

Understanding How Competence, Workload, and Burnout Affect Performance: A Conceptual Framework

Alifa Isherdianti Nabila¹, Puspita Wulansari²

^{1,2}Telkom University, Masters of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract:

This paper presents a conceptual framework that examines the multifaceted relationships between competence, workload, burnout, and overall performance across diverse professional environments. The framework posits that competence, defined as the combination of skills, knowledge, and experience, is a critical determinant of performance. However, this relationship is not linear; it is significantly influenced by workload, which can either enhance or hinder performance depending on its intensity and duration. When workload becomes excessive, it often leads to burnout—a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion—which acts as a mediating factor that undermines performance. This study seeks to clarify the effects of competence and workload on performance and investigate the role of burnout in this dynamic. To achieve a thorough theoretical comprehension, a comprehensive literature review has been carried out, covering books, empirical research, and conceptual papers on nurse performance, competence, workload, and burnout. The proposed framework aims to enhance the existing literature by elucidating the relationships between competence, workload, burnout, and performance, offering a foundation for developing strategies that address workload management and burnout prevention to sustain high levels of performance. The implications of this framework are broad, providing valuable insights for organizational leaders, human resource professionals, and policymakers aiming to optimize performance and well-being in various professional settings.

Keywords: Competence, Workload, Burnout, Performance.

1. Introduction

The relationship between competence, workload, burnout, and performance has become increasingly critical in understanding the dynamics of modern workplaces. As organizations continue to push for higher efficiency and productivity, the pressure on employees to perform has intensified, often leading to negative consequences such as burnout. Competence, which refers to the combination of skills, knowledge, and abilities that an individual possesses, is traditionally seen as a key determinant of performance. Yet, the role of workload—the demands placed on employees in terms of time, complexity, and effort—complicates this relationship. When the demands of a job exceed an individual's capacity, the risk of burnout increases, potentially undermining performance and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Performance is defined as the efficiency of an individual in fulfilling roles and responsibilities related to their job. It can also be interpreted as the effective execution of specified roles and responsibilities (Pourteimour *et al.*, 2021). High performance is often the ultimate goal for both individuals and organizations, as it is directly linked to productivity, profitability, and competitive advantage. However, achieving and sustaining high performance is complex, as it is influenced by a variety of factors, including competence, motivation, organizational support, and the broader work environment.

Competence is a crucial factor that can influence employee performance. It represents an individual's fundamental characteristics that enable them to achieve their maximum potential in performing a job. Therefore, competence is expected to enhance employee performance (Mukhtar *et al.*, 2021). By evaluating employee competence, individual performance outcomes can also be predicted. Consequently, good competence can lead to increased work motivation, resulting in better performance (Hutabarat *et al.*, 2023). The concept of competence is multifaceted, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. Cognitive competence refers to the knowledge and intellectual skills required to perform a job, while

emotional competence involves the ability to manage emotions and stress. Social competence, on the other hand, pertains to interpersonal skills and the ability to work effectively with others. These dimensions of competence are critical for achieving high performance, as they enable individuals to navigate the complexities of their roles and adapt to changing circumstances (Taris & Schaufeli, 2016).

Employee performance can be improved as long as the workload remains manageable. High workloads can affect employees' physical and psychological conditions. High workloads are caused by continuously adding new demands without eliminating previous ones. Workload can have either a positive or negative impact on performance. Excessive workload can cause physical and mental fatigue, negatively affecting performance. Conversely, when workload management is handled well, it can positively impact performance. Workload can be a positive influence if employees can meet job demands while possessing good competence and feeling comfortable in the workplace (Jomuad *et al.*, 2021; Nurhandayani, 2022; Siswanto *et al.*, 2019)

Performance can also be affected by the level of burnout. Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to the feeling of being emotionally drained and depleted of emotional resources. Depersonalization involves developing negative, cynical attitudes towards one's job or colleagues, while reduced personal accomplishment reflects a decline in feelings of competence and successful achievement at work. These symptoms are not only detrimental to the individual but can also have profound effects on organizational outcomes, including reduced performance, increased absenteeism, and higher turnover rates (Jun *et al.*, 2021; Weni *et al.*, 2023).

One phenomenon associated with burnout is the mismatch between task completion and priorities, compounded by high workloads, making it difficult for employees to prioritize tasks effectively. Burnout and performance exhibit a negative relationship. Employees experiencing burnout are unable to perform well. Poor performance impacts both financial and non-financial rewards provided by the organization and creates job uncertainty, which in turn affects job satisfaction. Job dissatisfaction and rewards contribute to burnout, indicating that the relationship between burnout and performance is not unidirectional but bidirectional (Prentice & Thaichon, 2019).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Performance

Performance is considered one of the key determinants in achieving the vision, mission, goals, and sustainability of an organization. Performance refers to the work output or results achieved by an individual, whether in the form of products or services, which are typically used as a basis for evaluating employees or organizations. It reflects how employees perceive and approach their work (Badrianto *et al.*, 2022; Suwarno *et al.*, 2022). Badrianto *et al.* (2022) in Fadilla & Wulansari (2023) stated that performance is the willingness of an individual or group of individuals to carry out an activity and complete it in line with their responsibilities, achieving the desired outcomes. According to Prayoga & Pohan (2022), performance encompasses what employees do or do not do, including the amount of work produced, quality of results, timeliness, attendance, and ability to collaborate. To measure employee performance, a questionnaire containing several dimensions of performance criteria can be used. Employee performance is the ability and work results of an individual in fulfilling their responsibilities within a specified time frame. Performance evaluation can be conducted through various criteria dimensions, with the primary goal being to assess the extent to which an employee contributes their best in performing assigned tasks.

