

Integrative Model of Culture, Leadership, Trust, and Motivation for Enhancing Performance and HRD in Defense Organizations

*Integrative Model for
Performance in Defense
Organization*

Anton Nugroho
Universitas Pertahanan; Bogor, Indonesia
E-Mail: anton.nugroho@idu.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Defense organizations face complex and unpredictable security threats, demanding not only technological advancement but also transformation in human and organizational dimensions. The purpose of this study is to formulate a conceptual model called the synergic performance enabler model which integrates four strategic variables organizational culture, transformational leadership, institutional trust, and work motivation in improving performance and human resource development in national defense organizations. This study uses a systematic literature review approach, analyzing 40 reputable national and international journal articles indexed in Scopus, SINTA, and Google Scholar between 2015 and 2025. The sources were selected based on relevance to defense sector performance, leadership transformation, organizational behavior, and institutional development. The literature synthesis shows that organizational culture and transformational leadership are consistently associated with increased organizational performance and adaptability, particularly when supported by institutional trust and high intrinsic motivation. These four factors form a mutually reinforcing framework for achieving sustainable defense reform. The proposed synergic performance enabler model addresses gaps in prior research by offering an integrative perspective on human capital management in the defense sector. This study is the first to conceptualize a defense-specific organizational development model that combines leadership, trust, motivation, and culture into a unified strategy.

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ABSTRAK

Organisasi pertahanan menghadapi ancaman keamanan yang kompleks dan tidak dapat diprediksi, menuntut tidak hanya kemajuan teknologi tetapi juga transformasi dalam dimensi manusia dan organisasi. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah merumuskan sebuah model konseptual yang disebut synergic performance enabler model yang mengintegrasikan empat variabel strategis, yaitu budaya organisasi, kepemimpinan transformasional, kepercayaan institusional, dan motivasi kerja dalam meningkatkan kinerja serta pengembangan sumber daya manusia pada organisasi pertahanan nasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan systematic literature review dengan menganalisis 40 artikel jurnal bereputasi nasional dan internasional yang terindeks di Scopus, SINTA, dan Google Scholar pada periode 2015 hingga 2025. Sumber-sumber tersebut dipilih berdasarkan relevansi dengan kinerja sektor pertahanan, transformasi kepemimpinan, perilaku organisasi, dan pengembangan institusional. Sintesis literatur menunjukkan bahwa budaya organisasi dan kepemimpinan transformasional secara konsisten berhubungan dengan peningkatan kinerja organisasi dan kemampuan adaptasi, terutama ketika didukung oleh kepercayaan institusional serta motivasi intrinsik yang tinggi. Keempat faktor tersebut membentuk kerangka yang saling memperkuat dalam mencapai reformasi pertahanan yang berkelanjutan. Synergic performance enabler model yang diajukan ini menjawab kesenjangan dalam penelitian sebelumnya dengan menawarkan perspektif integratif mengenai manajemen sumber daya manusia di sektor pertahanan. Penelitian ini merupakan yang pertama dalam mengonseptualisasikan model

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary security environment, defense organizations are confronted with challenges that are more volatile, complex, and unpredictable than in previous decades (Syamsir et al., 2025). The convergence of cyber warfare, asymmetric conflict, strategic competition, and the diffusion of disruptive technologies has fundamentally altered the landscape of national defense and security (Singh et al., 2025). Traditional reliance on weapon modernization and infrastructure upgrades, while necessary, is no longer sufficient to secure institutional resilience or national sovereignty. Increasingly, the human dimension organizational culture, leadership, trust, and motivation emerges as a critical determinant of defense capability and long-term institutional effectiveness (Bijalwan et al., 2024).

This shift is particularly urgent for nations such as Indonesia, an archipelagic state with vast maritime borders and multiple security vulnerabilities (Arifin et al., 2024). The enactment of Presidential Regulation Number 8 of 2021 on the General Policy of State Defense underscores the centrality of strengthening professional and resilient human resources as the foundation for sustainable security. Despite the strategic emphasis, many defense institutions remain hampered by bureaucratic inertia, rigid hierarchical leadership, and cultural resistance to innovation (Sarjito, 2025). These obstacles hinder not only operational performance but also the capacity for institutional adaptation in the face of rapidly evolving threats.

