, communication, and assistance in

addressing work-related problems. These positive exchanges may encourage employees to become more engaged in their work. Greater Work Engagement, in turn, may encourage employees to invest more energy, dedication, and attention in carrying out their responsibilities, which can be reflected in their performance. Thus, Work Engagement provides an important mechanism through which the quality of leader–employee relationships are associated with Employee Performance.

The total effect of LMX on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.716$) indicates that the overall relationship between the two constructs remains positive and significant when both direct and indirect pathways are considered. The indirect effect through Work Engagement accounts for approximately 61.9% of the total effect based on the variance accounted for (VAF), indicating that Work Engagement represents an important pathway in the relationship between LMX and Employee Performance. Nevertheless, the significant direct effect indicates that LMX is also associated with Employee Performance through pathways that are not explained by Work Engagement.

This finding is particularly relevant in the context of First-Instance Courts in the

Serang Region. Employees work within a formal public-sector environment in which tasks, procedures, and responsibilities are structured. However, formal procedures do not fully capture the relational processes between leaders and employees. The results indicate that the quality of leader–employee relationships may contribute to employee performance both directly and by fostering employees' engagement with their work.

The findings also have managerial implications for the First-Instance Courts. Efforts to improve Employee Performance may therefore consider both the quality of LMX and the conditions that foster Work Engagement. Leaders can support this process through constructive communication, recognition of employee contributions, trust, assistance in solving work-related problems, and opportunities for employees to participate in work activities. Such practices may strengthen the relational exchange between leaders and employees while also supporting employees' engagement in carrying out their responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between Leader–Member Exchange (LMX), Work Engagement, and

Employee Performance in First-Instance Courts in the Serang Region. The findings show that LMX has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance and Work Engagement. Work Engagement also has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance. Furthermore, Work Engagement mediates the relationship between LMX and Employee Performance through a complementary mediation pattern, as indicated by the significant positive direct and indirect effects. The findings provide theoretical implications for the application of Social Exchange Theory in explaining the relationship between leader–employee interactions and employee outcomes in a public-sector judicial context. The results indicate that the relationship between leaders and employees is associated with Employee Performance both directly and through Work Engagement as an intervening mechanism. This finding highlights the relevance of considering employees’ psychological engagement when examining how leader–employee relationships are associated with performance. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that efforts to support Employee Performance in First-Instance Courts should consider

both the quality of leader–employee relationships and employees’ Work Engagement.

Constructive communication, leader support, recognition of employee contributions, trust, and opportunities for employee participation may help create relational conditions that support Work Engagement and Employee Performance. This study has several limitations. First, the analysis was based on 120 usable questionnaire responses from First-Instance Courts in one geographical region, namely the Serang Region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other judicial institutions or public-sector organizations. Second, the study used cross-sectional questionnaire data, which limits the ability to draw conclusions regarding changes in the relationships among LMX, Work Engagement, and Employee Performance over time. Future research could therefore examine a broader range of judicial or public-sector institutions and use larger samples or longitudinal designs to further examine the relationships identified in this study. Future studies may also consider additional variables that could help explain Employee Performance beyond the relationships examined in the present model.

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