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The Influence of Leadership Style and Incentive Systems on Employee Performance in Muslim Fashion Retail: Evidence from Rabbani Stores in Cirebon City

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Abstract: This study examines the influence of leadership style and incentive systems on employee performance from a management perspective. A quantitative survey approach was employed, with data collected through structured questionnaires distributed to employees. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to assess the partial and simultaneous effects of leadership style and incentive systems on employee performance. Instrument validity, reliability, and classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure the robustness of the model. The results reveal that leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, indicating that effective leadership practices such as providing clear direction, fairness, and motivation enhance employee outcomes. Incentive systems also demonstrate a positive and significant influence on performance, emphasizing the role of fair, transparent, and performance-based rewards in motivating employees. Moreover, leadership style and incentive systems jointly explain a substantial proportion of the variance in employee performance, suggesting their complementary role in performance management. These findings imply that organizations should adopt an integrated strategy by strengthening leadership effectiveness and aligning incentive systems with performance goals to enhance productivity and organizational sustainability. This study contributes to the human resource management literature by providing empirical evidence on the combined impact of leadership and incentives on employee performance.

Kata Kunci:
Gaya kepemimpinan; sistem insentif; kinerja karyawan; manajemen sumber daya manusia; kinerja organisasi

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Abstrak: *Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh gaya kepemimpinan dan sistem insentif terhadap kinerja karyawan dari perspektif manajemen. Pendekatan survei kuantitatif digunakan, dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang disebarkan kepada karyawan. Data dianalisis menggunakan regresi linier berganda untuk menilai pengaruh parsial dan simultan dari gaya kepemimpinan dan sistem insentif terhadap kinerja karyawan. Uji validitas instrumen, reliabilitas, dan asumsi klasik dilakukan untuk memastikan ketahanan model. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa gaya kepemimpinan memiliki pengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja karyawan, yang mengindikasikan bahwa praktik kepemimpinan yang efektif seperti pemberian arahan yang jelas, keadilan, dan motivasi dapat meningkatkan hasil kerja karyawan. Sistem insentif juga menunjukkan* *pengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja, yang menegaskan peran penghargaan yang adil, transparan, dan berbasis kinerja dalam memotivasi karyawan. Selain itu, gaya kepemimpinan dan sistem insentif secara bersama-sama menjelaskan proporsi varians yang substansial dalam kinerja karyawan, yang mengisyaratkan peran saling melengkapi di antara keduanya dalam manajemen kinerja. Temuan ini menyiratkan bahwa organisasi sebaiknya mengadopsi strategi terintegrasi dengan memperkuat efektivitas kepemimpinan dan menyelaraskan sistem insentif dengan tujuan kinerja guna meningkatkan produktivitas serta keberlanjutan organisasi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur manajemen sumber daya manusia dengan menyajikan bukti empiris mengenai dampak gabungan antara kepemimpinan dan insentif terhadap kinerja karyawan.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the retail sector in emerging economies has experienced a sustained decline in organizational performance, as reflected in preliminary internal indicators such as a reduction in the number of operating outlets, declining sales target achievement, and increasing employee absenteeism. Internal company data from mid-sized retail firms indicate that the number of active outlets decreased by nearly 20% between 2021 and 2023, while average monthly sales target achievement fell from above 90% to below 80%. This decline was accompanied by a noticeable increase in employee absenteeism, which signals weakening engagement, motivation, and work discipline. Although external pressures such as post-pandemic economic uncertainty, changing consumer behavior, and rising operational costs have affected retail performance, these factors alone do not fully explain the persistence and depth of performance deterioration observed at the organizational level.

This condition highlights a critical internal organizational phenomenon, namely the declining effectiveness of leadership practices and compensation systems in motivating employees and sustaining performance. In the retail sector, employee performance is closely tied to service quality, customer satisfaction, and sales outcomes, making leadership behavior and reward structures particularly influential. However, despite the presence of formal performance targets and incentive schemes, many retail organizations continue to experience productivity losses and employee withdrawal behaviors. This suggests that leadership styles may not be effectively aligned with employee expectations or that compensation mechanisms may not be perceived as fair, motivating, or performance-driven. As a result, the interaction between leadership and compensation emerges as a key issue in understanding employee performance decline in the contemporary retail environment.