2.2. Competence

Competence derives from the term "competent," meaning capable or having the ability. Competence refers to an individual's ability to behave and act in ways that help them achieve their goals (Hajiali *et al.*, 2022). It encompasses the ability to perform tasks correctly and excel, based on knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Edison *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, competence can also serve as a determinant of the skills or knowledge possessed or required by an employee to effectively complete their tasks and to foster professionalism in their work. Competence can also be defined as an underlying characteristic of an individual related to effective job performance, which has a causal relationship with criteria used as benchmarks for effective or

superior performance in the workplace or specific situations (Fadilla & Wulansari, 2023; Moehariono, 2014). In summary, competence is the ability of an individual to behave and act in ways that help achieve organizational goals, involving knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It also includes the ability to perform tasks correctly and effectively based on characteristics underlying individual performance effectiveness.

2.3. Workload

Workload refers to the number of activities requiring individual skills that must be performed within a certain timeframe and can be physical or psychological in nature (Sari & Ali, 2022). It is a psychological concept involving subjective demands and individual perceptions. Keunecke *et al.*, (2019) demonstrated that both excessive tasks and insufficient tasks can lead to decreased performance. An adequate or moderate level of workload tends to result in optimal individual performance. Based on the aforementioned definitions, workload can be characterized as activities requiring skills that must be completed within a specific time frame, either physically or psychologically. Excessive or insufficient tasks can diminish performance, whereas an adequate level of workload tends to yield optimal performance.

One commonly used measure of workload is the NASA Task Load Index (NASA TLX).

2.4. Burnout

Burnout is a syndrome of physical and mental exhaustion characterized by emotional fatigue, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Chemali *et al.*, 2019). It is a response to excessive workplace stress, marked by feelings of emotional exhaustion and a lack of emotional resources (Dall'Ora *et al.*, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines burnout as an occupational phenomenon, describing it as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (World Health Organization, 2019). Drawing from these definitions, burnout can be understood as a syndrome involving physical and mental exhaustion, emotional fatigue, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal achievement. It arises in response to excessive workplace stress where individuals experience emotional exhaustion and a lack of emotional resources that are not effectively managed.

2.4. The Relationships Between Variables

Competencies, defined as the qualities that enable an individual to perform workplace tasks effectively, are essential for organizational success. Effective performance management of competencies is crucial, as higher competency levels are directly correlated with improved employee performance, while lower competencies lead to poorer performance. An employee's self-concept, reflected in their understanding of key responsibilities and their ability to collaborate with others, significantly influences performance improvement. This underscores the importance of continuous learning and peer collaboration in enhancing employee competence (Hayatullah *et al.*, 2021).

Competence is one of the factors that influences employee performance. The relationship between competence and performance is relevant and highly accurate; in fact, to improve performance, it is essential to have competencies that align with job responsibilities. Karmandita and Subudi (2014) also stated that competence has an impact on employee performance. This indicates that employees with high competence tend to be more confident, which reduces the likelihood of errors and enables them to complete their work effectively (Alfian & Wulansari, 2017).

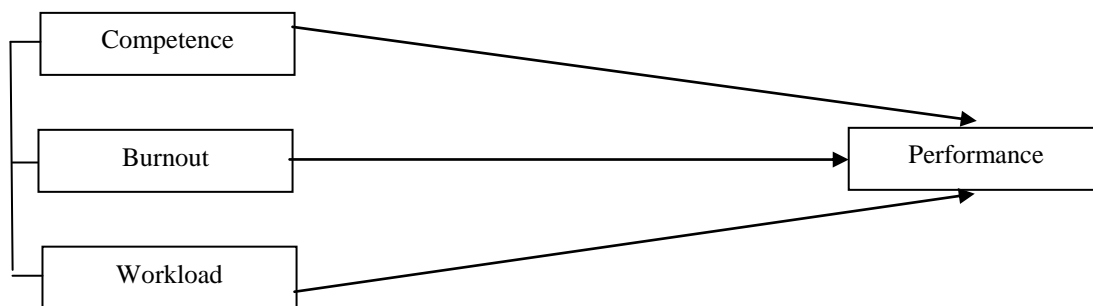
The decline in performance may be due to recruitment that does not meet the specific needs, mismatched competencies in employee placements, and an imbalance in workload among some employees (Mumtaz & Wulansari, 2023). High job demands can lead individuals to invest more energy and effort into work-related activities, thus increasing their job focus. High workload, characterized by an excess of tasks within limited timeframes, has both negative and positive impacts on performance. On one hand, excessive workload can act as a stressor that negatively affects performance by overtaxing available resources, such as time. On the other hand, high-performing employees may view increased workload as a challenge that motivates them to excel, thereby positively influencing performance (Spagnoli *et al.*, 2020).

