



The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction in the Relationship between Work Environment, Leadership, and Peer Influence on Job Performance in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual study proposes an integrated framework examining how work environment, leadership, and peer influence predict job performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating mechanism, among employees in Malaysia's Ministry of Home Affairs. Effective public service delivery and national security depend on a high-performing workforce, yet few studies have integrated these three key workplace predictors into a single framework within the Malaysian public sector context — particularly in a high-stakes security ministry. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Job Demands–Resources Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), this study proposes that a conducive work environment, supportive leadership, and positive peer influence function as vital job resources that enhance job satisfaction, which in turn drives improved job performance. Ten testable hypotheses are developed, each linked to specific theoretical propositions and supporting empirical evidence. A quantitative cross-sectional design using survey questionnaires and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) via SmartPLS 4 is proposed to test the hypothesised direct and indirect relationships. Expected findings will confirm job satisfaction as a significant mediator linking each predictor to job performance. Theoretically, this study extends the integrated application of both theories to the Malaysian security administration context. Practically, it offers policymakers and organisational managers evidence-based strategies to optimise the work environment, strengthen leadership practices, and foster constructive peer collaboration — ultimately enhancing workforce well-being, organisational effectiveness, and public service delivery.

Keywords: job performance, job satisfaction, work environment, leadership, peer influence, public sector, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

In the public sector, job performance is the cornerstone of effective governance and national development. It determines the quality of public service delivery, shapes citizen trust, and underpins the state's capacity to implement policy. For a ministry as critical as the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia (KDN), employee performance directly impacts national security, public order, immigration control, and social well-being, making it a vital area of study. High-performing civil servants ensure that government objectives translate into tangible outcomes for society (Zahran et al., 2025).

Globally, public sector performance is under intense scrutiny. Trends point toward a heightened focus on accountability, digital transformation, and citizen-centric service. However, persistent issues such as workplace bullying (Bret, 2025), organisational constraints (Noor & Nor, 2025), and the challenge of workforce diversity (Etalong et al., 2025) continue to impede optimal performance. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated demands for adaptability and resilience. Recent studies also highlight the importance of Islamic work ethics (Hartini et al., 2025) and emotional intelligence (Safiza et al., 2025) in reinforcing performance excellence.



Despite extensive research, significant gaps remain. Much of the existing literature focuses on isolated factors — such as training (Nor, 2025; Silva & Rodrigues, 2025) or performance appraisal (Rizar et al., 2026) — with limited holistic models that simultaneously integrate the work environment, leadership, and peer influence, especially within high-stakes security ministries. Furthermore, the mediating mechanism of job satisfaction in this specific context remains underexplored (Hadzar et al., 2026). The core problem is that without understanding how these relational and environmental factors interact, public sector organisations risk implementing ineffective HRM practices, leading to stagnation in performance.

This study is significant for multiple stakeholders. For policymakers, it offers evidence-based insights for crafting targeted HRM policies. For public sector managers, it provides a framework to enhance organisational effectiveness and service delivery. For public sector employees, it highlights pathways to improved satisfaction and well-being. For the public, the ultimate benefit is a more responsive, trustworthy, and efficient Ministry of Home Affairs, directly contributing to national safety and security.

Accordingly, this conceptual paper aims to: (1) develop an integrated theoretical framework linking work environment, leadership, and peer influence to job performance through job satisfaction; (2) formulate testable hypotheses grounded in Social Exchange Theory and Job Demands–Resources Theory; and (3) propose a rigorous methodological plan for empirical testing among employees of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia. This paper is conceptual in nature and does not report empirical findings; rather, it lays the theoretical and methodological foundation for subsequent data collection and analysis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Underpinning Theories

This study is underpinned by Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, which collectively explain how work environment, leadership, and peer influence affect job performance through job satisfaction.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) posits that workplace relationships are governed by reciprocal exchanges. When employees perceive support from leaders and peers, they feel obligated to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviours. In this study, supportive leadership and positive peer influence represent socio-emotional resources that foster job satisfaction, which in turn motivates employees to perform better. The work environment, whether conducive or constrained, signals the organisation's commitment to employees, strengthening the exchange relationship and enhancing satisfaction and performance.

Job Demands–Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) categorises work conditions into demands and resources. The work environment, leadership, and peer influence function as job resources that buffer demands and stimulate motivation. According to JD-R, resources trigger a motivational process leading to engagement and satisfaction, which subsequently improves performance. Job satisfaction operates as the mediating mechanism translating these resources into performance outcomes. Conversely, a poor work environment or unsupportive leadership acts as a demand, depleting motivation and reducing satisfaction and performance.

