# THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN MEDIATING THE INFLUENCE OF MERITOCRACY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ON EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT OF WEST NUSA TENGGARA

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## Abstract

This study examines the mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between meritocracy, organizational culture, and employee retention, analyzing both direct and indirect effects. The research was conducted at the Provincial Government of West Nusa Tenggara, involving a population of 288 structural officials (Echelon II, III, and IV), with a sample of 103 respondents selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The results reveal that meritocracy and organizational culture positively and significantly influence both employee retention and organizational commitment, while organizational commitment emerges as the strongest predictor of retention and partially mediates the influence of both meritocracy and organizational culture on retention. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening the merit system and embedding organizational culture to enhance employee retention through the development of organizational commitment.

**Keywords:** Meritocracy, Organizational Culture, Organizational Commitment, Employee Retention, Public Sector

## INTRODUCTION

Human resources are a strategic asset for organizational success, particularly in the public sector where bureaucratic reform depends heavily on the quality of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) (Sedarmayanti, 2017). From a New Public Service perspective, the bureaucracy must be adaptive, responsive, and public-oriented (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). ASN retention has become increasingly critical in Indonesia, yet more complex under the recent legal framework of Law Number 20 of 2023, which mandates structural reforms but introduces transitional challenges in career management and the absorption of non-ASN personnel. Despite over a decade of reform, only 12.8% of local governments are rated "good" on merit system implementation by the Civil Service Commission (KASN) (Dwiputrianti et al., 2024), while 38.4% of ASN are aged 51–60, signalling an impending retirement wave (Kurniawan & Suswanta, 2021).

Literature identifies meritocracy, organizational culture, and commitment as key retention determinants (Balushi et al., 2022). Public-sector retention depends on perceived justice, work culture, and emotional attachment (Syam et al., 2025). This aligns with Social Exchange Theory employees reciprocate fair treatment with loyalty (Nawaz & Pangil, 2016; Vandenberghe et al., 2019) and Perceived Organizational Support Theory, which links fair promotion and competency development to stronger commitment and retention (Balushi et al., 2022). Meritocracy is defined as an ASN system prioritizing competence and performance in career development (Rahman et al., 2026; Roziqin et al., 2026), while organizational culture is operationalized through the BerAKHLAK Core Values (Brumadyadisty, 2025; Tantri et al., 2022), both hypothesized to affect retention directly and indirectly via organizational commitment.

This dynamic is vividly reflected in the Provincial Government of NTB, where 2025–2026 saw controversies over the Regional Secretary appointment, contested promotions, and structural reforms affecting officials (ANTARA NTB, 2026; IDN Times NTB, 2026; NTBSatu, 2026). Regional Personnel Agency data show inter-agency transfers rising from 78 (2023) to 106 (2025), driven by non-meritocratic promotions, unsupportive culture, and low organizational attachment (BKD Provinsi NTB, 2025).

Despite extensive research, findings on the effects of meritocracy and organizational culture on retention remain inconsistent (Deni et al., 2025; Hendriati et al., 2024; Oslita et al., 2025; Suharto, 2025; Syam et al., 2025), and studies in Eastern Indonesian local governments, particularly NTB, remain scarce (Dwiputrianti et al., 2024; Rafika et al., 2025). Although Riyansyah and Suryatni (2025) stress the importance of strengthening organizational systems and commitment, the mediating role of commitment between meritocracy, culture, and retention is unexplored. This study therefore aims to analyze the effect of meritocracy and organizational culture on ASN retention through organizational commitment as a mediating variable in the Provincial Government of NTB following Law Number 20 of 2023, offering recommendations for strengthening the merit system, BerAKHLAK culture internalization, and ASN retention.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Meritocracy is a system that positions competence and achievement as the basis for placement, development, and reward (Young, 1958), reflecting objective, performance-based promotion (Castilla & Benard, 2010). In the public sector it is realized through the merit

system for civil servants, grounded in qualification, competence, and performance (Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara [KASN], 2018), and measured through competency-based talent management, performance appraisal, potential mapping, career development, and objective job promotion (Peraturan Gubernur Nusa Tenggara Barat No. 71/2022).