Globally, defense institutions have realized that technological superiority alone no longer ensures strategic advantage (Lindsay & Gartzke, 2022). The surge in cyber warfare and hybrid conflicts shows that adversaries now exploit organizational weaknesses through attacks on command systems, disinformation, and disruptive technologies, rather than purely physical vulnerabilities (Steingartner et al., 2021; Bardin, 2025). This shift underscores that resilience must be built from within, through adaptive leadership, institutional trust, and shared cultural values (Bucăța & Andrei, 2024).

In Indonesia, Presidential Regulation Number 8 of 2021 on the General Policy of State Defense highlights the need to strengthen professional and resilient human resources as part of national security. Yet, many defense organizations remain constrained by bureaucratic rigidity, weak innovation, and limited leadership adaptability. Enhancing defense performance and HRD, therefore, requires integrating culture, leadership, trust, and motivation (Akdere & Egan, 2020; Singh & Gupta, 2023; Henderson, 2024). It is consistent with global findings that emphasize these elements as core drivers of institutional resilience (Kernic et al., 2023; Larsson et al., 2023; Safitra et al., 2023; Waldman & Sparr, 2023; Loverre et al., 2024). Studies further show that aligning cultural transformation, leadership reform, and performance-based HRD strengthens operational readiness and institutional legitimacy (Stupak et al., 2021; Abdurachman et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023; Baba et al., 2024). For Indonesia, this means that defense reform must go beyond infrastructure to build an innovative, professional, and resilient organizational culture capable of adapting to complex security realities.

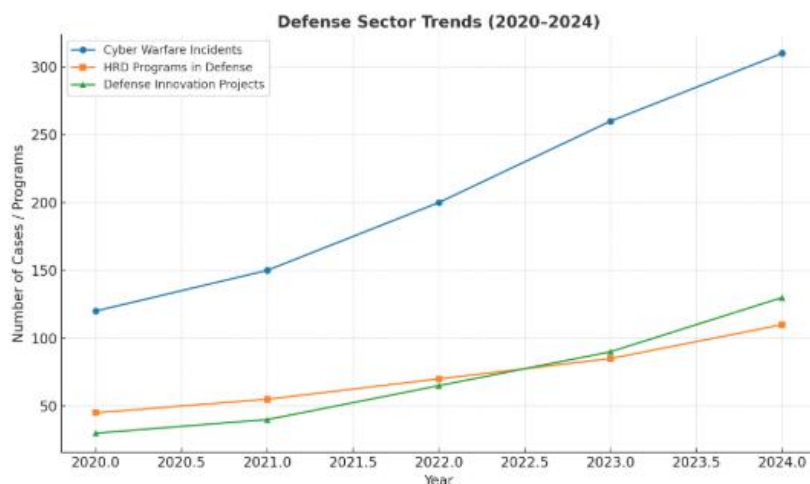


Figure 1. Defense Sector Trends (2020-2024)

As shown in Figure 1, defense organizations have faced a sharp rise in challenges and responses over the past five years, reflected in the growth of cyber warfare incidents, HRD programs, and innovation projects. The surge in digital threats highlights the need for stronger technological and organizational resilience, while the steady expansion of human capital initiatives aligns with Indonesia's Presidential Regulation Number 8 of 2021 emphasizing professional and adaptive personnel. The increase in innovation projects further indicates efforts to foster creativity and modernization, showing that defense strength depends not only on hardware but also on cultural, leadership, and human resource reform.

Academic and policy literature reinforces this view. Rožman et al. (2023) identify culture as the foundation of organizational behavior, while Alhitmi et al. (2023) highlight transformational leadership's role in driving commitment and innovation. When combined with trust, leadership strengthens adaptability in high-stakes environments (Nguyen et al., 2023; Abukalusa & Oosthuizen, 2025). Meanwhile, Self-Determination Theory underscores the importance of intrinsic motivation for sustaining discipline and resilience (Knevelsrud et al., 2024). Despite these insights, a critical research gap persists: studies rarely integrate culture, leadership, trust, and motivation into a unified model tailored to defense organizations. Existing research remains fragmented, often isolating leadership from cultural dynamics or motivation from institutional trust thereby limiting both theoretical development and practical HRD implementation in defense contexts.