Integrating both theories, SET explains the relational reciprocity underlying leadership and peer influence, while JD-R clarifies how work environment resources initiate motivational pathways. Together, they provide a robust framework for examining how these variables interact to influence job performance, with job satisfaction as the mediating variable, in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia.

2.2 Work Environment, Job Satisfaction, and Job Performance

In the public sector, the work environment plays a critical role in shaping both job satisfaction and job performance. A conducive work environment, encompassing physical conditions, organisational support, and interpersonal relationships, directly influences how satisfied employees feel in their roles. Wohung et al. (2025) found that the work environment significantly affects employee performance, with job satisfaction and work motivation acting as mediating mechanisms. Rokeman and Kob (2023) conducted a literature review



positioning the work environment as a mediator between job satisfaction and job performance, highlighting that a supportive environment strengthens the positive relationship between these two variables. Furthermore, Abd Razak et al. (2025) demonstrated that satisfaction, alongside public service motivation and leadership style, enhances employee performance in the public sector. Shalahuddin and Asdar (2026) confirmed that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between leadership style, work motivation, and employee performance. Similarly, Misriyani et al. (2025) established that job satisfaction serves as a mediator in determining civil servants' performance. Collectively, these studies affirm that a favourable work environment fosters job satisfaction, which subsequently drives higher job performance in public sector organisations.

2.3 Leadership, Job Satisfaction, and Job Performance

Leadership is a key determinant of both job satisfaction and job performance in the public sector. Regardless of whether they are ethical, digital, or transformational, effective leadership strategies have a direct impact on public servants' level of job satisfaction, which then impacts their performance results. Hailu (2025) found that leadership style significantly impacts employee performance in the Amhara region public sector in Ethiopia, with job satisfaction acting as a mediating variable. Shalahuddin and Asdar (2026) confirmed that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between leadership style, work motivation, and employee performance. Similarly, Kaya et al. (2026) demonstrated that organisational trust mediates the impact of digital leadership on both job performance and job satisfaction, highlighting the evolving nature of leadership in public organisations. Febrianto et al. (2026) established that transformational leadership and job satisfaction significantly affect civil servant performance, with intrinsic motivation playing a mediating role. Furthermore, Irsyahma (2026) revealed that digital competence, emotional intelligence, and transformational leadership influence public sector performance, with job satisfaction serving as a mediator. Collectively, these studies affirm that effective leadership fosters job satisfaction, which subsequently drives higher job performance in public sector organisations.

2.4 Peer Influence, Job Satisfaction, and Job Performance

In the public sector, peer influence plays a significant role in shaping both job satisfaction and job performance. Positive relationships with colleagues, characterised by support, friendship, and effective communication, directly influence how satisfied public servants feel in their roles, which in turn affects their performance outcomes. Lee et al. (2025) found that peer support significantly impacts job satisfaction and organisational relationship behaviour among public service employees, demonstrating that collegial support fosters a more satisfied and committed workforce. Aman and Surwanti (2025) conducted a bibliometric analysis revealing that motivation and job satisfaction remain central themes in employee performance research, with workplace relationships emerging as key determinants. Amarathunga and Sajeewani (2026) established that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between various organisational factors and commitment among public sector employees in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Asniwati and Latief (2026) demonstrated that interpersonal communication and workplace friendships significantly influence job satisfaction in public organisations, highlighting the importance of peer relationships. Kumar and Rani (2025) found that social capital and knowledge sharing, facilitated through peer interactions, sequentially mediate the relationship between social media usage and job performance through job satisfaction and self-efficacy. Collectively, these studies affirm that positive peer influence fosters job satisfaction, which subsequently drives higher job performance in public sector organisations.

2.5 Job Satisfaction and Job Performance

The direct relationship between job satisfaction and job performance is one of the most extensively studied links in organisational psychology. Judge and Bono (2001) demonstrated through meta-analysis that job satisfaction is consistently and positively related to job performance across diverse occupational contexts. In the public sector specifically, satisfied employees demonstrate higher task performance, greater organisational citizenship behaviour, and lower turnover intentions (Robbins & Judge, 2017). For employees in security-related ministries, job satisfaction is particularly consequential because dissatisfaction can compromise vigilance, decision-making quality, and service reliability. This study therefore posits job satisfaction not only

as a mediator but also as a direct predictor of job performance.