Organizational culture is the shared system of values, norms, and behavioral patterns guiding members' thinking and action (Schein, 2010; Robbins & Judge, 2019), formed through social interaction (Alvesson, 2013) and strengthening organizational effectiveness when consistently embedded (Denison et al., 2014). In this study it is measured through the BerAKHLAK core values: service orientation, accountability, competence, harmony, loyalty, adaptability, and collaboration (Kementerian PANRB, 2021).

Organizational commitment is the psychological bond that shapes an employee's decision to remain part of the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1993; Robbins & Judge, 2019), developing when employees feel valued and supported (Bakker et al., 2015). It is measured through affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1993).

Employee retention is an organization's capacity to keep employees working and contributing over time (Mathis & Jackson, 2006), reflecting the overall employee experience rather than merely the inverse of turnover (Hom et al., 2017). It is measured through satisfiers, dissatisfiers, and general satisfaction (Fahim, 2018).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This quantitative associative causal study examines the effect of meritocracy and organizational culture on employee retention through organizational commitment in the Provincial Government of West Nusa Tenggara. Primary data were collected via offline closed questionnaires from 103 structural officials (Echelon II, III, IV) selected through proportionate stratified random sampling from a population of 288, while secondary data were obtained from agency documents and regulations. Instruments measured meritocracy, BerAKHLAK culture, organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1993), and employee retention (Fahim, 2018) on a five-point Likert scale. Data analysis employed PLS-SEM with SmartPLS to evaluate direct and indirect effects and the mediating role of organizational commitment.

### Research Hypothesis

This study aims to examine the influence of meritocracy and organizational culture on employee retention, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of organizational commitment. Based on the literature review and previous empirical findings, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Meritocracy has a positive and significant effect on employee retention.

H2: Organizational culture has a positive and significant effect on employee retention.

H3: Meritocracy has a positive and significant effect on organizational commitment.

H4: Organizational culture has a positive and significant effect on organizational commitment.

H5: Organizational commitment has a positive and significant effect on employee retention.

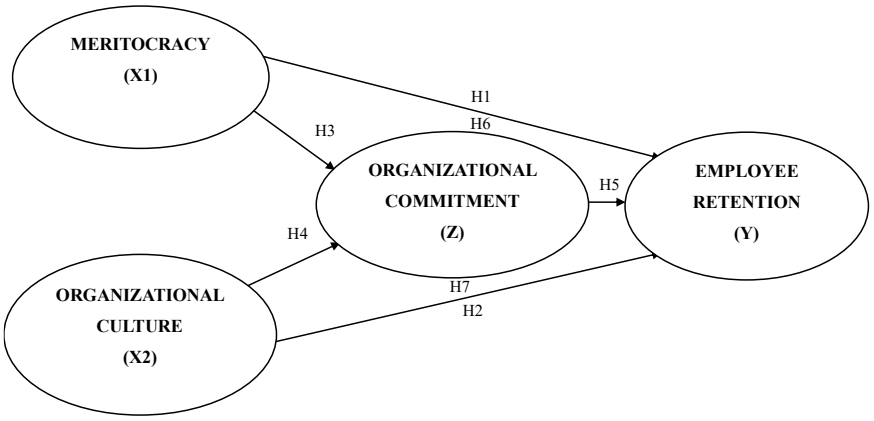
H6: Organizational commitment mediates the effect of meritocracy on employee

retention.

H7: Organizational commitment mediates the effect of organizational culture on employee retention.