Extant literature consistently demonstrates that leadership styles play a significant role in shaping employee attitudes and performance outcomes. Transformational leadership has been shown to enhance innovative work behavior and employee performance by fostering vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration (Afsar et al., 2021; Nugroho, 2024). Similarly, servant and ethical leadership styles emphasize trust, moral integrity, and employee well-being, which positively influence commitment and performance (Miao et al., 2021; Yasir et al., 2021). Broader leadership frameworks also confirm that effective leadership is strongly associated with organizational commitment and overall performance, particularly when supported by appropriate human resource practices (Alrowwad et al., 2022; Siengthai & Pila-Ngarm, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). These findings collectively establish leadership as a central determinant of employee performance across organizational contexts.

However, a critical limitation of prior leadership–performance research lies in its contextual focus. Many empirical studies have been conducted in manufacturing, public-sector, or generalized service industries, with limited attention to the retail sector, which is characterized by high labor intensity, frontline service demands, and strong dependence on employee behavior for organizational success (Decuypere et al., 2020; Endrawati et al., 2023). Moreover, a substantial proportion of leadership research is situated in Western or developed-country contexts, where cultural characteristics such as power distance, individualism, and reward expectations differ considerably from those in emerging economies (Nguyen et al., 2022; Suifan et al., 2021).

These contextual differences raise concerns regarding the generalizability of existing findings to retail organizations operating in emerging-market environments.

In parallel, research on compensation and incentive systems has consistently shown that financial and non-financial rewards play a vital role in motivating employees and enhancing performance (Ghaffari et al., 2021; Torlak et al., 2021; Riyanto et al., 2021). Empirical studies confirm that fair compensation, incentives, and rewards positively influence productivity and work outcomes across various sectors (Utami & Nugraheni, 2022; Hanifah, 2024; Kusumo, 2024). Nevertheless, compensation is often examined as an independent predictor of performance, with limited consideration of how leadership styles influence employees' perceptions of reward fairness, motivational value, and performance relevance (Asbari et al., 2021; Mulyani & Sukatno, 2023). As a result, existing literature provides an incomplete explanation of how leadership and compensation jointly shape employee performance.

Another important limitation of prior studies is their reliance on pre-pandemic data, which may not adequately capture changes in employee expectations, job insecurity, and leadership challenges in the post-COVID-19 workplace (Purwanto et al., 2021). The pandemic has altered employment relationships, increased performance pressures, and reshaped employees' views on leadership support and compensation adequacy, particularly in the retail sector. Consequently, there is a need for updated empirical evidence that reflects the post-pandemic organizational context.

Therefore, this study is positioned to address these gaps by integrating leadership style and compensation within a unified analytical framework to explain employee performance in the retail sector of an emerging-market, post-pandemic context. By focusing on a sector and context that remain underrepresented in leadership research, this study aims to extend existing leadership and performance theories while providing practical insights for retail managers seeking to improve employee performance and organizational sustainability.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the relationships and directional effects between leadership style, incentive systems, and employee performance. The research was conducted at Rabbani stores in Cirebon City, with employees serving as the unit of analysis. Given the relatively limited population size and the manageable number of employees across all Rabbani outlets in Cirebon City, this study applied a total sampling technique, in which all 30 employees were included as research respondents. The use of total sampling was considered methodologically appropriate to minimize sampling bias and to ensure that the findings accurately represent the entire population of employees within the research object, particularly in the context of a limited branch population.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed directly to respondents, while secondary data were obtained from internal company records and relevant organizational documentation to support the analysis. Data collection was conducted using a survey method with a Likert-scale instrument designed to measure leadership style, incentive provision, and employee performance. Leadership style and incentive provision were treated as independent variables, whereas employee performance was positioned as the dependent variable. The measurement items were adapted to the retail context and structured to capture respondents' perceptions consistently and comprehensively.

Prior to hypothesis testing, data quality was assessed through validity and reliability testing to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the measurement instruments. Item validity was evaluated using correlation analysis, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. To ensure that the regression model met the assumptions required for multiple linear regression analysis, classical assumption tests were conducted. These included a normality test to examine whether the regression residuals were normally distributed, a multicollinearity test to ensure that independent variables were not highly correlated, and a heteroscedasticity test to verify the homogeneity of variance in the regression residuals. Meeting these assumptions was necessary to ensure the reliability and robustness of the regression results.

