



Does hierarchical culture matter? Moderating organizational learning and job satisfaction among Indonesian civil servants

Meilda Aulia Aziza¹ and Arum Etikariena²

¹Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia

²Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Background: Job satisfaction among civil servants is crucial in improving their public services. Job satisfaction could be enhanced by organizational learning. However, hierarchical cultures can have a positive influence on these processes. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the role of hierarchical culture in shaping the effectiveness of organizational learning to improve job satisfaction.

Purpose: This study examines the moderating role of hierarchical culture in the relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction among civil servants.

Method: 203 civil servants participated in an online survey using the Organizational Learning Scale ($\alpha=.90$), the Job Satisfaction Scale ($\alpha=.94$), and the Hierarchical Culture Scale ($\alpha=.78$). Data analysis was conducted using PROCESS.

Findings: The results indicate a positive and significant relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction ($b = 0.4829$, $t = 4.3755$, $p < .001$). However, the moderating role of hierarchical culture in the relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction is not significant ($b = -0.0380$, $t = -1.4777$, $p > .005$).

Implication: Organizational learning in the public sector has a crucial impact on job satisfaction among civil servants, whereas the hierarchical culture neither strengthens nor weakens the relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction. Practically, government institutions implementing bureaucratic reform are encouraged to enhance organizational learning to foster civil servants' job satisfaction. Hierarchical culture can be maintained while organizations are still able to adapt to changes so that they can build a positive working environment, specifically organizational learning.

KEYWORDS

Moderating effect; hierarchical culture; civil servants; job satisfaction; organizational learning.

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Introduction

Indonesia is predicted to become the fourth-largest country with the implementation of a world-class bureaucracy (Prasojo, 2019). To achieve this vision, the government has initiated bureaucratic reforms to enhance the public service. Civil servants play a crucial role as the primary workforce in implementing public services. Despite this bureaucratic reform, the welfare of civil servants remains a concern. According to the Ministry of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform (Erlangga, 2024), bureaucratic reform is not aligned with the welfare of civil servants. The welfare of civil servants is crucial to the success of bureaucratic reform. Satisfied employees are more likely to demonstrate positive work outcomes, contributing to improved organizational performance (Choi, 2020). This is due to the fact that satisfied employees tend to enjoy their work, feel a sense of belonging within the organization, and perceive a strong alignment between their personal goals and the institution's identity (Rai & Verma, 2023). Without adequate welfare support, the reform process risks becoming ineffective.

Therefore, improving civil servant welfare should be an integral part of bureaucratic reform strategies to ensure that public service transformation is both sustainable and comprehensive.

The study of job satisfaction has sustained scholarly interest for more than nine decades since it was first introduced in the 1930s (Judge et al., 2017; Judge et al., 2020). Job satisfaction stems from multiple aspects experienced by employees in the workplace, including salary, career advancement opportunities, relationships with colleagues and supervisors, as well as the nature of the job itself (Luz et al., 2018). Job satisfaction refers to an individual's subjective and psychological reflection on their work environment and the nature of their job, encompassing emotions, perceptions, and evaluations (Judge et al., 2017). Furthermore, job satisfaction is a positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of an individual's job or job experience (Judge et al., 2020; Onyemah et al., 2018). Employees who experience job satisfaction are more likely to feel enthusiastic about their jobs and find enjoyment compared to those who are dissatisfied with their work (Ye et al., 2019). Lack of attention to job satisfaction will make employees feel bored at work (Dobrow et al., 2018). Therefore, all possible means to improve employees' job satisfaction must be adopted (Ye et al., 2019).