## Research Model

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the causal relationship between meritocracy (X1) and organizational culture (X2) as the independent variables, organizational commitment (Z) as the mediating variable, and employee retention (Y) as the dependent variable. The research model can be described as follows:




The model shows that meritocracy (X1) and organizational culture (X2) are expected to influence employee retention (Y) directly and indirectly through organizational commitment (Z). This framework is tested using the PLS-SEM technique to determine both the direct and mediated effects among the variables

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 77 employees from PT. PLN (Persero) UP3 Sumbawa participated in this study. The demographic profiles of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.**
**Respondent Profile**

| Characteristic | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 76 | 73,8 |
| | Female | 27 | 26,2 |
| **Age** | 31–40 Years | 5 | 4,9 |
| | 41–50 Years | 41 | 39,8 |
| | 51–60 Years | 57 | 55,3 |
| **Education Level** | Senior High School | 1 | 1 |
| | Diploma III | 1 | 1 |
| | Diploma IV | 5 | 4,9 |
| | Bachelor's Degree (S1) | 35 | 34 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Master's Degree (S2) | 55 | 53,4 |
| | Doctoral Degree (S3) | 6 | 5,8 |
| **Working Period (Tenure)** | 1–10 years | 2 | 1,9 |
| | 11–20 years | 26 | 25,2 |
| | 21–30 years | 48 | 46,6 |
| | 31–39 years | 27 | 26,2 |
| **Position (Echelon)** | Echelon II | 15 | 14,6 |
| | Echelon III | 55 | 53,4 |
| | Echelon IV | 33 | 32 |

*Source: Processed primary data, 2026*

**Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)**

The measurement model was evaluated through convergent validity using outer loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Based on Hair et al. (2020), an outer loading value ≥ 0.70 is acceptable, AVE ≥ 0.50 indicates adequate convergent validity.

**Table 2.**
**Outer Loading and Average Variance Extracted**

| Variable | Item | Outer Loading | AVE | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Meritocracy (X1) | X1.1 | 0.853 | 0.715 | Valid |
| | X1.2 | 0.828 | | Valid |
| | X1.3 | 0.820 | | Valid |
| | X1.4 | 0.874 | | Valid |
| | X1.5 | 0.861 | | Valid |
| | X1.6 | 0.820 | | Valid |
| | X1.7 | 0.815 | | Valid |
| | X1.8 | 0.879 | | Valid |
| | X1.9 | 0.848 | | Valid |
| | X1.10 | 0.844 | | Valid |
| | X1.11 | 0.858 | | Valid |
| | X1.12 | 0.845 | | Valid |
| Organizational Culture (X2) | X2.1 | 0.821 | 0.724 | Valid |
| | X2.2 | 0.833 | | Valid |
| | X2.3 | 0.841 | | Valid |
| | X2.4 | 0.838 | | Valid |
| | X2.5 | 0.901 | | Valid |
| | X2.6 | 0.886 | | Valid |
| | X2.7 | 0.841 | | Valid |
| | X2.8 | 0.846 | | Valid |
| | X2.9 | 0.885 | | Valid |
| | X2.10 | 0.828 | | Valid |
| | X2.11 | 0.866 | | Valid |
| | X2.12 | 0.854 | | Valid |

| Variable | Item | Outer Loading | AVE | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | X2.13 | 0.840 | | Valid |
| | X2.14 | 0.831 | | Valid |
| Organizational Commitment (Z) | Z1.1 | 0.834 | 0.743 | Valid |
| | Z1.2 | 0.867 | | Valid |
| | Z1.3 | 0.849 | | Valid |
| | Z1.4 | 0.876 | | Valid |
| | Z1.5 | 0.895 | | Valid |
| | Z1.6 | 0.853 | | Valid |
| | Z1.7 | 0.875 | | Valid |
| | Z1.8 | 0.807 | | Valid |
| | Z1.9 | 0.838 | | Valid |
| | Z1.10 | 0.865 | | Valid |
| | Z1.11 | 0.869 | | Valid |
| | Z1.12 | 0.908 | | Valid |
| Employee Retention (Y) | Y.1 | 0.885 | 0.787 | Valid |
| | Y.2 | 0.902 | | Valid |
| | Y.3 | 0.884 | | Valid |
| | Y.4 | 0.898 | | Valid |
| | Y.5 | 0.867 | | Valid |
| | Y.6 | 0.877 | | Valid |
| | Y.7 | 0.888 | | Valid |
| | Y.8 | 0.877 | | Valid |
| | Y.9 | 0.872 | | Valid |
| | Y.10 | 0.891 | | Valid |
| | Y.11 | 0.901 | | Valid |
| | Y.12 | 0.901 | | Valid |

