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Psychological Capital as a Mediator between Empowering Leadership and Employee Adaptive Performance: Evidence from General Election Commission Employees in West Sumatera

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between empowering leadership and employee adaptive performance by positioning psychological capital as the mediating mechanism among employees of the General Election Commission (KPU) at the provincial and regency/city levels across West Sumatra. This article is a revised, more parsimonious model derived from a broader study, retaining psychological capital as the sole mediator and setting aside employee agility. A quantitative survey approach was employed, involving 228 employees selected from 20 KPU work units throughout the province. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). The results show that empowering leadership does not have a statistically significant direct effect on employee adaptive performance ($\beta = 0.300$; $t = 1.872$; $p = 0.062$). However, empowering leadership significantly and strongly influences psychological capital ($\beta = 0.831$; $t = 17.709$; $p < 0.001$), and psychological capital in turn significantly influences employee adaptive performance ($\beta = 0.355$; $t = 2.172$; $p = 0.030$). The specific indirect effect of empowering leadership on employee adaptive performance through psychological capital is significant ($\beta = 0.295$; $t = 2.267$; $p = 0.024$), indicating full (indirect-only) mediation. These findings suggest that empowering leadership improves KPU employees' adaptive performance primarily by strengthening their psychological resources rather than through a direct behavioral pathway.

Keywords: Empowering Leadership, Employee Agility, Psychological Capital, Adaptive Performance

Indonesian Abstract: Penelitian ini menguji hubungan antara empowering leadership dan kinerja adaptif pegawai dengan memosisikan modal psikologis sebagai mekanisme mediasi pada pegawai Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) Provinsi dan Kabupaten/Kota se-Sumatera Barat. Artikel ini merupakan revisi model yang lebih ringkas dari penelitian sebelumnya, dengan hanya mempertahankan modal psikologis sebagai mediator dan mengesampingkan employee agility. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode survei terhadap 228 pegawai dari 20 satuan kerja KPU di seluruh provinsi. Data dianalisis menggunakan Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa empowering leadership tidak berpengaruh signifikan secara

langsung terhadap kinerja adaptif pegawai ($\beta = 0,300$; $t = 1,872$; $p = 0,062$). Namun, empowering leadership berpengaruh positif dan sangat kuat terhadap modal psikologis ($\beta = 0,831$; $t = 17,709$; $p < 0,001$), dan modal psikologis selanjutnya berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kinerja adaptif pegawai ($\beta = 0,355$; $t = 2,172$; $p = 0,030$). Efek tidak langsung empowering leadership terhadap kinerja adaptif pegawai melalui modal psikologis juga signifikan ($\beta = 0,295$; $t = 2,267$; $p = 0,024$), yang mengindikasikan mediasi penuh (indirect-only). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa empowering leadership meningkatkan kinerja adaptif pegawai KPU terutama melalui penguatan sumber daya psikologis mereka, bukan melalui jalur perilaku langsung.

Keywords: *Empowering Leadership, Modal Psikologis, Kinerja Adaptif Pegawai.*

INTRODUCTION

The role of the General Election Commission (KPU) extends well beyond administrative duties; it also entails safeguarding the integrity of the democratic process and maintaining public trust. The KPU operates in a highly dynamic environment, as election administration involves multiple stages, evolving regulations, and shifting political interests. These dynamics require the KPU to perform its duties independently, non-partisanly, professionally, and with integrity so that elections are conducted fairly and honestly (Nengsih, 2019). Consequently, KPU staff must possess a high level of work readiness in order to adapt to changing regulations, tight time constraints, and increasingly demanding public-service expectations.

KPU staff are expected to work in accordance with regulations, understand changes in election policy, manage voter data, and support every stage of the electoral process, from candidate nomination through the provision of public information services. In practice, workloads and work-related pressures tend to intensify at each stage of an election, while regulatory changes, advances in election-related information technology, inter-regional coordination, and rising public-service demands require KPU staff to display a high level of adaptability so that they continue to work effectively, punctually, and accurately.