One key factor that may significantly influence job satisfaction is the presence of a strong learning culture within the organization, often referred to as organizational learning. Organizational learning is creating, acquiring, sharing knowledge, and modifying behaviors to reflect new knowledge and insights (Garvin, 1993). The four dimensions of organizational learning are learning from experience, encouraging the creation of new knowledge and ideas, tolerance for mistakes when testing new ideas, and encouraging knowledge sharing (Kohtamäki et al., 2012). Organizational learning is a vital process that enhances organizational effectiveness by systematically improving performance and outcomes (Chao et al., 2024). Organizational learning has been identified as an effective strategy for improving performance, particularly during times of change, as it demonstrates how to approach tasks differently to enhance organizational performance (Tortorella et al., 2020; Pedler & Burgoyne, 2017). A growing learning environment promotes a culture in which employees are encouraged to engage in continuous learning and knowledge sharing, thereby enhancing their job satisfaction (Chao et al., 2024). By cultivating such an environment, organizational learning can produce a substantial positive effect on job satisfaction, which is a key component of an individual's psychological and emotional response to their work and responsibilities (Chao et al., 2024). Learning organizations enable employees to adapt and enhance efficiency, productivity, and service quality (Eisenberg et al., 2018). Previous studies by Islam et al. (2015) presented that there is a relationship between organizational learning and employee job satisfaction. Organizational learning enables employees to be more responsive and goal-oriented, resulting in higher levels of job satisfaction (Lin et al., 2019). In line with Lin and Huang (2020), organizational learning can increase civil servants' engagement and can effectively enhance job satisfaction.

However, the organizational culture context plays a crucial role in strengthening or potentially weakening the correlation between organizational learning and job satisfaction. Organizational culture significantly shapes employees' behaviors and attitudes (Tarba et al., 2017). While various types of organizational culture exist, in the context of government institutions, hierarchical culture is strongly experienced by civil servants. Therefore, this study focuses on hierarchical culture. Hierarchical culture is characterized by formal structures and strict regulations. Organizations with a hierarchical culture tend to emphasize predictability and stability in relationships, which in turn positively influences organizational output (Alqudah et al., 2022; Raziq et al., 2024). Hierarchical cultures pay more attention to the implementation of rules at all levels of management, relying on rules to solve problems and improve organizational

learning (Shahriari & Allameh, 2020). In addition, a hierarchical culture establishes clear communication channels for employees, which helps reduce uncertainty and enables them to share innovative ideas, thereby promoting organizational learning (Keum & See, 2017). Previous studies have indicated that hierarchical cultures are a stronger predictor of organizational learning than other cultural types (Saif, 2017). A hierarchical culture also streamlines organizational learning, such as knowledge sharing and integration, thus propelling innovation (Keum & See, 2017). Other studies also stated that organizational learning has a positive impact on hierarchical culture to increase job satisfaction (Shao et al., 2015; Alattas, 2015).

While some studies have found positive links between hierarchical culture and knowledge-sharing behaviors that support organizational learning (Alqudah et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2015; Alattas, 2015), others argue that rigid structures can hinder learning and adaptability (Oh & Han, 2020). Top et al. (2015) also presented that the hierarchical culture is often considered the main reason leading to low job satisfaction. Alsabbagh and Khalil (2017) also found a negative correlation between organizational learning and hierarchical culture because of their inability to adapt to changes in environmental conditions and tolerate mistakes, so they do not support organizational learning. In another study by Krauss & Vanhove (2022) state that hierarchical culture limits organizational learning due to rigid and centralized processes, but favors stability for workers who value structure more. Based on the inconsistent findings above, it is important to gain more deeper whether hierarchical culture influences the link between organizational learning and job satisfaction. Therefore, this study aims to test whether hierarchical culture moderates the link between organizational learning and job satisfaction.

This research is grounded in social exchange theory (SET) by Blau (1964), which emphasizes the principle of reciprocity in organizational settings, where employees engage in social exchanges with the organization. It considers the benefits of the relationship and examines how such exchanges foster job satisfaction. If the organization is committed to facilitating employee learning, in turn, employees feel obligated to demonstrate positive attitudes, including job satisfaction (Cheah & Rahim, 2024). Furthermore, when employees perceive that the organization supports their career development, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction (Harden et al., 2018). Organizational learning provides the necessary support for employees to develop their potential and competencies at work. This process enhances their willingness to engage in continuous learning, enabling them to become more responsive, goal-oriented, and to experience higher levels of job satisfaction (Lin et al., 2019). Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study is:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive association between organizational learning and job satisfaction.