Moreover, there is a significant positive relationship between workload and burnout. High cognitive, temporal, and emotional job demands elevate the risk of fatigue and exhaustion, linking higher workloads to increased emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Diehl *et al.*, 2021; López-Núñez *et al.*, 2020).

Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, frustration, fatigue, and a diminished sense of personal efficacy, detrimentally affects employee performance. Psychological issues and inadequate job design further exacerbate this condition, leading to reduced performance standards and overall organizational disruption. Employees experiencing burnout often feel powerless and reluctant to take initiative, severely impacting their job performance (Yener *et al.*, 2021).

3. Methodology

This presentation is further reinforced by theories and prior research findings from experts, which serve as foundational references. The conceptual framework of this study is designed to illustrate the impact of competence, workload, and burnout on nurse performance. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of this research.



Proposition 1: Competence has a positive effect on performance.

Proposition 2: Workload has a negative effect on performance.

Proposition 3: Burnout has a negative effect on performance.

It is hypothesized that competence will have a direct positive effect on performance. Conversely, it is anticipated that workload and burnout will have a direct negative effect on performance. Thus, the proposed study aims to investigate these relationships and elucidate the role of competence, burnout, and workload in the context of performance at Indonesia.

Although this work is primarily conceptual, its implications are also relevant to empirical domains where further research can be conducted. Future studies can gather data from a diverse range of employee across various units using methods such as questionnaires and interviews. By tapping into the knowledge and experiences of the employee, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a robust analytical tool that can be employed to test the proposed theories and evaluate the conceptual framework. SEM allows for the analysis of complex interactions between variables, providing empirical validation and potentially paving the way for new research directions in interest dynamics, career development, competency, and training.

4. Implications

The findings from this conceptual framework offer several practical implications for management in Indonesian company. First, by understanding the intricate relationship between competence, workload, burnout, and performance, organizations can develop more effective talent management strategies that align employee competencies with job requirements, manage workloads to prevent burnout, and invest in continuous professional development to enhance resilience and adaptability. This approach can lead to improved employee performance, reduced turnover, and better organizational outcomes.

The study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating these critical constructs into a cohesive framework that explains their collective impact on performance, offering a more holistic understanding of these dynamics and opening new avenues for future research. Policymakers, particularly in high-stress sectors like healthcare and education, can use these insights to promote employee well-being through policies that encourage reasonable workloads and access to mental health resources, ultimately fostering a more satisfied and effective workforce. On a broader social level, addressing burnout not just as an organizational issue but as a societal concern can lead to improved quality of life, reduced healthcare costs, and enhanced societal productivity, demonstrating the far-reaching impact of this study's findings.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The proposed conceptual framework underscores the importance of considering burnout as a critical variable in understanding the relationship between competence, workload, and performance. By recognizing burnout as a crucial variable, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing performance. The proposed framework highlights several key insights and offers practical, theoretical, and research recommendations. The framework emphasizes that while competence is a critical determinant of performance, its effectiveness is influenced by the context in which it is applied—particularly the workload imposed on employees. When the workload exceeds an individual's capacity, it can lead to burnout, which in turn diminishes performance. This relationship underscores the need for a balanced approach to managing both employee competencies and workload to optimize performance outcomes. The study contributes to the literature by integrating these key constructs, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that impact employee performance.

Organizations should prioritize continuous professional development and competency-based training to enhance employee performance. This approach not only improves the alignment of employee skills with job requirements but also helps address burnout by ensuring that employees are well-prepared and supported in their roles. Implementing effective workload management strategies is crucial to prevent overburdening employees. Strategies such as balanced task allocation, realistic deadlines, and adequate support systems can help manage workload effectively. By addressing these factors, organizations can improve overall performance, increase employee satisfaction, and reduce turnover rates.

Future research should utilize Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to empirically test the proposed conceptual framework. SEM is a robust analytical tool for exploring the complex relationships among competence, workload, burnout, and performance, offering a comprehensive validation of the framework. Researchers should collect data from various organizational settings to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine how changes in competence, workload, and burnout over time impact employee performance. Additionally, qualitative research could provide deeper insights into employees' personal experiences, complementing quantitative data and offering a more detailed understanding of the factors influencing performance.

This conceptual framework has significant potential to impact both academic research and practical applications in organizational management. By examining competence, workload, and burnout as independent variables influencing performance, this study offers a more nuanced perspective on the factors affecting employee outcomes. For organizational leaders and policymakers, the insights derived from this framework can inform strategies to improve employee well-being and performance, leading to more effective and supportive work environments.

In conclusion, recognizing the roles of competence, workload, and burnout in influencing employee performance provides valuable perspectives for both theoretical development and practical implementation. The proposed framework serves as a foundation for future empirical research and offers actionable recommendations for organizations seeking to create balanced and productive work environments.

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