*Source: SmartPLS 4 Output, 2026.*

Table 2 indicates that all indicators on the four research variables possess outer loading values above 0.70, with details of Meritocracy (X1) ranging from 0.815–0.879; Organizational Culture (X2) ranging from 0.821–0.901; Organizational Commitment (Z) ranging from 0.807–0.908; and Employee Retention (Y) ranging from 0.867–0.902. The AVE values of the four variables are also above 0.50, namely 0.715 (X1), 0.724 (X2), 0.743 (Z), and 0.787 (Y), so all indicators and constructs are declared convergently valid.

**Discriminant Validity**

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion, while internal consistency reliability was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR). Following Hair et al. (2021), discriminant validity is established when the HTMT value between any two constructs remains below the 0.90 threshold, while CA and CR values above 0.70 confirm that each construct is reliably measured.

**Table 3.**
**Discriminant Validity (HTMT) and Reliability**

| Construct Relationship / Variable | HTMT | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Organizational Commitment ↔ Organizational Culture | 0.607 | – | – |
| Meritocracy ↔ Organizational Culture | 0.284 | – | – |
| Meritocracy ↔ Organizational Commitment | 0.719 | – | – |
| Employee Retention ↔ Organizational Culture | 0.590 | – | – |
| Employee Retention ↔ Organizational Commitment | 0.862 | – | – |
| Employee Retention ↔ Meritocracy | 0.705 | – | – |
| Meritocracy (X1) | – | 0.964 | 0.968 |
| Organizational Culture (X2) | – | 0.971 | 0.974 |
| Organizational Commitment (Z) | – | 0.968 | 0.972 |
| Employee Retention (Y) | – | 0.975 | 0.978 |

*Source: SmartPLS 4 Output, 2026.*

The measurement model evaluation confirms that all constructs are reliable (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability: 0.964–0.978, > 0.70) and possess adequate discriminant validity (all HTMT values < 0.90, ranging from 0.284 to 0.862). Thus, the measurement model is declared valid and reliable

**Inner Model Test Results**

The structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. Table 4 presents coefficient of determination ($R^2$), predictive relevance ($Q^2$), and effect size ($f^2$) values for all endogenous constructs and their respective antecedent relationships.

**Table 4.**
**Coefficient of Determination ($R^2$), Predictive Relevance ($Q^2$), and Effect Size ($f^2$)**

| Variable / Effect Path | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | $f^2$ | $Q^2$ Predict | Kategori |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Organizational Commitment (Z) | 0,660 | 0,653 | - | 0,643 | Moderate ($R^2$); Substantial ($Q^2$) |
| Employee Retention (Y) | 0,743 | 0,735 | - | 0,616 | Strong ($R^2$); Substantial ($Q^2$) |
| Meritocracy (X1) → | - | - | 0,909 | - | Large ($f^2$) |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Organizational Commitment (Z) | | | | | |
| Organizational Culture (X2) → Organizational Commitment (Z) | - | - | 0,501 | - | Large ($f^2$) |
| Organizational Commitment (Z) → Employee Retention (Y) | - | - | 0,420 | - | Large ($f^2$) |
| Meritocracy (X1) → Employee Retention (Y) | - | - | 0,113 | - | Small ($f^2$) |
| Organizational Culture (X2) → Employee Retention (Y) | - | - | 0,073 | - | Small ($f^2$) |