However, this relationship may be influenced by organizational culture, specifically, hierarchical culture. Studies argue that organizations can implement structured and systematic learning approaches, which in turn may enhance job satisfaction (Al Maazmi et al., 2024). Organizational learning, which plays a critical role in improving job satisfaction, may be further strengthened when employees perceive certainty through clearly defined structures and established procedures. Such clarity enables organizational learning to occur in a structured, predictable, and consistent manner. When employees encounter challenges, this structure can guide them through step-by-step problem-solving processes, reinforcing their sense of direction and support. According to social exchange theory, the more positively employees perceive organizational support, the more likely they are to exhibit positive work-related attitudes, including job satisfaction. Within this context, the employee-employer relationship is shaped as a reciprocal social exchange, where both parties support one another for mutual benefit. Empirical findings by Rawashdeh et al. (2025) demonstrated that in organizations with a strong

hierarchical culture, employees tend to show greater acceptance and commitment to implemented policies and practices. This is because hierarchical culture fosters a stable and structured environment, helping employees to clearly understand their roles, responsibilities, and how their contributions align with organizational goals. Employees working in such environments are typically more prepared to adapt to organizational changes, as they have a clear grasp of the organization's direction and expectations. Therefore, the second hypothesis of this study is:

Hypothesis 2: Hierarchical culture moderates the relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction. The relationship is strengthened when employees perceive a hierarchical culture as higher than lower.

To provide a clearer overview of this study, the proposed model is illustrated in Figure 1. This conceptual model outlines the hypothesized relationships between organizational learning, job satisfaction, and hierarchical culture as a moderating variable.

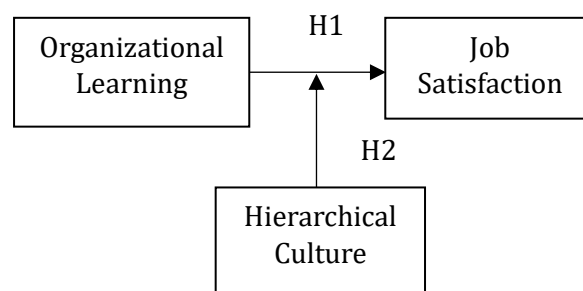


Figure 1. *Proposed Model*

Method

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative research design. Online questionnaires given to respondents were provided with a consent form. This study is to conduct a correlational analysis to examine the relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction, with hierarchical culture serving as a moderating variable in the context of civil servants in Indonesia.

Participants

The subject of this study is the civil servants in Indonesia, using a nonprobability sampling technique with the convenience sampling method. The criteria for participants are civil servants who have worked for at least 2 years in the same organization. The number of participants obtained was 217 people, but after checking the data, it was found that only 203 met the criteria. Demographic data results were obtained from the data processing descriptively. Participants in this study are 203 civil servants throughout Indonesia from various institutions with an age range of 24-66 years. The largest percentage is 34.6% in the age range of 25-34 years. The working period of the participants is 2-39 years. The majority of participants were undergraduates, 55.7% or a total of 113. Detailed demographics of research participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.*Research Participant Demographics*

Category	n	%
Gender		
Female	127	62.6
Male	76	37.4
Age		
15 – 24 years	3	1.5
25 – 34 years	70	34.6
35 – 44 years	63	31
45 – 54 years	35	17.4
55 – 64 years	31	15.3
65 – 74 years	1	0.5
Educational Background		
Senior High School	4	2
Diploma	19	9.4
Bachelor	113	55.7
Master	54	26.6
Doctoral	13	6.4
Tenure		
2 – 10 years	105	51.7
11 – 20 years	44	21.6
21 – 30 years	37	18.2
31 – 39 years	17	8.3

Instruments

The instruments are present in Bahasa Indonesia; therefore, before conducting the study, the researcher adopted the measurement tools for organizational learning and organizational culture, as the original instruments were in English. The translation process was carried out by two experts in industrial and organizational psychology, each with a TOEFL score above 550. The translated instruments were then back-translated into English to ensure accuracy. These translations were synthesized into a single document and subsequently reviewed by an expert judgment for further refinement. A pilot test was conducted with 31 respondents to assess the validity and reliability of the instruments.