Data analysis involved descriptive statistical techniques to describe respondent characteristics and the general condition of each research variable, followed by inferential statistical analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to examine both the partial and simultaneous effects of leadership style and incentive provision on employee performance. All statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to enhance methodological transparency, accuracy, and replicability. The analytical results were interpreted to determine the direction and strength of relationships among variables in accordance with the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings obtained from the analysis of primary data collected from respondents. The results are organized to describe respondent characteristics, instrument reliability, classical assumption testing, and regression analysis in order to address the research objectives.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics Based on Demographic Variables

Characteristics	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	18	60.0
	Female	12	40.0
Age	≤ 25 years	6	20.0
	26–35 years	14	46.7
	> 35 years	10	33.3
Education Level	Senior High School	9	30.0
	Diploma/Bachelor	21	70.0
Length of Work	≤ 3 years	11	36.7
	> 3 years	19	63.3

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that male employees dominate the respondent composition, accounting for 60.0% of the total sample. In terms of age distribution, most respondents are within the 26–35 year age group, reflecting a workforce largely composed of individuals in their productive years. This condition suggests that employees possess adequate physical capacity and adaptability to organizational demands. From an educational perspective, the majority of respondents have completed diploma or bachelor-level education, indicating a relatively strong educational foundation among employees. In addition, more than half of the respondents have worked for over three years, suggesting substantial organizational experience. This experience allows respondents to provide informed evaluations of leadership practices and incentive systems, forming a reliable basis for subsequent statistical analysis.

Table 2. Instrument Reliability Test Results

Variable	**Number of Items**	**Cronbach's Alpha**	**Remark**
Leadership Style (X1)	9	> 0.80	Reliable
Incentive System (X2)	8	> 0.70	Reliable
Employee Performance (Y)	13	> 0.85	Highly Reliable

As shown in Table 2, all variables demonstrate satisfactory reliability levels. The leadership style variable exhibits strong internal consistency, while the incentive system variable also meets the minimum reliability threshold. Employee performance shows the highest reliability coefficient, indicating that the measurement items consistently capture variations in employee performance. These results confirm that the research instruments are dependable and suitable for further analysis. Consequently, the study proceeds to classical assumption testing to ensure that the data meet the requirements for regression analysis.

Table 3. Normality Test Results

Variable	Sig.	Remark
Leadership Style (X1)	> 0.05	Normal
Incentive System (X2)	> 0.05	Normal
Employee Performance (Y)	> 0.05	Normal

The normality test results in Table 3 indicate that all variables have significance values exceeding 0.05, confirming that the data are normally distributed. This finding supports the use of parametric statistical techniques and indicates that the regression model can be appropriately applied.

Table 4. Multicollinearity Test Results

Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Remark
Leadership Style (X1)	> 0.10	< 10	No Multicollinearity
Incentive System (X2)	> 0.10	< 10	No Multicollinearity

Table 4 shows that the tolerance and VIF values fall within acceptable ranges, indicating the absence of multicollinearity between independent variables. This result confirms that leadership style and incentive system can be analyzed simultaneously without bias in the regression model.

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Results

Variable	B	t-value	Sig.
Constant	5.214	2.832	0.011
Leadership Style (X1)	0.432	3.429	0.003
Incentive System (X2)	0.387	3.278	0.004

The regression analysis results presented in Table 5 indicate that both leadership style and incentive system have positive and significant effects on employee performance. Leadership style shows a slightly stronger coefficient, suggesting a greater contribution to performance improvement compared to the incentive system. The significance values below 0.05 confirm that each independent variable individually influences employee performance. These findings provide empirical support for the proposed research model.

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2
0.872	0.760	0.732

Table 6 shows that the adjusted R^2 value indicates that 73.2% of the variance in employee performance is explained by leadership style and incentive system variables. This result demonstrates the strong explanatory power of the model, while the remaining variance may be influenced by other factors not examined in this study.

Discussion on Leadership Style, Incentive Systems, and Employee Performance from a Management Perspective

The results of this study confirm that leadership style and incentive systems are managerial instruments that play a decisive role in shaping employee performance. From a management perspective, leadership functions as a mechanism of direction, coordination, and control that aligns individual behavior with organizational objectives. Leaders who demonstrate clarity in task assignment, fairness in decision-making, and concern for employees' well-being contribute to the creation of a productive work climate that supports performance achievement. This finding aligns with management behavior theory, which emphasizes that leadership effectiveness is reflected in the leader's ability to translate organizational goals into actionable employee behavior (Robbins & Judge, 2021; Saleem et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022).