*Source: SmartPLS 4 Output, 2026.*

Structural model evaluation (inner model) was conducted through the coefficient of determination ($R^2$), effect size ($f^2$), and predictive relevance ($Q^2$). $R^2$ values ≥ 0.67 are categorized as strong, 0.33–0.66 as moderate, and < 0.33 as weak (Hair et al., 2021); $f^2$ values ≥ 0.35 are categorized as large effect, 0.15–0.35 as moderate effect, and 0.02–0.15 as small effect (Cohen, 1988). The $R^2$ value of Organizational Commitment of 0.660 (moderate category) indicates that Meritocracy and Organizational Culture together explain 66.0% of the variation in Organizational Commitment, while the $R^2$ value of Employee Retention of 0.743 (strong category) indicates that the three exogenous variables explain 74.3% of the variation in Employee Retention. The Meritocracy → Organizational Commitment path possesses the largest effect size ($f^2 = 0.909$), while the $Q^2$ Predict values for Organizational Commitment (0.643) and Employee Retention (0.616) are in the substantial category, indicating that the research model has strong predictive relevance.

**Hypothesis Testing**

The structural model was evaluated through the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 4 with 5,000 subsamples, generating path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values for both direct and indirect (mediation) effects. A hypothesis is accepted when the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05 for a two-tailed test (Hair et al., 2021). Direct and indirect (mediation) effects for all seven hypotheses are consolidated in Table 5.

**Table 5.**
**Hypothesis Testing Results (Bootstrapping)**

| Hyp. | Effect / Mediation Path | Orig. Sample (β) | T Statistics | P Values | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Direct Effects** | | | | |
| **H1** | Meritocracy (X1) → Employee Retention (Y) | 0.245 | 3.794 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| **H2** | Organizational Culture (X2) → Employee Retention (Y) | 0.175 | 2.898 | 0.004 | Accepted |
| **H3** | Meritocracy (X1) → Organizational Commitment (Z) | 0.579 | 11.772 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| **H4** | Organizational Culture (X2) → Organizational Commitment (Z) | 0.430 | 7.661 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| **H5** | Organizational Commitment (Z) → Employee Retention (Y) | 0.564 | 7.019 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| | **Indirect Effects (Mediation)** | | | | |
| **H6** | Meritocracy (X1) → Organizational Commitment (Z) → Employee Retention (Y) | 0.326 | 6.133 | 0.000 | Accepted (Partial Mediation) |
| **H7** | Organizational Culture (X2) → Organizational Commitment (Z) → Employee Retention (Y) | 0.242 | 5.022 | 0.000 | Accepted (Partial Mediation) |

*Source: SmartPLS 4 Bootstrapping Output (5,000 subsamples), 2026.*

Bootstrapping results with 5,000 subsamples demonstrate that all seven hypothesized paths are statistically supported. Meritocracy exerts a positive and significant direct effect on employee retention (H1: $\beta = 0.245$; $t = 3.794$; $p = 0.000$) and organizational commitment (H3: $\beta = 0.579$; $t = 11.772$; $p = 0.000$), with the latter representing the largest effect size in the model ($f^2 = 0.909$; large). Likewise, organizational culture positively and significantly influences employee retention (H2: $\beta = 0.175$; $t = 2.898$; $p = 0.004$) and organizational commitment (H4: $\beta = 0.430$; $t = 7.661$; $p = 0.000$; $f^2 = 0.501$; large). Organizational commitment emerges as the strongest direct predictor of employee retention (H5: $\beta = 0.564$; $t = 7.019$; $p = 0.000$; $f^2 = 0.420$; large), surpassing both meritocracy and organizational culture in its direct influence.Regarding indirect effects, organizational commitment significantly mediates the influence of meritocracy on employee retention (H6: $\beta = 0.326$; $t = 6.133$; $p = 0.000$; Sobel $z = 6.054$; $p < 0.001$) and organizational culture on employee retention (H7: $\beta = 0.242$; $t = 5.022$; $p = 0.000$; Sobel $z = 5.193$; $p < 0.001$). Since both the direct and indirect effects are significant, the mediation is classified as partial. The Variance Accounted For (VAF) values of 57.1% for meritocracy (total $\beta = 0.571$) and 58.0% for organizational culture (total $\beta = 0.417$) indicate that more than half of the total effect of both independent variables on employee retention is channeled through the organizational commitment pathway.