To address this, the present study proposes the Synergic Performance Enabler Model (SPEM), a conceptual framework integrating the four constructs to enhance defense performance and human resource development. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 40 scholarly sources (2015–2025), this research synthesizes diverse theoretical and empirical insights into an integrative model tailored to defense institutions. The purpose of this study is to formulate the SPEM model as a strategic framework linking culture, leadership, trust, and motivation for improving defense HRD.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Culture in a Defense Institution

The study of defense organizations has long emphasized the technical dimension of modernization, ranging from weapon systems procurement to cyber defense capabilities (Cheung, 2021; Krpec & Křiž, 2025). However, an increasing body of literature underscores the critical role of organizational behavior variables, particularly culture, leadership, trust, and motivation, in sustaining institutional performance and Human Resource Development (HRD). This section reviews relevant literature across these four dimensions, highlighting theoretical foundations, empirical findings, and their interconnections, while also identifying gaps that necessitate an integrative framework.

Organizational culture constitutes the set of shared values, norms, and assumptions that shape collective behavior (Grover et al., 2022; Amelia & Ariani, 2023). In defense organizations, culture plays a particularly strategic role because it regulates cohesion, discipline, and institutional legitimacy. Military culture has often been characterized as hierarchical and tradition-bound, emphasizing obedience, loyalty, and resilience (Heward et al., 2024). Such attributes contribute to operational effectiveness under high-stakes conditions but may simultaneously foster rigidity and resistance to innovation (Cromwell & Gardner, 2020).

Recent literature emphasizes adaptive culture as a determinant of long-term performance (Bukowski & Rudnicki, 2019; Fang et al., 2024). Defense organizations must cultivate cultures that balance tradition with adaptability to absorb change without undermining cohesion. Kernic et al. (2023) further observe that modern defense environments require “pluralistic cultures” that encourage ethical reflection, cross-domain collaboration, and innovation. Empirical studies in Indonesia and similar contexts reveal that cultural reform often lags behind structural modernization, creating misalignment between formal reforms and underlying behavioral patterns (Kayoi et al., 2021).

Transformational Leadership and Institutional Adaptability

Leadership is among the most widely studied factors influencing organizational effectiveness, with transformational leadership receiving particular attention (Busari et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2023; Tarigan et al., 2025). This leadership style is defined through four core dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Khan et al., 2022). Collectively, these dimensions enable leaders to articulate a compelling vision, inspire collective commitment, encourage innovation, and address the individual needs of subordinates. In the context of military and defense institutions, transformational leadership is particularly relevant because it supports adaptability and learning within organizational structures that are traditionally hierarchical and rigid. As contemporary military organizations face dynamic operational demands and technological advancements, transformational leadership provides a mechanism for balancing discipline with flexibility, thereby enhancing organizational responsiveness (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate the positive effects of transformational leadership on performance and organizational outcomes. Apriyani et al. (2023) found that transformational leadership within the Indonesian Navy’s education and training command significantly enhanced performance when mediated by organizational commitment, underscoring the role of affective and normative attachment in translating leadership behaviors into results. Similarly, Aryanto et al. (2023) reported that transformational leadership and military culture jointly shaped soldier performance in regional commands, indicating that leadership effectiveness is reinforced by shared values and norms. Loverre et al. (2024) argue that transformational leadership enhances intrinsic motivation in military organizations by fostering autonomy and competence, which are essential for sustaining high levels of engagement and effectiveness.

Institutional Trust as Strategic Capital

Trust has emerged as a crucial dimension of organizational effectiveness, particularly in high-stakes institutions such as defense. Trust enables cooperation across hierarchical levels, facilitates knowledge sharing, and reduces friction in decision-making (Alshwayat et al., 2021). In defense settings characterized by uncertainty and risk, institutional trust functions as strategic capital that strengthens cohesion and resilience (Wang & Zheng, 2024). The literature identifies multiple antecedents of trust. Ethical leadership, transparent communication, and procedural fairness are frequently cited as key enablers (Kernic et al., 2023). Conversely, distrust can undermine readiness and legitimacy, as observed in cases where opaque decision-making eroded personnel confidence (Gustafsson et al., 2021). Empirical findings by Lee and Kim (2020) show that trust not

only improves coordination but also moderates the effects of leadership and culture on performance.