Job satisfaction was measured using 36 items of the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) developed by Spector (1997). The job satisfaction measurement tool has been adapted using Indonesian in the research of Junaedi and Aisyah (2023). The job satisfaction measurement tool uses 6 points of the Likert scale, with the lowest score (1) with the tendency of individuals to have low job satisfaction and (6) with the tendency of individuals to have high job satisfaction. Example item: "I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do." The results of the reliability test in the measuring instrument test showed a Cronbach's value of $\alpha = .94$.

Organizational learning is measured using 4 items based on the definition of organizational learning by Garvin (1993), developed by Kohtamäki et al. (2012). This measuring tool uses 6 Likert scale points, with the lowest score (1) with low organizational learning tendency and (6) with high organizational learning propensity. An example of this is "Our employees are

encouraged to learn from experience." The results of the reliability test on the test of the measuring instrument showed a value of Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$.

Hierarchical culture was measured using 5 hierarchical culture items from the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). This measuring tool uses six Likert scale points, with the lowest score (1) with the tendency of the organization to have a low hierarchical culture and (6) with the tendency of the organization to have a high hierarchical culture. Example item: "The organization is a very controlled and structured place. Formal procedures generally govern what people do." The results of the reliability test in test of the measuring instrument showed a value of Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$.

Data Analysis

Data analysis using SPSS to conduct descriptive statistical analysis and hypothesis testing, Model 1 of PROCESS version 4.3, developed by Hayes (2013). The analysis methods carried out were reality tests, sample demographic analysis, analysis of the relationship between control variables and employee job satisfaction, and moderated regression analysis to see the role of hierarchical cultural moderation between organizational learning relationships and job satisfaction.

Ethical Clearance

The research has undergone ethical review stages by the Faculty of Psychology Ethical Committee with number 178/FPsi.Komite Etik/PDP.04.00/2024 to ensure the confidentiality of the data, the well-being of respondents, and ethical accountability throughout the research process. Survey responses would remain anonymous and would be used only for research analysis and reporting, and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Result and Discussion

After obtaining the results of descriptive analysis, the analysis continued with statistical analysis, which showed the mean value, standard deviation, and correlation value between variables presented in Table 2. It is known that job satisfaction has a significant relationship with organizational learning ($r = .694, p < .01$) and hierarchical culture ($r = .707, p < .01$). Furthermore, hierarchical culture also has a significant relationship with organizational learning ($r = .627, p < .01$).

Table 2.

Descriptive and Correlation Results of Research Variables

Variable	Means	SD	1	2	3
OL (X)	4.89	.977	-	-	-
JS (Y)	4.11	.792	.694**	-	-
OC (Z)	4.48	1.053	.627**	.707**	-

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

The next stage is regression analysis using Model 1 PROCESS to test the hypothesis shown in Table 3. The results of moderation regression analysis showed that organizational learning had a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction ($b = 0.4829, t = 4.3755, p < .001$). Thus, the H1 research hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, it was found that there was no influence of hierarchical culture as a moderator in the relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction ($b = -0.0380, t = -1.4777, p > .005$). Thus, the H2 research hypothesis was not supported.

Table 3.*Moderation Analysis Results*

	Coeff (B)	Se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	.3074	.4818	.6381	.5242	-.6426	1.2575
OL	.4829	.1104	4.3755	<0.001	.2653	.7005
OC	.5133	.1265	4.0570	.0001	.2638	.7629
Int_1	-.0380	.0257	-1.4777	.1411	-.0886	.0127

Note. N=203. OL = Organizational Learning; OC = Hierarchical Culture; Interaction 1 = (OL x OC) → JS.

Results from this study ($b = 0.4829$, $t = 4.3755$, $p < .001$) support H1, which posits a positive association between organizational learning and job satisfaction. Organizational learning in the public sector has consistently been linked to increased job satisfaction among civil servants. The findings align with prior research by Lin et al. (2022), which demonstrated that civil servants who perceive organizational support for learning tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction. This highlights the critical role of organizational learning in enhancing civil servants' satisfaction. This finding complements a recent study by Chao et al. (2024), which involved social workers in Macau and demonstrated that organizational learning significantly and positively influences job satisfaction. This extends the understanding that not only social workers benefit from organizational learning in enhancing job satisfaction, but public sector employees also require organizational learning at individual, team, and organizational levels to improve their work satisfaction, in the end, could increase public services effectively.

