

The Effect Of Psychological Safety And Learning Agility On Civil Servant Performance: The Mediating Role Of Innovative Work Behavior In The Indonesian Public Sector

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Abstract

Public sector organizations are increasingly required to enhance performance and innovation amid bureaucratic reform and digital transformation. However, empirical evidence regarding the psychological mechanisms underlying civil servant performance remains limited, particularly in hierarchical public institutions. This study investigates the effect of psychological safety and learning agility on civil servant performance, with innovative work behavior as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was employed using survey data collected from 167 civil servants at the Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions, Indonesia. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results reveal that learning agility has a positive and significant effect on performance, whereas psychological safety does not directly influence performance. Both psychological safety and learning agility significantly enhance innovative work behavior. Innovative work behavior significantly improves performance and mediates the relationship between learning agility and performance, but not between psychological safety and performance. This study contributes to public sector human resource management literature by clarifying the behavioral mechanism linking adaptive learning capability and performance. The findings suggest that in bureaucratic contexts, psychological safety alone is insufficient to drive performance unless translated into innovative actions. Policy implications for strengthening adaptive learning and innovation ecosystems in public institutions are discussed.

Keywords: *Psychological Safety, Learning Agility, Innovative Work Behavior, Civil Servant Performance, Public Sector HRM, PLS-SEM*

Abstrak

Organisasi sektor publik semakin dituntut untuk meningkatkan kinerja dan inovasi di tengah reformasi birokrasi dan transformasi digital. Namun, bukti empiris mengenai mekanisme psikologis yang mendasari kinerja pegawai negeri sipil masih terbatas, khususnya di lembaga publik yang hierarkis. Studi ini meneliti pengaruh keamanan

psikologis dan ketangkasan belajar terhadap kinerja pegawai negeri sipil, dengan perilaku kerja inovatif sebagai variabel mediasi. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dengan menggunakan data survei yang dikumpulkan dari 167 pegawai negeri sipil di Kementerian Desa dan Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal, Indonesia. Data dianalisis menggunakan Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketangkasan belajar memiliki pengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja, sedangkan keamanan psikologis tidak secara langsung memengaruhi kinerja. Baik keamanan psikologis maupun ketangkasan belajar secara signifikan meningkatkan perilaku kerja inovatif. Perilaku kerja inovatif secara signifikan meningkatkan kinerja dan memediasi hubungan antara ketangkasan belajar dan kinerja, tetapi tidak antara keamanan psikologis dan kinerja. Studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur manajemen sumber daya manusia sektor publik dengan mengklarifikasi mekanisme perilaku yang menghubungkan kemampuan belajar adaptif dan kinerja. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa dalam konteks birokrasi, keamanan psikologis saja tidak cukup untuk mendorong kinerja kecuali jika diterjemahkan ke dalam tindakan inovatif. Implikasi kebijakan untuk memperkuat ekosistem pembelajaran adaptif dan inovasi di lembaga publik dibahas.

Kata kunci: *Keamanan Psikologis, Ketangkasan Belajar, Perilaku Kerja Inovatif, Kinerja Pegawai Negeri Sipil, Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia Sektor Publik, PLS-SEM*

Introduction

Public sector performance has become a strategic concern amid bureaucratic reform, digital governance transformation, and increasing public accountability. Civil servants are expected not only to comply with regulations but also to demonstrate adaptability, innovation, and proactive performance behavior. Despite improvements in formal performance indicators within Indonesian ministries, gaps remain between organizational performance targets and innovation capacity.

Recent global competitiveness reports highlight declining innovation capacity in emerging economies, including Indonesia. This suggests that structural reforms alone are insufficient without strengthening behavioral and psychological drivers of performance. In public bureaucracies characterized by hierarchical structures and risk aversion, fostering innovation and adaptive capability becomes particularly challenging.