These conditions make employee adaptive performance a crucial variable in this study. Employee adaptive performance refers to an employee's ability to adjust their mindset, behavior, and work methods when facing changes in tasks, procedures, technology, and uncertain working conditions (Pulakos et al., 2000). This capability is increasingly vital because organizational success depends not only on an employee's ability to complete routine tasks, but also on their capacity to handle change, learn new procedures, solve problems flexibly, and remain effective under high-pressure work situations (Marshela, 2025). Preliminary observations within the Provincial and Regency/City KPU offices across West Sumatra indicate that not all employees have adapted successfully to shifting tasks and work patterns; some appear unprepared to handle procedural changes, new task allocations, or sudden increases in workload, a condition that can affect the speed of task completion, the quality of inter-employee coordination, and the accuracy of electoral-stage execution.

One factor believed to influence employee adaptive performance is empowering leadership. Empowering leadership is a style in which leaders share authority with employees, strengthen intrinsic motivation, and foster employees' belief in the importance of their work and in their own capability to complete tasks (Kim & Yoon, 2025). Leaders who empower employees tend to provide opportunities for participation as well as trust, support, and work autonomy. Such conditions can encourage employees to take initiative, adapt to change, and seek solutions to work-related problems. Nevertheless, the influence of empowering leadership on employee adaptive performance is not always direct; it is often

argued that leadership behavior must first be translated into an employee's internal psychological readiness before it can generate adaptive work behavior.

This is where psychological capital becomes theoretically important. Psychological capital is a positive psychological resource comprising self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, and it is developable rather than fixed (Luthans et al., 2006). Employees with strong psychological capital tend to be more confident, more optimistic, better able to sustain effort, and more capable of persevering under high-pressure work conditions (Triccia & Satiningsih, 2020). Because election-related tasks routinely involve time pressure and stringent accuracy requirements, psychological capital is expected to help employees maintain adaptive performance even when work conditions change unexpectedly. Prior studies also indicate that psychological capital can function as a mechanism that connects positive leadership behavior with employee performance outcomes (Hariani & Darmawan, 2025).

This article is a deliberately parsimonious revision of a broader study that originally examined both employee agility and psychological capital as parallel mediators between empowering leadership and employee adaptive performance. In that broader model, employee agility — not psychological capital — emerged as the effective transmission mechanism. The present article isolates the psychological pathway on its own terms, re-estimating the model with empowering leadership, psychological capital, and employee adaptive performance only. Focusing the model in this way allows a clearer, more direct test of whether strengthening employees' internal psychological resources is, by itself, a sufficient channel through which empowering leadership translates into adaptive employee behavior, without the explanatory power of the behavioral (agility) pathway competing for variance in the same model.

The novelty of this study also lies in its research setting. Most research on empowering leadership, psychological capital, and employee adaptive performance has predominantly focused on the business, industrial, educational, or healthcare sectors. Studies involving election-management bodies remain relatively limited, even though the KPU is a public organization that faces high work pressure, frequent regulatory change, demands for accuracy, extensive use of election-related information technology, and strict requirements for public accountability. Examining the psychological mechanism linking leadership and adaptive performance within this setting therefore contributes both theoretically, by testing Social Cognitive Theory's proposition that behavior emerges through the interaction of environmental conditions and personal psychological resources, and practically, by informing how KPU leadership might be directed to strengthen employees' capacity to respond to a continuously changing electoral environment.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Social Cognitive Theory provides the principal theoretical foundation for this model. The theory views human functioning as the product of reciprocal interactions among environmental conditions, personal factors, and behavior (Bandura, 1986). Employees are not passive recipients of organizational conditions; they interpret environmental cues, evaluate their own capabilities, regulate their actions, and learn from experience (Bandura, 1977). In this study, empowering leadership represents an important environmental condition, psychological capital represents a positive personal resource, and employee adaptive performance represents the resulting behavioral outcome. This framing implies that leadership may affect performance through an intermediate cognitive-psychological process rather than through a simple, direct stimulus-response relationship.