2.6 Research Gap and Originality

While prior studies have examined individual predictors of job performance in the public sector, no study to date has integrated work environment, leadership, and peer influence as simultaneous predictors with job satisfaction as a mediator — particularly within Malaysia's Ministry of Home Affairs. Table 1 presents a critical comparison of representative prior studies against the proposed framework.

Study	Predictor(s)	Mediator	Context	Gap Addressed by Current Study
Hailu (2025)	Leadership style	Job satisfaction	Ethiopia public sector	Single predictor; non-Malaysian context
Wohung et al. (2025)	Work environment	Job satisfaction & motivation	General public sector	Single predictor; no peer/leadership integration
Lee et al. (2025)	Peer support	None	Public service employees	No mediation; no environmental/leadership factors
Kaya et al. (2026)	Digital leadership	Organisational trust	Public organisations	Single predictor; trust not satisfaction as mediator
Current study	WE + Leadership + Peer Influence	Job satisfaction	Malaysia Ministry of Home Affairs	First integrated three-predictor model in KDN context

Table 1. Critical comparison of prior studies with the proposed framework

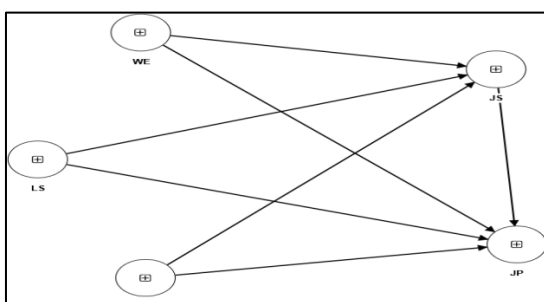
As Table 1 demonstrates, existing studies are characterised by single-predictor designs, alternative mediators, and contexts outside the Malaysian security administration setting. The originality of this study lies in: (a) integrating three distinct categories of workplace resources (environmental, leadership, and peer-related) into a single model; (b) positioning job satisfaction as the unifying mediating mechanism across all three predictor paths; and (c) applying this integrated framework to the understudied, high-stakes context of Malaysia's Ministry of Home Affairs.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Proposed Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework. Three exogenous constructs — Work Environment (WE), Leadership (LS), and Peer Influence (PI) — are hypothesised to directly predict Job Performance (JP) and indirectly predict it through the mediating construct of Job Satisfaction (JS). Job satisfaction is also hypothesised to have a direct effect on job performance. Solid arrows represent direct effects (H1, H2, H4, H5, H7, H8, H9); dashed arrows represent mediating paths (H3, H6, H10).

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework





Note: WE = Work Environment; LS = Leadership; PI = Peer Influence; JS = Job Satisfaction; JP = Job Performance. Solid arrows = direct effects. Dashed arrows = indirect (mediating) effects.

3.2 Operational Definitions of Variables

To ensure measurement clarity and construct validity, each variable is operationally defined as follows:

- **Work Environment (WE):** The extent to which employees perceive their physical working conditions, availability of resources, autonomy, organisational support, and workplace safety as conducive to effective task accomplishment. Measured using a 5-point Likert scale adapted from the Work Environment Scale (Moos, 1994) and public-sector-specific items (Wohung et al., 2025).
- **Leadership (LS):** The degree to which immediate supervisors demonstrate supportive, transformational, and ethical leadership behaviours including vision articulation, individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, and fairness. Measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X Short; Bass & Avolio, 2004) adapted for public sector context.
- **Peer Influence (PI):** The extent to which coworkers provide social support, knowledge sharing, constructive feedback, and positive group norms that shape an employee's attitudes and behaviours. Measured using the Peer Support Scale (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008) with items adapted for public sector settings.
- **Job Satisfaction (JS):** An employee's overall affective evaluation of their job, encompassing satisfaction with pay, promotion opportunities, supervision, coworkers, and the work itself. Measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Smith et al., 1969) short form.
- **Job Performance (JP):** The aggregated level of an employee's task performance (core job duties), contextual performance (organisational citizenship behaviours), and adaptive performance in responding to changing work demands. Measured using self-report items adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991) and validated in public sector contexts.

3.3 Hypothesis Development

H1: Work Environment → Job Performance

JD-R Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) posits that job resources — including a conducive physical and organisational environment — directly stimulate motivational processes that enhance performance. Empirically, Wohung et al. (2025) demonstrated a significant direct effect of work environment on employee performance in public sector settings. Therefore: H1: There is a significant positive relationship between work environment and job performance among employees in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia.

H2: Work Environment → Job Satisfaction

According to JD-R Theory, workplace resources satisfy basic psychological needs and foster positive affective states such as job satisfaction. Rokeman and Kob (2023) confirmed that a supportive work environment strengthens job satisfaction. Therefore: H2: There is a significant positive relationship between work environment and job satisfaction among employees in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia.

