

How Leadership Perception and Interpersonal Communication Shape Academic Wellbeing: Evidence from Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract:

This study examines the causal relationships between Leadership perception, interpersonal communication, work climate, and lecturers' job satisfaction. Rapid changes in Islamic higher education governance require a deeper understanding of how organisational dynamics shape academic Wellbeing and institutional performance. Using a quantitative, path-analytic approach, this research investigates both direct and indirect effects among the four variables. Data were collected from 100 lecturers selected through the Krejcie and Morgan sampling Table, using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire that had undergone validity and reliability testing. The findings indicate that Leadership perception and interpersonal communication significantly influence work climate, with interpersonal communication emerging as the strongest predictor. Leadership perception, interpersonal communication, and work climate each have significant direct effects on job satisfaction, with work climate making the most important contribution. The analysis also confirms that work climate partially mediates the relationship between Leadership perception and interpersonal communication toward job satisfaction. The structural model demonstrates strong explanatory power, accounting for 85 per cent of the variance in work climate and 87 per cent of the variance in job satisfaction. These results imply the essential role of supportive Leadership practices, open communication, and a cohesive work environment in enhancing lecturer satisfaction.

Keywords: *Leadership Perception, Interpersonal Communication, Work Climate, Job Satisfaction*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menganalisis hubungan kausal antara persepsi kepemimpinan, komunikasi antarpersonal, iklim kerja, dan kepuasan kerja dosen. Perubahan dalam tata kelola pendidikan tinggi Islam menuntut pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai bagaimana dinamika organisasi memengaruhi kesejahteraan akademik dan kinerja institusi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif melalui analisis jalur, penelitian ini menguji pengaruh langsung dan tidak langsung dari keempat variabel tersebut. Data dikumpulkan dari 100 dosen yang dipilih berdasarkan tabel Krejcie dan Morgan menggunakan kuesioner berskala Likert yang telah melalui uji validitas dan reliabilitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa persepsi kepemimpinan dan komunikasi antarpersonal berpengaruh signifikan terhadap iklim kerja, dengan komunikasi antarpersonal menjadi prediktor terkuat. Persepsi kepemimpinan, komunikasi antarpersonal, dan iklim kerja masing-masing berpengaruh langsung terhadap kepuasan kerja, sementara iklim kerja memberikan kontribusi terbesar. Analisis juga menunjukkan bahwa iklim kerja memediasi secara parsial hubungan antara persepsi kepemimpinan dan komunikasi antarpersonal terhadap kepuasan kerja. Model struktural memiliki daya

jelaskan tinggi, yaitu 85 persen terhadap varians iklim kerja dan 87 persen terhadap varians kepuasan kerja. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya kepemimpinan yang suportif, komunikasi terbuka, dan lingkungan kerja yang kohesif dalam meningkatkan kepuasan kerja dosen.

Kata Kunci: *Persepsi Kepemimpinan, Komunikasi Antarpersonal, Iklim Kerja, Kepuasan Kerja*

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions around the world increasingly recognize the importance of creating work environments that support academic Well-being and professional performance (Douwes et al., 2023; Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023; Kelsey et al., 2023). Global competition requires institutions not only to demonstrate academic excellence but also to establish credible Leadership, effective communication, and organizational climates that earn public trust (Adeoye & Munawwaroh, 2025; Albustomi, 2025). Previous studies emphasize that effective Leadership, clear interpersonal communication, and a healthy work climate serve as essential foundations for institutional growth and sustainability (Boeske, 2023; Fry & Egel, 2021; Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2024). Institutions that succeed in building harmonious internal relations tend to experience stronger organizational performance and stability (Adinew, 2024; Xia et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). This global dynamic is also reflected in Indonesia, where Islamic higher education institutions face growing demands to enhance academic services and create supportive working conditions for lecturers.

Changes in the governance of Islamic higher education introduce new challenges regarding Leadership quality, communication practices, and organizational collaboration. Lecturers face increasing administrative responsibilities, research expectations, and community engagement activities that require a conducive and stable work climate. Reports from Islamic educational institutions indicate that unclear communication patterns, inconsistent Leadership styles, and fluctuating work conditions may reduce motivation and job satisfaction among lecturers (Alkhateeb et al., 2025; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2025; Adeoye & Widiana, 2025). These issues, such as those at IAIN Takengon, are even more pronounced because religious values, academic traditions, and bureaucratic structures interact to shape lecturers' daily work experiences. Understanding the factors influencing job satisfaction is, therefore, critical for strengthening the competitiveness of Islamic higher education institutions.