**The Effect of Meritocracy on Employee Retention (H1)**

Meritocracy exerts a positive and significant effect on employee retention (β = 0.245; t = 3.794; p = 0.000), supporting H1. Descriptively, meritocracy was perceived as "good" (mean = 3.938); the competence-based placement indicator scored highest (4.039), while fairness in performance appraisal scored lowest (3.796), reflecting a persistent halo-effect bias in day-to-day supervisory evaluation despite formally merit-based staffing. The magnitude of the path coefficient indicates that narrowing this appraisal gap would directly reduce structural officials' turnover intention.

This finding is consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), under which merit-based practice satisfies officials' needs for competence and autonomy, and with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), whereby transparent talent management strengthens self-efficacy through observational learning. The result corroborates Ananda (2022) and Lestari (2020) on perceived fairness predicting retention intention, while extending Rahmat (2021) by showing that meritocracy retains explanatory power even amid controversies such as externally recruited officials, provided the system is still perceived as reasonably fair.

**The Effect of Organizational Culture on Employee Retention (H2)**

Organizational culture also exerts a positive and significant effect on retention (β = 0.175; t = 2.898; p = 0.004), confirming H2. The culture variable was rated "strong" overall (mean = 3.872); the Accountable dimension scored highest (4.019), reflecting strong internal compliance, whereas Service Orientation scored lowest (3.796), indicating that inward-facing discipline still outweighs outward-facing service quality.

Drawing on Situational Strength Theory (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010), the BerAKHLAK culture functions as a "strong situation" that clarifies behavioral expectations, which proved decisive amid the 2026 restructuring that demoted 227 officials without prior notice. The Harmonious and Collaborative values (means 3.816 and 3.961) satisfied the relatedness need posited by Self-Determination Theory, buffering officials against uncertainty. This confirms Wibowo (2020) and Wahyuni (2023) on collaborative climates, while refining Sari (2024): in NTB, culture retains an independent direct effect alongside its mediated pathway.

**The Effect of Meritocracy on Organizational Commitment (H3)**

Meritocracy shows the strongest effect in the model on organizational commitment (β = 0.579; t = 11.772; p = 0.000; $f^2$ = 0.909, "large" per Cohen, 1988), confirming H3. This magnitude fits a workforce dominated by senior, highly educated officials (53.4% at Eselon III, 59.2% postgraduate), for whom professional recognition, not basic compensation, is the primary motivator.

Situational Strength Theory explains this as a "strong situation" created by clear, consistent, merit-based promotion criteria, corroborated by regional personnel-agency data showing that 23% of transfer requests were linked to non-merit-based promotion. Social Cognitive Theory further clarifies the mechanism: officials who observe talent management applied without patronage develop stronger self-efficacy and identification with the organization. These results confirm Pramudiya (2025) and Ridwan (2024), reinforcing meritocracy as the principal antecedent of commitment among senior public officials.