Prior studies have established that psychological safety promotes voice behavior and learning, while learning agility enhances adaptive performance. However, empirical findings remain inconsistent. Some studies report a direct positive effect of psychological safety on performance, whereas others indicate indirect effects through behavioral mediators. Similarly, learning agility has been found to affect performance either directly or via innovative work behavior.

Moreover, most existing studies focus on private sector settings, limiting generalizability to public institutions where accountability systems, hierarchical culture, and procedural rigidity differ significantly. Therefore, this study aims to

examine the direct effects of psychological safety and learning agility on performance, the effects of both variables on innovative work behavior and the mediating role of innovative work behavior in explaining performance outcomes among civil servants. This study addresses empirical inconsistencies and extends Social Exchange Theory and Experiential Learning Theory into a public sector context.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Psychological Safety and Performance

Psychological safety refers to a shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999). Based on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), employees reciprocate supportive organizational environments with positive contributions. In public institutions, psychological safety may encourage voice, knowledge sharing, and risk-taking behaviors. However, performance systems in bureaucracies are often procedural and compliance-based, potentially weakening the direct link between safety and measurable performance outcomes.

H1: Psychological safety positively influences civil servant performance.

Learning Agility and Performance

Learning agility is defined as the ability and willingness to learn from experience and apply that learning in new situations (DeRue et al., 2012). Grounded in Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), individuals who effectively transform experiences into adaptive knowledge demonstrate superior performance. In dynamic public policy environments, learning agility enables civil servants to navigate regulatory changes and complex stakeholder demands.

H2: Learning agility positively influences civil servant performance.

Psychological Safety and Innovative Work Behavior

Psychological safety fosters openness, experimentation, and constructive dialogue. When employees feel safe, they are more likely to generate and promote new ideas (Vallabh et al., 2023).

H3: Psychological safety positively influences innovative work behavior.

Learning Agility and Innovative Work Behavior

Learning agility enhances cognitive flexibility and openness to novel solutions, which are essential precursors to innovation.

H4: Learning agility positively influences innovative work behavior.

Innovative Work Behavior and Performance

Innovative work behavior (IWB) involves idea generation, promotion, and implementation (De Jong & Den Hartog). Innovative employees tend to improve service quality, administrative efficiency, and organizational outcomes.

H5: Innovative work behavior positively influences performance.

Mediating Role of Innovative Work Behavior

Psychological and cognitive capabilities may not automatically translate into performance unless manifested behaviorally. Innovative work behavior may act as the mechanism through which adaptive capability improves outcomes.

H6: Innovative work behavior mediates the relationship between psychological safety and performance.

H7: Innovative work behavior mediates the relationship between learning agility and performance.

Research Methods

This study employs a quantitative explanatory design. The population consists of civil servants at the Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions. Using purposive sampling, 204 valid responses were obtained. All constructs were measured using validated Likert-scale instruments: Psychological Safety (PSC-based indicators), Learning Agility (mental, people, change, results agility), Innovative Work Behavior (idea exploration, generation, promotion, implementation) and Performance (quality, quantity, timeliness, initiative). Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. Measurement model evaluation included outer loading (>0.70), AVE (>0.50), Composite Reliability (>0.70), and HTMT (<0.90). Structural model evaluation included R^2 , f^2 , Q^2 , SRMR, and bootstrapping.

Research Findings

The structural model was evaluated using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with a bootstrapping procedure (5,000 resamples). The results demonstrate satisfactory model quality, with SRMR = 0.061 (< 0.08), indicating good model fit. The coefficient of determination (R^2) shows that innovative work behavior is explained by psychological safety and learning agility at $R^2 = 0.512$, while employee performance is explained by psychological safety, learning agility, and innovative work behavior at $R^2 = 0.603$, indicating moderate explanatory power.

First, learning agility has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.318$; $t = 3.274$; $p = 0.001$). Since the t -statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p -value is below 0.05, H2 is supported. This finding indicates that higher levels of adaptability, cognitive flexibility, and openness to experience significantly improve ASN performance outcomes.