Despite this, the defense literature on trust remains fragmented. Many studies examine interpersonal trust within teams, while fewer analyze institutional trust at systemic levels. Moreover, trust is seldom integrated with other organizational variables, such as motivation, despite evidence that trust is a prerequisite for intrinsic engagement (Nguyen et al., 2023). This gap underscores the need for frameworks that situate trust as both an outcome of leadership and culture and as a driver of motivation and performance.

Work Motivation in Organizational Dynamics

Work motivation is central to aligning individual contributions with organizational missions. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that motivation is enhanced when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Applied to defense contexts, SDT suggests that soldiers and defense personnel are more committed when their roles are perceived as meaningful, challenging, and socially valued (Knevelsrud et al., 2024). Research supports this claim. Loverre et al. (2024) provide a systematic review of SDT applications in military and police organizations, demonstrating that intrinsic motivation predicts both performance and well-being. In Indonesia, empirical studies highlight the role of recognition systems, career development, and alignment with national defense missions in sustaining motivation (Aryanto et al., 2023; Nurdiniati et al., 2024). However, excessive reliance on extrinsic motivators, such as financial incentives or rigid discipline, often yields diminishing returns in the long run (Pamungkas et al., 2023).

The literature gap lies in connecting motivation with broader institutional dynamics. Most defense studies treat motivation as an individual-level phenomenon, neglecting how culture, leadership, and trust collectively shape motivational climates. This narrow approach risks oversimplifying motivational drivers in complex defense organizations. Organizational culture legitimizes leadership practices and provides a normative foundation for trust. Transformational leadership reshapes culture and enhances trust, while trust in turn fosters psychological safety that sustains motivation. Motivation ultimately translates these dynamics into sustained performance and HRD.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine scholarly publications addressing the impact of organizational culture, leadership, trust, and motivation on performance and human resource development within defense or similar high-stakes institutions. To ensure transparency and replicability, the SLR follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, which provides structured guidelines for reporting systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). In addition to these theoretical perspectives, methodological rigor is essential in examining such multidimensional constructs. The integration of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods within social and defense sciences provides a more comprehensive and valid analytical framework for studying organizational behavior and performance. Building upon this methodological foundation, the present SLR seeks not only to map existing scholarly insights but also to critically evaluate how culture, leadership, trust, and motivation interact as interdependent factors shaping defense HRD and institutional performance.

Collectively, these constructs and methodological approaches provide a robust foundation for advancing both the theoretical and practical understanding of human capital development in defense organizations. By synthesizing findings from diverse scholarly sources, this study highlights the strategic imperative of reforming organizational culture and leadership practices while simultaneously fostering trust and motivation as key enablers of resilience and professional excellence in modern defense institutions. The present study is guided by three central research questions. First, it explores how culture, leadership, trust, and motivation have been conceptualized within

defense-related organizations. Second, it examines the relationships among these four constructs in shaping organizational performance and human resource development. Finally, it investigates what frameworks or models have been proposed in previous research and identifies the gaps that remain to be addressed.

To answer these questions, a systematic search strategy was applied across several reputable databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, SAGE, Wiley, JSTOR, DOAJ, and Google Scholar. The inclusion criteria required that selected articles be published between 2015 and 2025, written in either English or *Bahasa Indonesia*, peer-reviewed, and focused on public sector or defense contexts. Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria further refined the scope of the review. Studies included were empirical investigations, theoretical models, or research focused on defense-related organizations. Excluded from the review were articles dealing purely with technical defense engineering issues as well as non-peer-reviewed opinion pieces. The final stage of the process involved data analysis. From an initial pool of 73 articles, 40 met the established inclusion criteria. These articles were examined using thematic coding in order to identify key patterns and relationships across the literature. Core concepts and variables were systematically mapped into thematic categories, which were then synthesized to develop the proposed conceptual model.