In human resource management, leadership style is not only viewed as an individual trait but also as a strategic managerial capability that influences motivation, commitment, and work engagement. Transformational, ethical, and servant leadership styles have been shown to strengthen employees' psychological attachment to their work, thereby enhancing performance outcomes. Leaders who inspire, empower, and act ethically foster trust and intrinsic motivation, which are critical for sustaining performance in service-oriented organizations (Afsar et al., 2021; Miao et al., 2021; Yasir et al., 2021). This study supports previous empirical evidence indicating that leadership effectiveness in management contexts is strongly associated with employees' perception of fairness, support, and interpersonal quality (Goleman, 2020; Alrowwad et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022).

In addition to leadership, incentive systems represent a core component of performance management within organizations. From a managerial standpoint, incentives function as formal control mechanisms designed to reinforce desired behaviors and outcomes. The findings demonstrate that transparent, performance-based, and equitable incentive systems positively influence employee performance by strengthening the perceived link between effort and reward. This supports expectancy and reinforcement perspectives in management theory, which argue that employees allocate effort based on the perceived value and attainability of rewards (Ghaffari et al., 2021; Torlak et al., 2021; Riyanto et al., 2021). Well-managed compensation structures therefore serve not only as motivators but also as tools for aligning individual performance with organizational strategy (Saniuk et al., 2021; Utami & Nugraheni, 2022).

However, the results also suggest that employee performance is not determined solely by leadership style and incentive systems. Management literature indicates that performance outcomes are often influenced by additional factors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation, and work environment. Several studies have shown that leadership and compensation frequently affect performance indirectly through these intervening variables (Asbari et al., 2021; Pawirosumarto et al., 2021; Nugroho, 2024; Kusumo, 2024). This implies that while leadership and incentives are key managerial drivers, their effectiveness may be strengthened or weakened depending on how they interact with other human resource practices and employee perceptions (Siengthai & Pila-Ngarm, 2022).

Overall, this study reinforces the managerial view that employee performance is the result of an integrated management system rather than isolated practices. Leadership style shapes the social and psychological work environment, while incentive systems provide formal motivation and performance reinforcement. When these two elements are aligned, organizations are more likely to achieve sustainable performance outcomes. These findings are consistent with prior studies in retail and service contexts, which emphasize that leadership credibility enhances the effectiveness of incentive systems, and fair incentives strengthen employees' acceptance of managerial authority (Purwanto et al., 2021; Mulyani & Sukatno, 2023; Endrawati et al., 2023; Hanifah, 2024). From a management perspective, this integration is essential for designing effective human resource strategies that support both organizational performance and long-term competitiveness.

Managerial Implications of Leadership and Incentive Alignment

From a management perspective, the alignment between leadership style and incentive systems represents a critical strategic issue in human resource management. Leadership determines how policies are interpreted and implemented at the operational level, while incentive systems formalize management expectations into measurable performance outcomes. When leadership behaviors are consistent with incentive structures, employees are more likely to perceive managerial decisions as legitimate and fair, which enhances compliance and discretionary effort. Empirical evidence suggests that leadership credibility strengthens the motivational impact of compensation systems, particularly in service and retail organizations where employee–customer interaction is intensive (Endrawati et al., 2023; Ghaffari et al., 2021; Torlak et al., 2021).

Effective leaders play a central role in translating incentive policies into daily work practices. Incentives that are not clearly communicated or inconsistently applied may lose their motivational power, regardless of their monetary value. (Decuypere et al., 2020). Leadership behaviors such as clarity, transparency, and consistency are therefore essential managerial competencies in performance management. Previous studies indicate that leadership clarity and fairness significantly enhance employees' acceptance of reward systems and performance evaluation mechanisms (Robbins & Judge, 2021; Alrowwad et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). This finding highlights that incentive effectiveness is contingent upon leadership quality rather than being an independent managerial tool.