Another result from this study ($b = -0.0380$, $t = -1.4777$, $p > .005$) didn't support H2, stating that there was no influence of hierarchical culture as a moderator in the relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction. This finding differs from previous studies, which argue that hierarchical culture positively affects organizational learning, particularly in public sector organizations (Raziq et al., 2024). On the other hand, this result is in concurrence with older previous studies by Dajani and Mohamad (2017) that did not find a significant moderating effect of organizational culture on organizational learning. This result may be attributed to several alternative explanations. It is suspected that one of the reasons hierarchy cultures does not moderate the relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction is that the sample of civil servants who consider hierarchical culture creates a conducive work environment (Supriatna, 2017). As they may feel that hierarchical culture is a normal condition and is already deeply embedded in employees' daily experience, the participants of this study have already worked for a minimum of 2 years. As a result, the presence or absence of hierarchical culture may not be perceived as a distinguishing factor influencing how organizational learning impacts job satisfaction.

Secondly, it is also possible that other variables, such as psychological capital or individual characteristics, play a more critical role in shaping how organizational learning translates into job satisfaction. According to Ryu & Moon (2019), internal factors have a stronger influence on job satisfaction than external factors, such as self-motivation to learn. Moreover, intrinsic motives for participating in learning programs are the core element to predict individual performance, but in an organizational context, employees have different types of learning motives. Another reason the hierarchical culture does not moderate is that the sample of civil servants from various institutions in Indonesia makes the hierarchical culture less specific than is studied. According to Siswanti & Nurhariati (2022), hierarchical culture positively influences organizational learning only when accompanied by clear policies and structures. Thus, it is important to conduct an

analysis involving one specific organization to see the impact of hierarchical culture on organizational learning and job satisfaction. Lastly, Aichouche et al. (2022) stated that organizational culture—such as hierarchy, adhocracy, clan, or market—has its advantages and limitations in the context of organizational learning. Therefore, managers must carefully consider how their organization's prevailing cultural characteristics influence organizational learning processes.

Theoretically, the findings of this study contribute to the understanding of organizational learning and job satisfaction in the public sector. Also, this research expands the knowledge related to job satisfaction from a social exchange theory perspective, as well as the role of hierarchical culture as a moderating variable in the relationship between organizational learning and job satisfaction. Practically, this study offers valuable input for government institutions undergoing bureaucratic reform. Primarily, it highlights the importance of enhancing organizational learning as a means to foster civil servants' job satisfaction. Secondly, it suggests that hierarchical culture can be preserved within government institutions while still allowing for adaptability to change, thereby supporting the development of a positive work environment, particularly in organizational learning.

However, this study also has limitations. The sample selection in this study, with a non-probability, convenience sampling method, restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader or different populations. Also, obtaining data from a self-report questionnaire may have influenced the sensitivity of the analysis in detecting interaction effects. Future research could benefit from using multi-source data or conducting comparative studies across sectors with varying levels of hierarchical culture.

Conclusion

A key takeaway from these findings is that organizational learning in the public sector has a crucial impact on job satisfaction among civil servants. This study concludes that organizational learning has a significant effect on civil servants' job satisfaction in Indonesia, but the hierarchical culture cannot moderate the relationship between organizational learning and civil servants' job satisfaction in Indonesia. Practically, for government institutions undergoing bureaucratic reform, fostering continuous learning is imperative. Supporting continuous organizational learning not only enhances the institution's ability to adapt to reform initiatives but also positively influences employee job satisfaction and strengthens overall institutional performance. The hierarchical culture can be maintained while the organization adapts to changes, so that it can foster organizational learning to increase job satisfaction. For the next research, it is possible to take samples of civil servants in one organization so that it can describe specifically the hierarchical culture. Another suggestion for further research is to look for another culture, such as clan culture, adhocracy culture, or market culture, which can also examine an internal factor that can moderate organizational learning.

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