RESULTS

Identification and Screening of Literature

This research process began at the identification stage, where a total of 200 articles were retrieved from reputable databases, including Scopus, SINTA, and Google Scholar. These articles were selected based on their relevance to organizational culture, transformational leadership, institutional trust, work motivation, and human resource development within the context of defense organizations. At the screening stage, duplicate records were carefully examined. The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram was used to guide the screening and selection process according to the opinion of Page et al. (2021) and is illustrated in Figure 2.

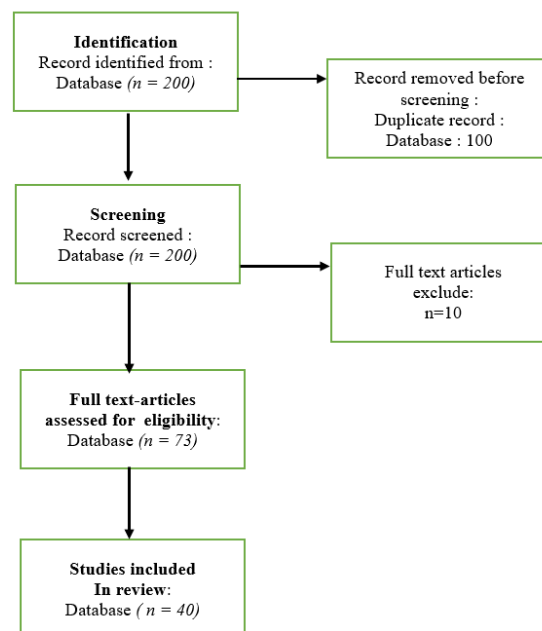


Figure 2. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Subsequently, in the eligibility assessment stage, full-text articles were reviewed in detail to determine their alignment with the research objectives. From this process, 73 articles were deemed eligible as they specifically addressed the nexus between organizational culture, leadership transformation, institutional trust, motivation,

performance, and human resource development. However, 10 articles were excluded due to insufficient relevance or methodological limitations. Finally, at the inclusion stage, a total of 40 articles were incorporated into the systematic review. These selected studies provided the empirical and conceptual foundation for formulating the proposed Synergic Performance Enabler Model (SPEM), following the systematic review guidelines of PRISMA (Page et al., 2021).

Integrative Model in Defense Organization

The integration of culture, leadership, trust, and motivation into a unified framework offers a novel approach to enhancing performance and sustaining human resource development in defense organizations, thereby addressing existing gaps in the literature. Figure 3 shows the integrative model in a protection organization.

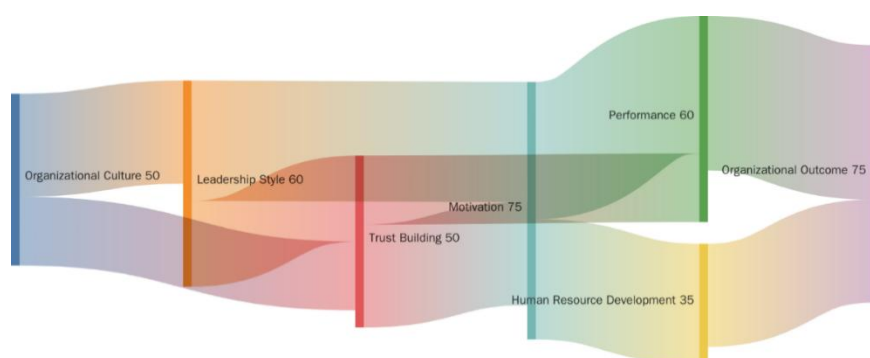


Figure 3. Integrative Model in Defense Organization

This model demonstrates that organizational culture contributes directly by 30% to leadership style and 20% to trust building within the organization (Amelia & Ariani, 2023). Furthermore, leadership style exhibits a dual and significant impact, contributing 25% to trust and 35% to the enhancement of motivation. This pathway underscores that culture and leadership serve as the foundational pillars in creating an organizational climate conducive to fostering both interpersonal and institutional trust. The established trust then contributes 30% to the improvement of motivation and 20% directly to organizational performance. Meanwhile, motivation emerges as the primary driver, influencing a 40% increase in performance and a 35% contribution to human resource development. These two output components, performance and HR development, jointly contribute 45% and 30% respectively to organizational outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2023; Apriyani et al., 2023).