**The Effect of Organizational Culture on Organizational Commitment (H4)**

Organizational culture also significantly predicts commitment ($\beta = 0.430$; $t = 7.661$; $p = 0.000$; $f^2 = 0.501$, "large"), confirming H4. Although smaller than the effect of meritocracy, this result indicates that formal career regulation alone is insufficient without a supportive social climate; together, meritocracy and culture explain 66% of the variance in organizational commitment ($R^2 = 0.660$). This empirical finding is strongly corroborated by previous studies in the Indonesian public sector, where Nurillah, Suparman, and Suryatni (2024) and Humairo and Suryatni (2024) consistently reported a significant positive influence of organizational culture on organizational commitment, underscoring the robustness of this relationship across different regional government settings. Self-Determination Theory accounts for this through relatedness fulfilment via the Harmonious and Collaborative values, while Situational Strength Theory explains how mandatory internalization of BerAKHLAK constitutes a clear, strong normative structure. Value congruence between individual and institutional principles of integrity and collaboration transforms transactional compliance into affective commitment, consistent with Nkina and Mwilongo (2026) and Putri and Santoso (2022), both identifying shared values as a key determinant of public-sector commitment.

**The Effect of Organizational Commitment on Employee Retention (H5)**

Organizational commitment is the strongest direct predictor of retention ($\beta = 0.564$; $t = 7.019$; $p = 0.000$; $f^2 = 0.420$, "large"), exceeding both meritocracy (0.245) and culture (0.175), confirming H5. Commitment was rated "high" (mean = 3.976), with normative items – moral responsibility to remain (4.058) and obligation to support continuity (4.049) – most prominent, indicating that loyalty here is substantially duty-based.

This supports Meyer and Allen's (1993) three-component model, in which affective, continuance, and normative commitment jointly drive retention decisions, and aligns with Social Cognitive Theory's view of commitment as a personal factor shaped by environmental antecedents. The result is consistent with Rofiudin and Fadhli (2025), Afsar et al. (2020), and Meyer et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis identifying affective commitment as the strongest predictor of retention.

**The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment between Meritocracy and Employee Retention (H6)**

The bootstrapping procedure confirms that organizational commitment significantly mediates the effect of meritocracy on employee retention. The indirect effect ($\beta = 0.326$; $t = 6.133$; $p = 0.000$) is corroborated by a supplementary Sobel Test (Sobel statistic = 6.054; $p < 0.05$), providing convergent statistical evidence for the mediating pathway. Because the direct effect of meritocracy on retention (H1) remains significant ($\beta = 0.245$; $p = 0.000$), the mediating role of organizational commitment is classified as partial mediation rather than full mediation, with the total effect of meritocracy on retention reaching 0.571.

This partial-mediation pattern reveals a dual causal mechanism through which meritocracy secures retention. Through the direct pathway (0.245), the objectivity of the career system independently discourages turnover: an official who had intended to request an inter-regional transfer, for instance, may abandon that intention simply by succeeding in an open, competitive promotion assessment. Through the mediated pathway (0.326), however, the influence of meritocracy proves more substantial and more durable, because a genuinely fair system does not merely produce a one-off behavioral response – it becomes

internalized, forming strong affective and normative commitment that subsequently translates into sustained, long-term retention rather than a transient decision to stay.

Theoretically, this mechanism is best explained through Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and its concept of triadic reciprocal determinism, in which meritocracy operates as an environmental factor that systematically shapes officials' cognition and affect – the personal factor manifested as organizational commitment – which in turn directs retention-related behavior. When the institution consistently applies assessment-center-based talent management, such as the Provincial Government's transparent Nine-Box Matrix instrument that maps officials by past performance and future leadership potential, officials engage in observational learning: they witness that achievement is genuinely and proportionally rewarded, which strengthens self-efficacy and affective commitment. Situational Strength Theory (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010) complements this account: in such a "strong situation," organizational commitment forms more robustly and stably, increasing its capacity to function as an effective mediator.