Previous research in organizational behavior consistently highlights the influence of Leadership, interpersonal communication, and work climate on employee Well-being and satisfaction. Studies show that perceptions of Leadership quality correlate with trust, commitment, and performance (González-Cánovas et al., 2024; Legood et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2022). Other research demonstrates that open and supportive communication fosters collegial relations and enhances comfort within the workplace (Betzler & Löschke, 2021; Nguyen, 2023; Willett et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the work climate often acts as a

mediating factor linking managerial behavior to job outcomes (Hessari et al., 2025; Ofei et al., 2023; Shen et al., 2023). Despite these insights, studies in Islamic higher education tend to analyze these variables separately and have not comprehensively explored their simultaneous effects. This indicates the need for a causal model that captures the complex interactions among these organizational factors.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts an integrative approach to examine how Leadership perception and interpersonal communication influence lecturers' job satisfaction through the mediating role of work climate. This research also contributes conceptually by situating the analysis within the organizational dynamics of Islamic higher education, a context that remains understudied in the literature. Using path analysis, the study aims to test both direct and indirect relationships among the variables and assess the extent to which work climate mediates these effects. Specifically, this study investigates how Leadership, communication, and workplace conditions shape lecturers' job satisfaction at IAIN Takengon, thereby strengthening empirical evidence and providing a foundation for institutional policy development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach, with pathway analysis techniques, to examine the causal relationships among Leadership perception, interpersonal communication, work climate, and lecturer job satisfaction (Fang & Qi, 2023; Yiming et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). Path analysis was chosen because it can identify direct and indirect influences among variables within a single model. This design allows researchers to accurately assess the contribution of each variable in accordance with the established theoretical foundation. The research model is prepared based on a conceptual framework that connects organizational behavior, social interaction, and work environment conditions in the context of Islamic higher education. The research was conducted at IAIN Takengon over one year, namely April 2024 to April 2025. All stages of research are carried out sequentially, starting from topic determination, proposal preparation, literature review, variable identification, and the preparation of research instruments. The activity continued with instrument trials, field data collection, initial processing, and statistical analysis to test the research hypothesis. The final stage includes writing reports, revising substances, and preparing scientific articles for dissemination in accordance with the requirements of academic publications.

The research population comprises 140 IAIN Takengon lecturers from various faculties and study programs. The sample was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan Table at a significance level of 5%, yielding approximately 100 respondents (Haji et al., 2022; Suardana & Adnyana, 2022). The sampling technique focuses on the representation of the work unit, ensuring that the collected data reflect the institution's condition proportionately. Respondents were selected based on their willingness to complete the questionnaire and the suitability of the research criteria (Ali et al., 2023; Hellström et al., 2024; Terzioglu et al., 2021). This approach ensures that the data obtained are accurate, relevant,

and usable for path analysis at the inferential stage. The research involved four main variables, namely Leadership perception, interpersonal communication, work climate, and job satisfaction. Each variable is operationalized through specific indicators, thereby making the measurement process more targeted, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Variables and Indicators

| Dimension | Indicator | Number of Items |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Leadership Perception (X1) | Personality of the Leader | 2 |
| | Knowledge of Faculty | 2 |
| | Understanding of Vision and Mission | 2 |
| | Decision-Making Ability | 2 |
| | Communication Pattern | 2 |
| | | |
| Interpersonal Communication (X2) | Shared Meaning | 3 |
| | Supportive Messages | 3 |
| | Usefulness of Information | 3 |
| | Openness | 3 |
| | Relationship Maintenance | 3 |
| Work Climate (X3) | Open Structure | 3 |
| | Dynamic Performance Standards | 3 |
| | Managerial Support | 3 |
| | Responsibility | 3 |
| | Involvement | 3 |
| Job Satisfaction (X4) | Goal Attainment | 2 |
| | Workplace Comfort | 2 |
| | Supervisor Recognition | 2 |
| | Enjoyment at Work | 2 |
| | Feedback | 2 |