Thematic Clusters from the Selected Studies

This quantitative pattern clearly illustrates that performance improvement in defense organizations relies not solely on formal structures but more significantly on the reinforcement of culture, effective leadership, and the systematic development of trust and motivation. The quantitative synthesis of relational weights aligns with thematic findings from the literature, where culture and leadership consistently emerged as primary enablers of trust and motivation. These interlinkages empirically support the recursive structure depicted in the SPEM model.

The synthesis of 40 selected studies reveals four major thematic clusters that collectively explain the internal dynamics of defense organizations, namely, organizational culture, transformational leadership, institutional trust, and work motivation. Each dimension demonstrates reciprocal influence, forming an integrated behavioral system that underpins defense performance and human resource development. Most studies consistently identify culture as the structural foundation of defense institutions (Grover et al., 2022; Heward et al., 2024; Fang et al., 2024). Culture functions as both an enabler of cohesion and a barrier to innovation. Traditional, hierarchy-based

cultures reinforce discipline and loyalty but often impede adaptability. Empirical findings from Indonesian and European contexts emphasize the need for adaptive or pluralistic cultures that balance historical traditions with innovation imperatives, highlighting that cultural transformation must be gradual and context-sensitive rather than imposed (Bukowski & Rudnicki, 2019; Kayoi et al., 2021). Across defense systems, transformational leadership emerges as a critical enabler of change. Studies by Apriyani et al. (2023) and Nguyen et al. (2023) show that leaders who demonstrate inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation enhance organizational commitment and adaptability, even in rigid hierarchies. However, this leadership effectiveness depends on cultural receptivity leaders who align transformational practices with shared institutional values achieve stronger behavioral integration. This pattern suggests that leadership and culture operate as mutually reinforcing drivers of institutional adaptability.

The third cluster identifies trust as the central mediating mechanism linking leadership and motivation. Evidence shows that ethical leadership and procedural fairness foster institutional trust, which enhances cooperation and resilience (Lee & Kim, 2020; Kernic et al., 2023). Conversely, opaque decision-making reduces morale and weakens organizational legitimacy (Gustafsson et al., 2021). Notably, trust not only arises from effective leadership but also amplifies its motivational effects, confirming its dual role as both an outcome and a catalyst of organizational performance. Work motivation, primarily examined through Self-Determination Theory, converts shared values and trust into sustained effort and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Loverre et al., 2024). Studies in defense contexts indicate that intrinsic motivators, such as purpose, autonomy, and competence, yield stronger commitment than extrinsic factors like rank or financial rewards (Pamungkas et al., 2023). However, the analysis reveals that motivation cannot be effectively sustained without cultural alignment, trustworthy leadership, and perceived institutional fairness, underscoring its dependency on systemic factors rather than individual incentives alone.

Integration Key Synergic Performance Enabler Model (SPEM)

These patterns validate the interdependence of the four constructs and justify their integration into the Synergic Performance Enabler Model (SPEM). The empirical synthesis demonstrates that culture legitimizes leadership, leadership fosters trust, trust sustains motivation, and motivation translates these relational dynamics into measurable improvements in performance and human resource development.

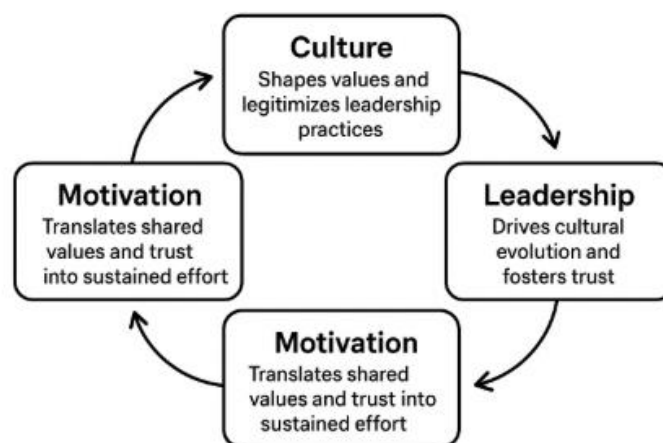


Figure 4. Synergic Performance Enabler Model (SPEM)