Empowering leadership can theoretically increase employee adaptive performance directly because autonomy, participation, trust, and meaningful work allow employees to exercise discretion and respond to changing circumstances on their own initiative. Employees

who are given latitude in deciding how tasks are accomplished may be more willing to revise routines, solve problems, and take the initiative when standard approaches no longer suffice. Empirical research has often reported a positive relationship between empowering leadership and employee adaptive performance (Kim & Yoon, 2025). Accordingly, the first hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Empowering leadership has a positive effect on employee adaptive performance.

A similar but distinct logic applies to psychological capital. When leaders communicate confidence, involve employees in decision-making, provide meaningful responsibility, and allow autonomy, employees receive mastery opportunities and supportive social cues that can strengthen self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Psychological capital is developable rather than fixed, and positive organizational and leadership conditions can facilitate its formation (Luthans et al., 2006). Empowering leadership has therefore been theorized and empirically linked to employees' positive psychological resources.

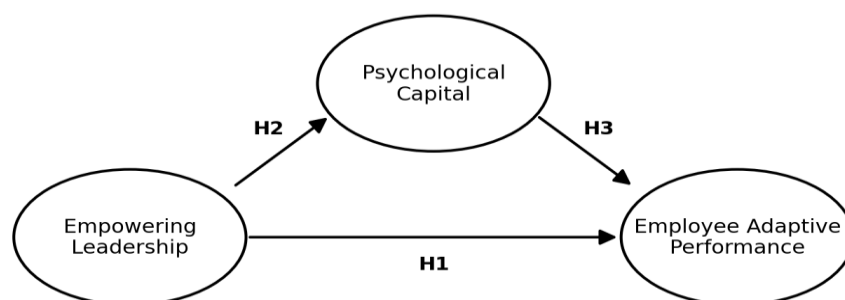
H2: Empowering leadership has a positive effect on psychological capital.

Psychological capital is, in turn, expected to contribute to employee adaptive performance, because employees with stronger self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience are better equipped to persist under pressure, maintain confidence when familiar routines fail, and recover quickly from setbacks. Prior studies have found positive links between psychological capital and employee performance outcomes in public-sector and service-oriented contexts (Hariani & Darmawan, 2025; Triccia & Satiningsih, 2020).

H3: Psychological capital has a positive effect on employee adaptive performance.

The mediating hypothesis follows directly from H2 and H3: if empowering leadership strengthens psychological capital, and psychological capital in turn supports adaptive performance, then psychological capital should carry at least part of the influence of empowering leadership on employee adaptive performance. Consistent with contemporary mediation analysis, significance of mediation is assessed based on the significance of the indirect effect itself rather than requiring a significant total or direct effect as a precondition (Zhao et al., 2010).

H4: Psychological capital mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and employee adaptive performance.



H4: Empowering Leadership → Psychological Capital → Employee Adaptive Performance

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODS

This research employed a quantitative approach using a survey method. Data were collected through a questionnaire technique, in which a set of written statements was administered to respondents who answered based on their actual circumstances (Sugiyono, 2023). The questionnaire used a closed-ended format, with each statement accompanied by response options on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (score 1) to "Strongly Agree" (score 5). Empowering leadership, psychological capital, and employee adaptive performance were each measured with multi-item reflective indicators adapted from established scales used in the broader thesis on which this article is based.

The population comprised employees of the Provincial and Regency/City General Election Commissions across West Sumatra. Questionnaires were distributed using two simultaneous methods: in person (offline) to KPU work units that were physically accessible, and online via a Google Forms link shared through employee WhatsApp groups. The two approaches were implemented in parallel to maximize reach and response rate, given that respondents were spread across 20 work units throughout the province. Of 313 questionnaires distributed, 228 complete and valid responses were returned and used in the analysis, corresponding to a response rate of 72.84 percent.

Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS), which is well suited to models involving latent constructs measured by multiple reflective indicators and to prediction-oriented research (Hair et al., 2022). The measurement model was evaluated for internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE), and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross-loadings, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio, HTMT). The structural model was evaluated for collinearity, the significance and relevance of path coefficients using a bootstrapping procedure with 500 resamples, the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the endogenous constructs, and effect size (f^2). Mediation was tested through the specific indirect effect of empowering leadership on employee adaptive performance via psychological capital, following the approach of Zhao et al. (2010), which classifies mediation patterns according to the joint significance of the direct and indirect effects rather than the earlier causal-steps approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Response Rate and Respondent Profile

All 228 valid responses were included in the PLS-SEM analysis. The sample was predominantly male (61.4%), and the largest age group was 41–50 years (37.3%), followed by 31–40 years (34.6%). More than half of respondents held a bachelor's degree (52.6%), while 21.5% held a master's degree. The largest tenure category was 16–20 years (36.4%), indicating substantial organizational experience, and the largest job category was staff/implementing personnel (42.1%). This distribution provides representation across demographic profiles, organizational units, and job levels.

Table 1. Survey Response Rate

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires distributed	313	100.00%
Questionnaires not returned	85	27.16%
Complete questionnaires returned and analyzed	228	72.84%

Source: Processed survey data (2026).

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
Gender	Male	140 (61.4%)
	Female	88 (38.6%)
Age	17–30 years	50 (21.9%)
	31–40 years	79 (34.6%)
	41–50 years	85 (37.3%)
	51–60 years	14 (6.1%)
	>60 years	1 (0.4%)
Education	Senior high school / vocational	36 (15.8%)
	Diploma III	23 (10.1%)
	Bachelor's degree	120 (52.6%)
	Master's degree	49 (21.5%)
Tenure	1–5 years	67 (29.4%)
	6–10 years	26 (11.4%)
	11–15 years	31 (13.6%)
	16–20 years	83 (36.4%)
	21–25 years	15 (6.6%)
	26–30 years	5 (2.2%)
	>30 years	1 (0.4%)
Position	Staff / implementing personnel	96 (42.1%)
	First expert / skilled	76 (33.3%)
	Echelon IV / junior expert	50 (21.9%)
	Echelon III / associate expert	6 (2.6%)

Source: Processed survey data (2026).

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability and convergent validity for all three constructs. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.961 to 0.987, rho_A ranged from 0.963 to 0.988, composite reliability ranged from 0.964 to 0.988, and average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.630 to 0.849, all exceeding the conventional thresholds of 0.70 for reliability and 0.50 for AVE. These results support the internal consistency and convergent validity of empowering leadership, psychological capital, and employee adaptive performance.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Empowering Leadership	0.964	0.966	0.969	0.759
Psychological Capital	0.987	0.988	0.988	0.849
Employee Adaptive Performance	0.961	0.963	0.964	0.630

Source: SmartPLS output (2026).

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Under the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of

each construct's AVE (shown on the diagonal in Table 4) exceeded its correlations with the other constructs, indicating that each construct shared more variance with its own indicators than with the other constructs in the model.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	Employee Adaptive Performance	Empowering Leadership	Psychological Capital
Employee Adaptive Performance	0.793		
Empowering Leadership	0.595	0.871	
Psychological Capital	0.605	0.831	0.921

Source: SmartPLS output (2026). Diagonal values are the square roots of AVE.

Item-level cross-loadings further confirmed discriminant validity: every retained indicator loaded most strongly on its assigned construct. The indicators of empowering leadership (EL1–EL10) loaded highest on Empowering Leadership; the indicators of psychological capital (MP1–MP16, retaining the original instrument coding) loaded highest on Psychological Capital; and the indicators of employee adaptive performance (KA1–KA18, retaining the original instrument coding) loaded highest on Employee Adaptive Performance, supporting the empirical distinctiveness of the three constructs.

Table 5. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	Employee Adaptive Performance	Empowering Leadership	Psychological Capital
Employee Adaptive Performance			
Empowering Leadership	0.614		
Psychological Capital	0.614	0.849	

Source: SmartPLS output (2026).