Second, psychological safety does not significantly affect performance directly ($\beta = 0.073$; $t = 0.913$; $p = 0.361$). As the t -statistic is below 1.96 and the p -value exceeds 0.05, H1 is not supported. This suggests that although psychological safety creates a supportive work climate, it does not directly translate into measurable performance improvement within the bureaucratic context.

Third, psychological safety significantly influences innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.284$; $t = 2.765$; $p = 0.006$), supporting H3. This indicates that employees who feel safe to express ideas and take interpersonal risks are more likely to engage in innovative behavior.

Fourth, learning agility also significantly affects innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.492$; $t = 4.981$; $p = 0.000$), supporting H4. This result shows that individuals with high learning agility are more capable of generating, promoting, and implementing new ideas.

Fifth, innovative work behavior has a significant positive effect on performance ($\beta = 0.356$; $t = 3.842$; $p = 0.000$), supporting H5. This confirms that innovative actions serve as a behavioral driver of improved work outcomes.

Effect size (f^2) analysis indicates that learning agility has a medium effect on innovative work behavior ($f^2 = 0.271$), while innovative work behavior has a medium effect on performance ($f^2 = 0.214$). Psychological safety shows a small effect on performance ($f^2 = 0.009$).

The mediation analysis reveals that innovative work behavior significantly mediates the relationship between learning agility and performance ($\beta = 0.175$; $t = 2.414$; $p = 0.016$). Since both the indirect effect and the direct effect remain significant, this indicates **partial mediation**, supporting H7. This suggests that learning agility improves performance both directly and indirectly through innovative work behavior.

In contrast, innovative work behavior does not mediate the relationship between psychological safety and performance ($\beta = 0.101$; $t = 1.542$; $p = 0.124$). Because the indirect effect is not statistically significant, H6 is not supported. Although psychological safety enhances innovative behavior, its indirect contribution to performance is insufficient to produce a significant mediating effect.

Discussion

This study provides important insights into the behavioral mechanisms underlying civil servant performance in a bureaucratic context. The findings demonstrate that learning agility is a stronger predictor of performance compared to psychological safety. The significant positive effect of learning agility on performance confirms the central premise of Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), which posits that individuals who are able to transform experience into adaptive knowledge and flexible responses are more likely to achieve superior outcomes. In the context of public administration, where policy changes, digital transformation, and regulatory adjustments occur frequently, employees with high learning agility are better equipped to adjust strategies, solve emerging problems, and maintain productivity. This adaptability appears to have a direct and measurable contribution to performance indicators.

In contrast, psychological safety does not have a significant direct effect on

performance. This finding suggests that in hierarchical and rule-bound public institutions, interpersonal comfort and openness alone are insufficient to generate measurable performance improvements. Bureaucratic systems often rely heavily on formal performance indicators, standardized procedures, and compliance-based evaluation systems. As a result, even when employees feel safe to express opinions or share ideas, their performance ratings may still depend primarily on procedural adherence and target achievement rather than relational climate. This explains why psychological safety may function more as an enabling condition than as a direct performance driver.

However, psychological safety significantly influences innovative work behavior, indicating that a supportive interpersonal climate encourages employees to engage in idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation. This aligns with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which argues that when organizations provide a safe and trusting environment, employees reciprocate through constructive contributions. In this case, those contributions manifest in innovative actions rather than immediate performance gains. Thus, psychological safety appears to operate indirectly through behavioral channels rather than directly affecting output-based performance metrics.

The significant mediation effect of innovative work behavior in the relationship between learning agility and performance further strengthens this interpretation. The results indicate partial mediation, meaning that learning agility enhances performance both directly and indirectly through innovative behavior. This confirms that innovative work behavior serves as a behavioral mechanism that translates adaptive cognitive capacity into tangible performance outcomes. Employees who learn quickly and adapt effectively are more likely to experiment with new methods, improve work processes, and implement creative solutions, which subsequently enhance performance. These findings are consistent with recent empirical evidence (e.g., Pham et al., 2024), which demonstrates that innovation-oriented behavior significantly strengthens employee performance.