Figure 4 illustrates the Synergic Performance Enabler Model (SPEM). The Synergic Performance Enabler Model (SPEM) integrates four key internal enablers: organizational culture, transformational leadership, institutional trust, and work motivation, into a unified conceptual framework. Within this model, culture provides the foundation by

shaping shared values and legitimizing leadership practices. Leadership, in turn, becomes the driving force that guides cultural evolution and cultivates trust across organizational levels (Deng et al., 2023). Trust establishes the psychological safety necessary for collaboration and resilience, enabling personnel to operate effectively under pressure (Alshwayat et al., 2021). Finally, motivation transforms shared values and trust into sustained effort and commitment, ensuring long-term performance. Together, these elements form a dynamic, interdependent loop in which leadership and culture continually reinforce trust and motivation, creating a self-sustaining system that enhances institutional effectiveness and human resource development.

Based on Figure 5, the strategic flow of the Synergic Performance Enabler Model (SPEM) reveals a multi-tiered alignment across key actors in the defense ecosystem, namely policymakers, defense academies, and organizational leaders. Policymakers are positioned at the foundational level, responsible for crafting human resource systems that go beyond technical competence to include motivation and trust as performance indicators (Alshwayat et al., 2021; Baba et al., 2024). Their role also involves revising training curricula to ensure coherence between leadership development and organizational culture reform (Akdere & Egan, 2020). This alignment ensures that future leaders are equipped not only with tactical expertise but also with the emotional intelligence and ethical grounding necessary to drive transformation.

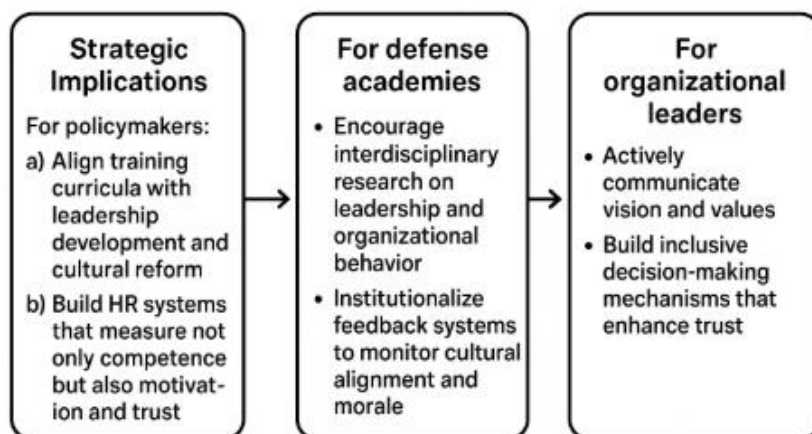


Figure 5. Strategic Implications for Policymakers

At the institutional level, defense academies are tasked with fostering a research culture that explores the intersection of leadership behavior, organizational dynamics, and cultural change (Apriyani et al., 2023; Bucăța & Andrei, 2024). Through institutionalized feedback systems, these academies can monitor internal alignment, morale and strategic progress. Meanwhile, organizational leaders operate at the implementation frontier, translating vision into practice by fostering inclusive decision-making and cultivating trust-based relationships. Together, this flow of strategy from policy to practice ensures that SPEM is not merely a conceptual model but a living framework that drives performance excellence across defense institutions.

These findings conclude that organizational culture is widely recognized as a critical factor shaping performance outcomes, especially in military and defense environments where values, norms, and shared beliefs directly influence collective effectiveness (Kim & Vandenberghe, 2020; Bekesiene, 2023). Leadership, particularly transformational leadership, has also been shown to enhance adaptability, motivation, and long-term institutional resilience by fostering trust and encouraging innovation in complex operational contexts (Odeh et al., 2023; Bataineh et al., 2025). Trust plays an equally central role in enabling coordination, collaboration, and knowledge sharing across hierarchical structures, which is indispensable in defense institutions facing uncertainty

and high-risk scenarios. Motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, further strengthens the alignment of individual contributions with broader organizational missions, thereby reinforcing performance.