All HTMT values remained below the conservative threshold of 0.85, at 0.614 for Empowering Leadership–Employee Adaptive Performance, 0.614 for Psychological Capital–Employee Adaptive Performance, and 0.849 for Empowering Leadership–Psychological Capital. The last ratio sits just below the threshold and should be interpreted with some caution, reflecting the strong theoretical and empirical closeness between empowering leadership and the psychological resources it helps to cultivate; taken together with the Fornell-Larcker and cross-loading results, the three constructs are nonetheless judged empirically distinct.

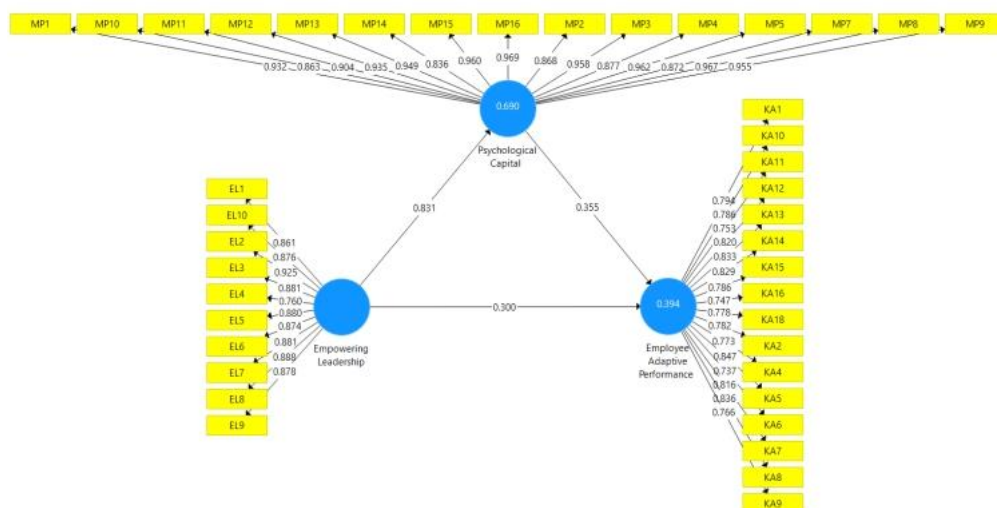


Figure 2. Measurement and Structural Model – Outer Loadings and Path Coefficients

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model showed a moderate coefficient of determination for employee adaptive performance and a strong coefficient of determination for psychological capital. Empowering leadership explained 69.0% of the variance in psychological capital ($R^2 = 0.690$), while empowering leadership and psychological capital jointly explained 39.4% of the variance in employee adaptive performance ($R^2 = 0.394$). In terms of effect size, empowering leadership exerted a large effect on psychological capital ($f^2 = 2.225$), whereas the direct effects of empowering leadership and psychological capital on employee adaptive performance were both small ($f^2 = 0.046$ and $f^2 = 0.064$, respectively). The overall model fit indices were within acceptable ranges commonly reported for PLS path models (SRMR = 0.050; NFI = 0.788).

Table 6. R^2 and f^2 Results

Endogenous Construct	R^2	R^2 Interpretation	f^2 (from EL)	f^2 (from PC)
Psychological Capital	0.690	Strong	2.225	–
Employee Adaptive Performance	0.394	Moderate	0.046	0.064

Source: SmartPLS output (2026).