H3: Job Satisfaction mediates WE → JP

Integrating JD-R's motivational pathway with empirical evidence from Misriyani et al. (2025) and Shalahuddin and Asdar (2026), work environment resources are expected to enhance performance indirectly by first elevating job satisfaction. Therefore: H3: Job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between work environment and job performance.

H4: Leadership → Job Performance

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) proposes that supportive leadership establishes a high-quality exchange relationship, prompting employees to reciprocate with superior performance. Hailu (2025) and Febrianto et al.



(2026) confirmed significant direct leadership effects on public sector performance. Therefore: H4: There is a significant positive relationship between leadership and job performance.

H5: Leadership → Job Satisfaction

Under SET, leaders who provide individualised consideration and support create positive exchange relationships that elevate employee satisfaction. Kaya et al. (2026) and Irsyhma (2026) confirmed this link. Therefore: H5: There is a significant positive relationship between leadership and job satisfaction.

H6: Job Satisfaction mediates Leadership → JP

Combining SET's reciprocity mechanism with the JD-R motivational pathway, leadership is expected to enhance performance indirectly through elevated satisfaction. Shalahuddin and Asdar (2026) confirmed this mediation. Therefore: H6: Job satisfaction significantly mediates the leadership–job performance relationship.

H7: Peer Influence → Job Performance

SET posits that supportive peer relationships create normative pressures to reciprocate with higher effort and performance. Kumar and Rani (2025) demonstrated peer-facilitated effects on performance. Therefore: H7: There is a significant positive relationship between peer influence and job performance.

H8: Peer Influence → Job Satisfaction

Under JD-R, peer support constitutes a social job resource that buffers demands and enhances satisfaction. Lee et al. (2025) and Asniwati and Latief (2026) confirmed this link. Therefore: H8: There is a significant positive relationship between peer influence and job satisfaction.

H9: Job Satisfaction → Job Performance

The satisfaction–performance link is well-established (Judge & Bono, 2001; Robbins & Judge, 2017). Satisfied employees demonstrate higher task and contextual performance. Therefore: H9: There is a significant positive relationship between job satisfaction and job performance.

H10: Job Satisfaction mediates Peer Influence → JP

Integrating SET's peer reciprocity with JD-R's resource-to-satisfaction pathway, peer influence is expected to enhance performance indirectly through satisfaction. Therefore: H10: Job satisfaction significantly mediates the peer influence–job performance relationship.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study proposes a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design. Primary data will be collected through self-administered survey questionnaires distributed digitally to employees of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia. The cross-sectional design is appropriate for testing hypothesised direct and mediating relationships at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.2 Target Population and Sampling Technique

The target population comprises all administrative and support personnel (grades 29–41) serving at the Ministry of Home Affairs headquarters and selected state offices across Peninsular Malaysia, estimated at approximately $N = 3,200$ employees. Because a complete population list cannot be obtained due to administrative restrictions, a combination of stratified purposive sampling and snowball sampling will be employed. Initial respondents will be identified through departmental contacts (stratified by department:



Immigration, Prison, Police Civilian Staff, etc.), who will then refer colleagues within their grade range. This approach is consistent with prior public sector research in Malaysia where full sampling frames are restricted.

4.3 Sample Size Determination

Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for a population of $N = 3,200$, the minimum required sample size is 346 respondents. To account for an estimated 20% non-response rate and potential invalid responses, a total of 415 questionnaires will be distributed. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirement of 10 respondents per indicator for Structural Equation Modelling and is consistent with Hair et al. (2019) recommendations for PLS-SEM.

4.4 Measurement Instruments

All constructs will be measured using established multi-item scales on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Work Environment (8 items) adapted from Moos (1994) and Wohung et al. (2025); Leadership (12 items) from the MLQ-5X Short Form (Bass & Avolio, 2004); Peer Influence (6 items) adapted from Chiaburu and Harrison (2008); Job Satisfaction (5 items) from the JDI short form (Smith et al., 1969); Job Performance (7 items) adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991). Demographic variables (age, gender, grade, tenure, department) will also be collected as control variables.

4.5 Questionnaire Validation and Pilot Testing

Prior to main data collection, the questionnaire will undergo: (a) content validation by a panel of three experts (two academicians and one KDN HR officer) for face and content validity; (b) a pilot test with 30 respondents from a comparable government ministry to assess reliability, with Cronbach's alpha targeted at ≥ 0.70 for all constructs (Nunnally, 1978); and (c) minor linguistic refinement based on pilot feedback. The questionnaire will be administered in both English and Malay (Bahasa Melayu) to ensure comprehension, following forward-backward translation procedures.