This stage ensures that each item can measure the indicator precisely. Validity was calculated using Pearson's correlation, with the correlation coefficient exceeding the 5% critical value (Merino et al., 2022; Schröder et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2022). The instrument's reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency across the grains. The instrument is deemed feasible if all items are valid and have strong reliability. The results of the trial were used to improve the redaction and to eliminate less representative items before distributing the main questionnaire (Bhargava et al., 2023; Hughes et al., 2022; 2024). The data were analyzed using two main stages. The first stage is descriptive analysis to calculate the average, standard deviation, and score tendency of each variable (Fulk, 2023). The second stage is an inferential analysis, which includes tests of normality, homogeneity, linearity, and regression significance (Ullah & Ameen, 2022). Strip analysis is used to test causal models in line with the research hypothesis. This technique allows researchers to assess the direct and indirect influence of Leadership perceptions and interpersonal communication on job satisfaction through the work climate. The results of the analysis are the basis for empirical interpretation and theoretical discussion in the next section.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was carried out to describe the general tendencies of the research variables, including lecturers' perceptions of Leadership (X_1), interpersonal communication (X_2), work climate (X_3), and job satisfaction (X_4). This analysis aimed to identify the distribution, average score, and variability of respondents' answers before performing the inferential tests. The results of the descriptive statistical test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Descriptive Statistical Test

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance | Range | Minimum | Maximum |
|-------------------------------------|-----|--------|----------------|----------|-------|---------|---------|
| X_1 – Leadership Perception | 100 | 110.75 | 7.60 | 57.76 | 32 | 95 | 127 |
| X_2 – Interpersonal Communication | 100 | 124.52 | 9.01 | 81.18 | 35 | 110 | 145 |
| X_3 – Work Climate | 100 | 120.72 | 10.51 | 110.26 | 38 | 102 | 140 |
| X_4 – Job Satisfaction | 100 | 129.87 | 8.89 | 79.04 | 33 | 115 | 148 |

Table 1 shows four variables that represent perceptions and working conditions in the organization. Leadership Perception has a mean of 110.75, with a wide range of scores reflecting the diversity of respondents' assessments of Leadership patterns. Interpersonal Communication showed a mean of 124.52. This figure is higher than that for other variables, indicating that most respondents rate the quality of interpersonal communication higher. Work Climate recorded a mean of 120.72, indicating a relatively conducive work atmosphere. Job Satisfaction is at its highest, with a mean of 129.87. These findings suggest that job satisfaction is in a better category than other aspects. The variance in each variable shows the degree of difference in assessment between respondents. This data pattern can serve as a basis for determining organizational development priorities, especially to strengthen Leadership perceptions and improve the work climate, thereby aligning with a higher level of satisfaction in both general organizations and Islamic educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools.

Path Analysis

Path analysis was conducted to examine the causal relationships among the four main variables: lecturers' perceptions of Leadership (X_1), interpersonal communication (X_2), work climate (X_3), and job satisfaction (X_4). This analysis aimed to determine both the direct and indirect effects of Leadership perception and interpersonal communication on job satisfaction, with work climate serving as a mediating variable. The structural model is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the direction and magnitude of the causal relationships among variables.

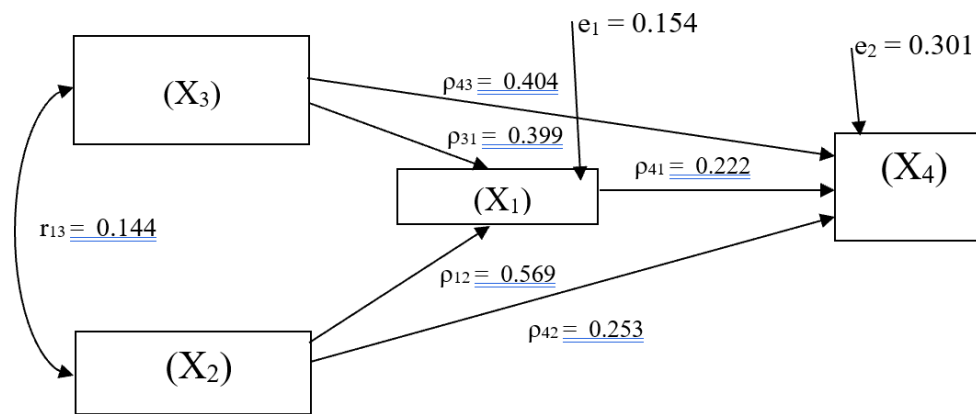


Figure 1. Path Diagram of the Effects of Leadership, Interpersonal Communication, and Work Climate on Job Satisfaction