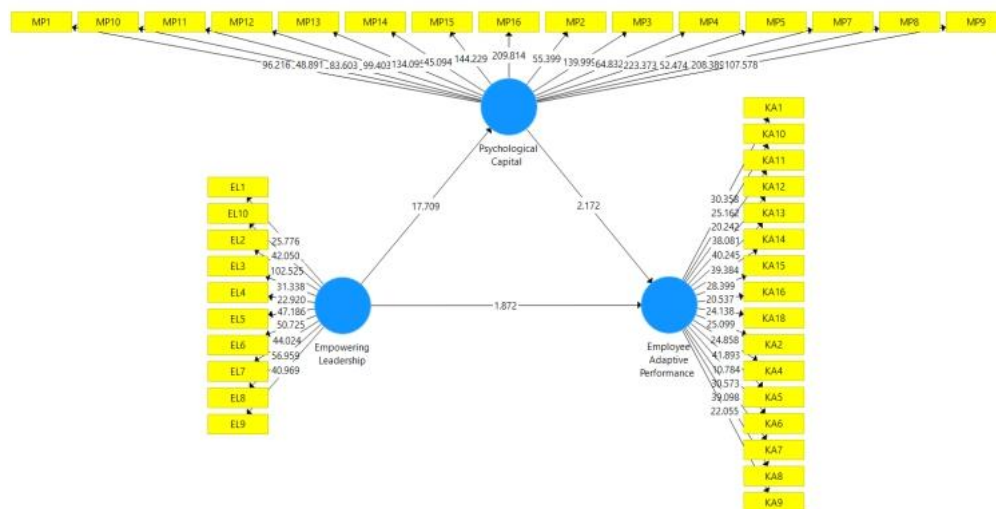


Figure 3. Structural Model – Bootstrapping T-Statistics

Table 7. Structural Model (Direct Effects) Results

Relationship	β (O)	T Statistics	P Value	Decision
Empowering Leadership → Employee Adaptive Performance	0.300	1.872	0.062	H1 Rejected
Empowering Leadership → Psychological Capital	0.831	17.709	0.000	H2 Accepted
Psychological Capital → Employee Adaptive Performance	0.355	2.172	0.030	H3 Accepted

Source: SmartPLS bootstrapping output, 500 resamples (2026).

Table 8. Specific Indirect Effect (Mediation) Result

Relationship	β (O)	T Statistics	P Value	Decision
Empowering Leadership → Psychological Capital → Employee Adaptive Performance	0.295	2.267	0.024	H4 Accepted

Source: SmartPLS bootstrapping output, 500 resamples (2026).

The mediation pattern is central to the interpretation of this model. Because the direct effect of empowering leadership on employee adaptive performance is not statistically significant ($p = 0.062$) while the specific indirect effect through psychological capital is significant ($p = 0.024$), the relationship is classified as indirect-only, or full, mediation according to Zhao et al. (2010). Psychological capital therefore functions as the mechanism through which empowering leadership is translated into employee adaptive performance in this reduced model, rather than as one of two competing pathways.

Discussion

The Effect of Empowering Leadership on Employee Adaptive Performance

H1 posited that empowering leadership has a positive effect on employee adaptive performance. The path coefficient is positive but falls just short of conventional significance ($\beta = 0.300$; $t = 1.872$; $p = 0.062$); H1 is therefore not supported at the 5% level, although the result is close to the threshold and should not be read as evidence of no relationship whatsoever. This pattern indicates that empowering leadership alone, without an accompanying internal psychological or behavioral change, is not a sufficiently strong or consistent direct driver of adaptive behavior among KPU employees. Granting autonomy and participation appears necessary but not, on its own, sufficient to reliably produce adaptive performance.

The Effect of Empowering Leadership on Psychological Capital

H2 posited that empowering leadership has a positive effect on psychological capital. Bootstrapping results show that this is by far the strongest relationship in the model ($\beta = 0.831$; $t = 17.709$; $p < 0.001$); H2 is strongly supported. The R^2 value of 0.690 indicates that empowering leadership explains 69.0% of the variation in psychological capital, and the large effect size ($f^2 = 2.225$) reinforces this conclusion. These results demonstrate that when leaders provide meaningful work, involvement, trust, and autonomy, employees' self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience are substantially strengthened. Among the constructs examined, leadership behavior stands out as the single most influential organizational resource shaping the positive psychological state of KPU employees.