4.6 Data Collection Procedure

Following ethical approval from the Open University Malaysia Research Ethics Committee and written permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs, the questionnaire will be distributed via a secure online platform (Google Forms / SurveyMonkey) through departmental liaisons. A cover letter will explain the study's purpose, guarantee anonymity, and confirm voluntary participation. Two reminder emails will be sent at two-week intervals. To reduce common method bias, data will be collected in two waves (Time 1: predictors and job satisfaction; Time 2: job performance, four weeks later), consistent with Podsakoff et al. (2003) recommendations.

4.7 Data Analysis Plan — Structural Equation Modelling

Data will be analysed using IBM SPSS 27 (descriptive statistics, screening) and SmartPLS 4 (measurement and structural model assessment), following the two-step approach recommended by Hair et al. (2019):

Step 1 — Measurement Model (Outer Model): Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) will assess: (a) internal consistency reliability via composite reliability ($CR \geq 0.70$) and Cronbach's alpha (≥ 0.70); (b) convergent validity via average variance extracted ($AVE \geq 0.50$) and outer loadings (≥ 0.60); and (c) discriminant validity via the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio ($HTMT < 0.85$) and Fornell–Larcker criterion.

Step 2 — Structural Model (Inner Model): Path coefficients (β) and significance levels will be estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Model fit will be assessed via Standardised Root Mean Square Residual ($SRMR < 0.08$), Normed Fit Index ($NFI > 0.90$), and χ^2/df ratio (< 3). Mediation hypotheses (H3, H6, H10) will be tested using bootstrapped indirect effects with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals; an indirect effect is significant if the confidence interval does not include zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Effect sizes (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) will also be reported.



4.8 Common Method Bias and Response Sensitivity

Because all data are self-reported, common method bias (CMB) is a potential concern. Procedural remedies include: (a) temporal separation of predictor and criterion measurement (two-wave design); (b) guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality; (c) reverse-coded items; and (d) clear separation of construct sections in the questionnaire. Statistically, Harman's single-factor test will be conducted; if a single factor explains more than 50% of variance, CMB will be deemed problematic and a common latent factor (CLF) approach will be applied.

Regarding response sensitivity within a security-related ministry: all questions are limited to non-classified workplace perceptions (e.g., satisfaction with physical environment, perceived supervisor support) and do not touch on operational or national security matters. Data will be reported only at the aggregate level, with no individual or departmental identification. Ministry clearance will be obtained prior to distribution, and a government liaison officer will review the questionnaire to ensure no sensitive items are included.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

The study will adhere to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and the Malaysian Code of Research Ethics. All participants will provide informed consent, may withdraw at any time without penalty, and will not receive financial incentives. Data will be stored on a password-protected server and retained for five years before secure disposal. Ethics approval will be obtained from the Open University Malaysia Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection.

5. EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This conceptual study makes three theoretical contributions. First, it integrates Social Exchange Theory and Job Demands–Resources Theory into a unified framework, demonstrating how relational exchange mechanisms (leadership, peer influence) and resource-based motivational pathways (work environment) converge through job satisfaction to shape performance. Second, it extends both theories to the understudied context of a high-stakes security ministry in a developing country, testing their cross-cultural and cross-sectoral generalisability. Third, it positions job satisfaction as a central mediating mechanism across three distinct predictor categories, offering a more parsimonious explanation of how diverse workplace factors translate into performance outcomes.

5.2 Practical Implications

If supported empirically, the findings will offer actionable strategies for the Ministry of Home Affairs: (a) invest in physical and psychological work environment improvements (resources, autonomy, safety); (b) prioritise leadership development programmes emphasising transformational and supportive leadership; (c) foster peer collaboration through team-building, knowledge-sharing platforms, and positive group norms; and (d) monitor and enhance job satisfaction as a leading indicator of subsequent performance gains. For the broader Malaysian public sector, the framework provides a template for integrated HRM intervention design.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This conceptual framework has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; future research should employ longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs. Second, self-report measures may be subject to social desirability bias; future studies could incorporate supervisor-rated performance metrics. Third, the focus on a single ministry limits generalisability; replication across other Malaysian ministries and ASEAN public sectors is recommended. Fourth, the snowball sampling approach may introduce selection bias; probability sampling should be pursued where administrative access permits. Future research could also examine moderators such as organisational culture, digitalisation level, and generational differences.



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