As shown in Figure 1, Leadership perception (X_1) and interpersonal communication (X_2) directly influence work climate (X_3). Furthermore, job satisfaction (X_4) is affected by all three variables, both directly and indirectly through the work climate. To provide a more straightforward overview of these relationships, the results of the direct and indirect effects are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Direct Effects among Variables

| Path | Direct Effect (ρ) | Interpretation |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| $X_1 \rightarrow X_3$ | 0.399 | Leadership perception directly influences work climate. |
| $X_2 \rightarrow X_3$ | 0.569 | Interpersonal communication has a substantial direct effect on work climate. |
| $X_1 \rightarrow X_4$ | 0.222 | Leadership perception directly affects job satisfaction. |
| $X_2 \rightarrow X_4$ | 0.253 | Interpersonal communication directly affects job satisfaction. |
| $X_3 \rightarrow X_4$ | 0.404 | Work climate has the strongest direct Effect on job satisfaction. |

The first hypothesis (H1) was supported, showing that Leadership Perception exerted a significant direct effect on Work Climate with a path coefficient of 0.399. Improvements in Leadership quality enhance the work environment for employees. The coefficient reflects a moderate level of influence, indicating that Leadership meaningfully shapes the conditions within the organizational environment.

The second hypothesis (H2) was confirmed. Interpersonal Communication demonstrated a substantial, significant direct effect on Work Climate, with a coefficient of 0.569. This value shows that higher-quality communication among employees substantially improves the work environment. The magnitude of the coefficient positions interpersonal communication as the most influential factor in forming a favorable Work Climate.

The third hypothesis (H3) was accepted, indicating that Leadership Perception had a significant direct effect on Job Satisfaction with a coefficient of 0.222. Although significant, the effect size is relatively small. Enhancements in Leadership can still raise job satisfaction, but the impact is weaker than that of the other predictors.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) was also supported. Interpersonal Communication directly influenced Job Satisfaction with a coefficient of 0.253. This Effect surpasses that of Leadership, suggesting that effective communication plays a more prominent role in strengthening job satisfaction among employees.

The fifth hypothesis (H5) was confirmed, showing that Work Climate had the most substantial direct influence on Job Satisfaction, with a coefficient of 0.404. This finding highlights that a favorable Work Climate contributes substantially to elevating employees' satisfaction and is the primary driver among the variables tested. In educational institutions, including Islamic colleges and pesantren-based systems, this pattern emphasizes the strategic importance of fostering a supportive, cohesive work climate to sustain educator Well-being.

Table 3. Indirect Effects through Work Climate (X_3)

| Path | Indirect Effect (ρ) | Interpretation |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| $X_1 \rightarrow X_4$ (through X_3) | 0.160 | Leadership indirectly increases job satisfaction via a positive work climate. |
| $X_2 \rightarrow X_4$ (through X_3) | 0.230 | Interpersonal communication indirectly enhances job satisfaction through work climate. |

The indirect effects of Leadership and communication through the work climate are also significant, although smaller in magnitude, with coefficients of $\rho = 0.160$ and $\rho = 0.230$, respectively. These results show that the work climate functions as a partial mediator, strengthening the relationships among Leadership, communication, and job satisfaction. In Islamic educational settings such as IAIN Takengon or modern pesantren, this pattern underscores the role of a supportive work environment in amplifying managerial practices and interpersonal communication that contribute to lecturer Well-being.

The structural model demonstrates strong explanatory power. The residual values ($e_1 = 0.154$ and $e_2 = 0.301$) indicate that the model explains approximately 85% of the variance in work climate and 87% of the variance in job satisfaction. These findings confirm that the proposed causal model fits the data well. The combination of effective Leadership, positive interpersonal communication, and a supportive work climate provides a robust explanation for lecturers' job satisfaction at IAIN Takengon.

Model Residual / Error Term

To determine how well the model explains variation among variables, the residual (e) was calculated for each structural equation. The residual values represent the proportion of variance in the dependent variables that is not explained by the model's predictors. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Model Residuals

| Model Structure | Residual (e) | Proportion (%) | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------|------------------|----------------|---|
| Structure 1 (Work Climate) | $e_1 = 0.154$ | 15 % | Indicates that 85 % of the variance in work climate is explained by Leadership perception and interpersonal communication. |
| Structure 2 (Job Satisfaction) | $e_2 = 0.301$ | 13 % | Indicates that 87 % of the variance in job satisfaction is explained by Leadership perception, interpersonal communication, and work climate. |

The residual values in Table 4 demonstrate that the model has strong explanatory power. Only a small proportion of the variance 15% for work climate and 13% for job satisfaction, remains unexplained by the variables included in the model. Therefore, the structural model can be considered reliable in describing the causal relationships among Leadership perception, interpersonal communication, work climate, and lecturers' job satisfaction at IAIN Takengon.