From a strategic management standpoint, incentive systems should be designed as part of an integrated performance management framework rather than isolated compensation practices. Financial incentives, recognition, and promotion opportunities must reflect organizational values and performance priorities. Research has shown that incentive systems aligned with organizational strategy contribute to sustainable performance and reduce dysfunctional behaviors such as goal displacement or short-termism (Saniuk et al., 2021; Riyanto et al., 2021; Utami & Nugraheni, 2022). Leadership plays a decisive role in ensuring that such alignment is maintained over time through consistent supervision and feedback.

Furthermore, the interaction between leadership style and incentive systems influences employees' perceptions of organizational justice. Perceived fairness in both leadership behavior and reward distribution has been consistently associated with higher levels of trust, commitment, and performance. Ethical and transformational leadership styles, in particular, strengthen distributive and procedural justice perceptions, which enhance the motivational effect of incentives (Afsar et al., 2021; Yasir et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022). This suggests that managerial efforts to improve performance should simultaneously address behavioral leadership dimensions and formal reward structures.

In the context of contemporary human resource management, the findings imply that organizations should invest not only in competitive incentive schemes but also in leadership development programs. Training leaders to manage performance, communicate expectations, and apply incentives fairly can significantly enhance organizational effectiveness. This integrated approach is consistent with modern management theories that view leadership and compensation as complementary systems rather than separate managerial functions (Goleman, 2020; Siengthai & Pila-Ngarm, 2022; Hanifah, 2024).

Potential Mediating and Moderating Factors in Employee Performance Management

While this study focuses on leadership style and incentive systems as primary determinants of employee performance, management literature suggests that performance outcomes are often influenced by additional mediating and moderating variables. Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation, and work engagement are frequently identified as mechanisms through which leadership and compensation affect performance. Several empirical studies indicate that leadership behaviors enhance performance indirectly by increasing employee satisfaction and emotional attachment to the organization (Asbari et al., 2021; Nugroho, 2024; Kusumo, 2024). This suggests that leadership effectiveness may operate through psychological and attitudinal processes rather than direct behavioral control alone.

Incentive systems may also exert their influence on performance through motivational pathways. Employees' perceptions of reward fairness and adequacy shape their willingness to exert effort and maintain performance consistency. When incentives are perceived as inequitable or unclear, their motivational effect diminishes, regardless of their nominal value. Previous research demonstrates that compensation systems influence performance through expectancy and equity perceptions, which function as mediating mechanisms in performance management (Ghaffari et al., 2021; Riyanto et al., 2021; Torlak et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of employees' subjective interpretations of management practices.

Moreover, organizational context may moderate the relationship between leadership, incentives, and performance. Factors such as organizational culture, work environment, and sector characteristics can strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of managerial interventions. Studies conducted in retail and service industries indicate that leadership and incentive effects on performance are more pronounced in environments characterized by high customer interaction and performance visibility (Purwanto et al., 2021; Endrawati et al., 2023; Hanifah, 2024). This suggests that management strategies should be adapted to contextual conditions rather than universally applied.

The Covid-19 period and its aftermath have further highlighted the role of contextual variables in performance management. Changes in work arrangements, job insecurity, and performance pressures may alter how employees respond to leadership and incentives. Research during and after the pandemic indicates that supportive leadership and fair compensation systems are particularly critical in maintaining performance under uncertain conditions (Purwanto et al., 2021; Saniuk et al., 2021). This underscores the need for adaptive management practices that consider both structural and psychological employee needs.

In summary, although leadership style and incentive systems are key managerial drivers of employee performance, their effectiveness is shaped by a broader system of human resource practices and organizational conditions. Future management-oriented research may benefit from incorporating mediating and moderating variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of performance dynamics. Such an approach is consistent with contemporary human resource management theory, which conceptualizes performance as the outcome of complex interactions between leadership, motivation, rewards, and organizational context (Robbins & Judge, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022; Siengthai & Pila-Ngarm, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that leadership style and incentive systems play an important role in shaping employee performance in the post-pandemic Muslim fashion retail context. Effective leadership improves work direction, discipline, and motivation, while clear and performance-based incentive systems encourage employees to maintain productivity. Among the examined variables, leadership style appears to have a more dominant influence, as it directly guides employee behavior and strengthens the effectiveness of incentive mechanisms. These findings suggest that aligning leadership practices with incentive systems is essential for improving employee performance in competitive and service-oriented retail organizations.

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