The significance of H6 is also important epistemologically, as it helps reconcile a long-standing debate in the prior literature. Ananda (2022) claims that meritocracy affects retention solely through a direct pathway, whereas Rahmat (2021) argues that meritocracy fails to retain employees when commitment is absent or when perceptions of unfairness are chronic. The evidence from West Nusa Tenggara integrates both positions: meritocracy can directly influence retention, yet its effectiveness becomes far greater and more sustainable when mediated by organizational commitment, which functions as a conversion variable transforming meritocracy's instrumental effect into a deeper and more enduring retention drive without which officials tend to remain only calculatively rather than out of genuine affective attachment.

**The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment between Organizational Culture and Employee Retention (H7)**

The mediation test confirms that organizational commitment also significantly channels the effect of organizational culture on employee retention. The indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0.242$; $t = 5.022$; $p = 0.000$), further corroborated by a secondary Sobel Test yielding a statistic of 5.193, well above the 1.96 critical threshold. Because the direct effect of culture on retention (H2) remains significant ($\beta = 0.175$; $p = 0.004$), this mediating role is likewise classified as partial mediation, with the total effect of organizational culture on retention reaching 0.417.

This decomposition yields an important substantive insight: the strength and clarity of organizational culture become considerably more effective in reducing officials' turnover intention when the underlying values are internalized as moral commitment, rather than merely treated as an administrative guideline observed out of formal compliance. Situational Strength Theory (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010) explains that the BerAKHLAK culture, once genuinely embedded, constitutes a "strong situation" that provides clear behavioral guidance. This proved especially consequential during the disruptive 2026 organizational restructuring, in which large-scale reorganization led to the demotion of 227 officials many of whom learned of the change through mass media rather than formal notification a shock that carried a real risk of eroding trust and driving a surge in transfer requests, yet this potential wave of departures was substantially contained.

What restrained these officials from leaving was not the threat of disciplinary sanction, but rather the social-buffering function generated by the internalization of the Harmonious and Collaborative cultural values. Collegial tolerance, solidarity among fellow officials affected by the restructuring, and mutually supportive horizontal relationships fostered meaningful group cohesion. This sense of communal belonging, combined with an underlying idealism toward public service itself a manifestation of the relatedness need described by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) – collectively cultivated strong Normative Commitment, through which collective cultural values succeeded in neutralizing structural frustration and preserving officials' retention amid institutional uncertainty.

This finding of partial mediation also offers a substantive correction to the conclusion of Sari (2024), who hypothesized that organizational culture functions purely as an indirect variable, operating entirely through the mediation of commitment. Evidence from the West Nusa Tenggara context refutes this hypothesis by demonstrating that a strong communal work culture also provides a direct, independent source of comfort that reduces turnover intention, while simultaneously strengthening officials' affective and normative loyalty. This dual-pathway evidence extends commitment-based retention theory to values-driven public institutions and resonates with the accountability and trustworthiness principles central to Islamic public-administration ethics.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that meritocracy and organizational culture significantly enhance employee retention, both directly and indirectly through organizational commitment. Commitment emerges as the strongest direct predictor of retention, while meritocracy most strongly drives commitment formation, underscoring its role as a strategic mediating mechanism. Theoretically, these findings extend Social Exchange and Self-Determination theories into Indonesia's regional bureaucracy, demonstrating that perceived fairness and BerAKHLAK cultural values satisfy officials' needs for competence and relatedness, which are subsequently internalized as lasting loyalty. The results corroborate Nurillah, Suparman, and Suryatni (2024) on culture's positive effect on commitment and align with Humairo and Suryatni (2024) on commitment's mediating role, while uniquely contributing to the literature by integrating meritocracy as a novel antecedent absent in previous models.

Practically, personnel agencies must prioritize transparent, assessment-based career systems and the genuine internalization of BerAKHLAK values not merely as formal compliance but as living norms particularly during structural reforms, to effectively mitigate turnover intentions. For future research, exploring additional moderators such as perceived organizational support or transformational leadership, alongside longitudinal or mixed-method approaches involving non-structural staff, is recommended to capture the dynamic process of commitment formation and enrich retention strategies in the evolving landscape of Indonesian public governance.

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