The Effect of Psychological Capital on Employee Adaptive Performance

H3 posited that psychological capital has a positive effect on employee adaptive performance. The results support this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.355$; $t = 2.172$; $p = 0.030$); H3 is accepted. Employees who report higher self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience tend to demonstrate higher adaptive performance, consistent with the view that positive psychological resources help employees remain effective and persistent when familiar routines are disrupted by regulatory change, new technology, or shifting task demands. This finding is compatible with prior evidence linking psychological capital to employee performance in public-sector and service settings (Hariani & Darmawan, 2025; Triccia & Satiningsih, 2020). Together with empowering leadership, psychological capital explains 39.4% of the variance in employee adaptive performance ($R^2 = 0.394$), a moderate level of explanatory power that still leaves room for other unmodeled factors, though the individual effect size of psychological capital on adaptive performance remains small ($f^2 = 0.064$).

The Mediating Role of Psychological Capital

H4 posited that psychological capital mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and employee adaptive performance. The specific indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0.295$; $t = 2.267$; $p = 0.024$), while the direct effect of empowering leadership on employee adaptive performance is not significant ($p = 0.062$); H4 is accepted. Following Zhao et al. (2010), this combination — a significant indirect effect together with a non-significant direct

effect — constitutes indirect-only (full) mediation. Practically, this means that empowering leadership does not appear to change adaptive behavior by itself; rather, its influence operates by first strengthening employees' psychological capital, which subsequently supports adaptive performance. This is a materially different conclusion from the broader model that additionally included employee agility, where the psychological pathway through psychological capital was found to be non-significant and employee agility instead served as the effective mediator. Isolating the psychological pathway in the present, more parsimonious model reveals that psychological capital can indeed carry a significant indirect effect on its own; its earlier non-significance appears to have been a function of shared variance with employee agility rather than an inherent absence of a psychological mechanism.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

1. Empowering leadership does not have a statistically significant direct effect on the employee adaptive performance of KPU employees at the provincial and regency/city levels across West Sumatra; therefore, H1 is rejected.
2. Empowering leadership has a positive and highly significant effect on the psychological capital of KPU employees at the provincial and regency/city levels across West Sumatra; thus, H2 is accepted.
3. Psychological capital has a positive and significant effect on the employee adaptive performance of KPU employees at the provincial and regency/city levels across West Sumatra; thus, H3 is accepted.
4. Psychological capital mediates the effect of empowering leadership on employee adaptive performance. Because the direct effect is not significant while the indirect effect is significant, the relationship represents indirect-only (full) mediation; thus, H4 is accepted.
5. Overall, the findings indicate that empowering leadership improves employee adaptive performance among KPU employees primarily by cultivating their psychological resources — self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience — rather than through a direct behavioral pathway. Strategies for improving adaptive performance at the KPU should therefore treat empowering leadership and psychological capital as complementary levers rather than substitutes.

Recommendations

1. Scope of the study. This study is limited to civil servants within the Provincial and Regency/City General Election Commissions across West Sumatra; findings may not generalize to other regions or organizations. Future research could extend the model to other provinces or to other public-sector organizations facing comparable regulatory and public-accountability demands.
2. Cross-sectional design. Data were collected at a single point in time, whereas the adaptive demands placed on KPU employees likely differ between routine operational periods and the high-pressure stages surrounding elections. Future research could adopt a longitudinal design, measuring psychological capital and adaptive performance at multiple points relative to the electoral cycle.
3. Single-source, self-reported data. Data were obtained entirely through self-administered questionnaires. Future research could triangulate self-reports with supervisor evaluations, interviews, or administrative performance records.
4. Unexplained variance. Empowering leadership and psychological capital jointly explain only 39.4% of the variance in employee adaptive performance, leaving substantial variance unaccounted for. Future studies could incorporate additional variables such as

employee agility, digital competence, change readiness, role clarity, organizational support, or workload.

5. The dimensionality of psychological capital. This study treated psychological capital as a single higher-order construct. Future research could examine its four dimensions — self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience — separately, to identify which dimension contributes most strongly to employee adaptive performance within election-management organizations.

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