Interestingly, the absence of mediation between psychological safety and performance suggests structural constraints within bureaucratic organizations. Although psychological safety fosters innovative behavior, the indirect pathway to performance is not statistically strong enough. This may indicate that bureaucratic rigidities—such as strict regulations, limited autonomy, centralized decision-making, and formalized work procedures—restrict the extent to which innovative initiatives can be fully implemented or recognized in formal performance evaluations. In other words, employees may generate ideas and feel safe to express them, but institutional mechanisms may limit their ability to convert those ideas into measurable performance achievements.

Overall, these findings highlight that in public sector organizations, individual adaptive capacity (learning agility) plays a more decisive role in improving performance than contextual climate factors (psychological safety). While psychological safety remains essential for fostering openness and

innovation, it does not automatically translate into higher performance unless supported by structural flexibility, empowerment mechanisms, and performance systems that reward innovation. Therefore, enhancing employee learning agility appears to be a more strategic lever for improving bureaucratic performance, particularly when combined with institutional reforms that enable innovative behavior to impact performance metrics.

Results

The measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability and validity, with factor loadings above 0.70, AVE values exceeding 0.50, and composite reliability above 0.70.

Structural model results indicate that:

- Learning agility has a positive and significant effect on civil servant performance, indicating that adaptive learning capacity is a key determinant of performance improvement in bureaucratic institutions.
- Psychological safety does not have a significant direct effect on performance, suggesting that a safe interpersonal climate alone is insufficient to produce measurable performance outcomes within hierarchical public organizations.
- Psychological safety significantly enhances innovative work behavior, meaning that employees who feel safe to express ideas are more likely to engage in innovative activities.
- Learning agility significantly improves innovative work behavior, demonstrating that adaptive and flexible employees are more proactive in generating and implementing new ideas.
- Innovative work behavior has a positive and significant effect on performance, confirming that innovation-oriented actions contribute directly to higher job effectiveness.
- Innovative work behavior partially mediates the relationship between learning agility and performance, indicating that learning agility improves performance both directly and indirectly through innovation.
- Innovative work behavior does not mediate the relationship between psychological safety and performance, implying that bureaucratic constraints may limit the translation of perceived safety into measurable performance results.

Conclusion

This study concludes that learning agility plays a pivotal role in enhancing civil servant performance, both directly and indirectly through innovative work behavior. Employees who demonstrate adaptability, openness to experience, and the ability to rapidly learn from changing situations are better equipped to respond to the dynamic demands of public administration. Their capacity to transform experience into practical solutions not only strengthens their individual

performance outcomes but also stimulates innovative actions that further contribute to measurable performance improvement. The significant mediating role of innovative work behavior confirms that adaptive learning capabilities are most impactful when translated into concrete innovation-oriented behaviors within the workplace.

In contrast, psychological safety, while important in fostering a supportive and open organizational climate, does not directly improve performance in bureaucratic settings. Although employees who feel psychologically safe are more likely to share ideas and engage in innovative behavior, such perceptions alone are insufficient to influence formal performance metrics that are often governed by rigid procedures, hierarchical authority, and compliance-based evaluation systems. This suggests that psychological safety functions more as an enabling contextual factor rather than as a direct determinant of performance outcomes.

Therefore, public sector reform should move beyond an exclusive focus on structural compliance and administrative control toward the development of behavioral innovation ecosystems. Government institutions need to cultivate adaptive learning capacities, empower employees to experiment with new ideas, and align performance management systems with innovation-oriented contributions. By integrating learning agility development programs with institutional mechanisms that reward innovative behavior, public organizations can create a more dynamic, responsive, and performance-driven bureaucratic environment.

Practical Implications

HR policy should prioritize learning agility development through experiential training. Innovation systems must be institutionalized to convert psychological safety into tangible outcomes. Performance management systems should integrate innovation indicators. Leadership development programs should emphasize adaptive capability and innovation enablement.

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