Discussion

The present study investigated the causal relationships among Leadership perception, interpersonal communication, work climate, and lecturers' job satisfaction at IAIN Takengon. This research was conducted to address ongoing challenges faced by higher education institutions in building organizational environments that support academic performance and Well-being. Earlier studies identified Leadership and communication as core determinants of staff satisfaction and performance (Amadu & Anyarayer, 2022; Curado et al., 2022; Santalla-Banderali & Alvarado, 2022). Empirical studies from Islamic higher education settings in Indonesia remain limited, so this research sought to reduce that gap by testing a causal model using path analysis. The model examined both direct and indirect effects of Leadership perception and interpersonal communication on job satisfaction through work climate. The findings extend the literature on organizational behavior by situating Leadership and communication within the operational realities of Islamic educational institutions.

The results produced several key insights. Leadership perception ($\rho = 0.399$) and interpersonal communication ($\rho = 0.569$) each showed strong and positive direct effects on work climate. Leadership perception ($\rho = 0.222$), interpersonal communication ($\rho = 0.253$), and work climate ($\rho = 0.404$) also had direct positive effects on job satisfaction. Work climate emerged as the most influential predictor. This pattern indicates that the daily conditions within the institution, including collaboration, fairness, and trust, shape job satisfaction more strongly than Leadership alone. Indirect effects were present but smaller ($\rho = 0.160$ and $\rho = 0.230$). These values indicate that work climate acts as a partial mediator rather than a full mediator.

The findings align with Corpuz's (2023) framework of organizational behavior, which states that Leadership, communication, and climate jointly shape satisfaction and performance. One unexpected result was the more negligible influence of Leadership compared to work climate and communication. Previous research often identifies Leadership as the dominant factor (Boeske, 2023; Douwes et al., 2023; Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2024). The results of this study show that environmental and social factors in the workplace have more potent effects. This difference suggests a contextual pattern. Lecturers in Islamic higher education may derive greater satisfaction from collegial relationships and perceptions of fairness than from hierarchical Leadership structures.

The results are consistent with those of Fry & Egel (2021), who found that organizational climate strongly affects Well-being and job satisfaction in Chinese higher education. Xia et al. (2024) also reported that effective interpersonal

communication improves commitment and professional engagement. In contrast, the reduced influence of Leadership differs (Adinew, 2024). Their study showed that transformational Leadership was the strongest predictor of satisfaction and team performance. Differences in culture and institutional characteristics may explain this. Indonesian academic institutions tend to emphasize collective collegiality and spiritual orientation in work life, rather than individual Leadership authority.

This study contributes to the field of Islamic Educational Management by offering empirical evidence on how Leadership perception, interpersonal communication, and work climate shape job satisfaction within an Islamic higher education environment. The path analysis clarified the causal structure among the variables and identified work climate as the most influential factor. The findings highlight that effective management in Islamic higher education depends not only on formal Leadership roles but also on the development of a supportive, communicative, and collaborative organizational setting. By grounding the analysis in the context of IAIN Takengon, this research provides practical insights for institutional leaders who aim to improve job satisfaction and strengthen academic performance in Islamic educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This research addressed the ongoing challenge of understanding the determinants of lecturers' job satisfaction in Islamic higher education, focusing on how Leadership perceptions, interpersonal communication, and work climate interact to influence satisfaction levels. Using a quantitative path analysis, the study found that all three factors significantly contribute to job satisfaction, with work climate emerging as the most influential variable. Leadership and interpersonal communication were also found to have both direct and indirect effects, confirming that a conducive work environment mediates the relationship between management behavior and employee Well-being. These findings provide a clearer understanding of the causal dynamics that shape academic satisfaction in Islamic institutions, where social and organizational harmony are essential for institutional effectiveness.

The results highlight the need for educational leaders to prioritize building a supportive and collaborative organizational culture that fosters open communication and collegial trust. Enhancing the work climate through participatory Leadership and effective communication strategies can improve motivation, performance, and institutional loyalty among lecturers. Beyond its practical implications, this research contributes theoretically to the field of Islamic educational management by contextualizing Leadership and organizational behavior within faith-based academic settings. Future research may extend these findings by exploring additional mediating variables, such as motivation and organizational justice, across different institutional and cultural contexts to strengthen the model's generalizability.

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