DISCUSSION

The synthesis of organizational culture, transformational leadership, institutional trust, and work motivation underscores their collective importance in shaping the performance and resilience of defense organizations. However, a critical analysis reveals that while these constructs have been individually celebrated in both theory and practice, their integration exposes tensions, paradoxes, and gaps that require deeper examination. This discussion explores these dynamics, critiques the limitations of existing approaches, and reflects on the implications for defense human resource development and organizational reform.

Organizational culture has long been recognized as a stabilizing force in military institutions, fostering discipline, cohesion, and loyalty (Dyson, 2019; Davis, 2022). Yet, this very stability often transforms into rigidity, impeding innovation and adaptability. The Indonesian defense sector illustrates this paradox: while tradition-based culture reinforces identity and solidarity, it also perpetuates bureaucratic inertia and resistance to change (Ruslinawati & Prasetya, 2021). Critical analysis suggests that defense organizations cannot merely adopt Western notions of adaptive culture wholesale. The integration of cultural transformation must account for national values, historical legacies, and socio-political contexts. For example, Indonesia's archipelagic defense posture necessitates cultural norms that emphasize collaboration, decentralized decision-making, and cross-domain integration. Thus, culture serves as both an enabler and constraint, requiring nuanced transformation rather than wholesale replacement.

Transformational leadership has been widely validated as a catalyst for organizational reform (Busari et al., 2020; Le & Le, 2021). However, a critical gap lies in the overemphasis on charismatic and visionary aspects of leadership, often at the expense of structural and cultural realities. Defense organizations are inherently hierarchical, with deeply embedded command and control traditions that may dilute or even distort transformational initiatives. For instance, leaders who attempt to foster empowerment may inadvertently encounter resistance from entrenched middle-management cadres accustomed to rigid authority structures. Moreover, transformational leadership risks becoming personality-dependent, raising questions of sustainability once charismatic leaders exit. This indicates the need to situate transformational leadership within institutionalized systems of succession planning, ethical governance, and cultural reinforcement, rather than relying solely on individual leaders.

Institutional trust is often heralded as the glue that binds defense organizations, facilitating coordination and resilience (MacHaffie, 2021; Kernic et al., 2023). Yet, trust is inherently fragile and easily undermined by inconsistency, perceived injustice, or communication failures. In the defense context, where secrecy and rigid hierarchies are necessary for operational security, transparency, a key driver of trust, often becomes constrained. This tension creates a paradox that the very practices designed to protect national security can erode trust within the institution. For example, limited communication about strategic decisions may foster suspicion among personnel, reducing their willingness to embrace reforms. Addressing this paradox requires a recalibration of defense governance practices, balancing operational secrecy with inclusive communication and participatory decision-making.

Work motivation in defense organizations has traditionally been maintained through extrinsic mechanisms such as rank, salary, and discipline. However, Self-Determination Theory and recent military applications suggest that intrinsic motivation grounded in purpose, autonomy, and competence yields more sustainable outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Loverre et al., 2024). Defense organizations often overemphasize extrinsic motivators, such as seniority-based promotions or financial rewards, which can suppress intrinsic engagement and weaken mission-driven commitment. This study reveals that

culture, leadership, trust, and motivation are deeply interdependent. Culture legitimizes leadership, leadership fosters trust, trust sustains motivation, and motivation drives performance. Yet, rigid culture, low trust, or fragmented reforms can undermine systemic effectiveness. The SPEM model addresses these interconnections by proposing a unified framework for holistic transformation, emphasizing that isolated leadership or motivational programs are insufficient without cultural and institutional alignment. Beyond theoretical contribution, this analysis calls for adapting mainstream organizational concepts, such as adaptive culture and participatory leadership, to defense realities marked by hierarchy, secrecy, and tradition. True resilience, therefore, requires not only technological modernization but also integrated reform that balances tradition with innovation and extrinsic with intrinsic motivation.

CONCLUSION

The findings confirm that defense performance and HRD effectiveness are determined not by technological advancement alone but by the alignment of internal enablers within an integrated system. The Synergic Performance Enabler Model (SPEM) demonstrates that these four constructs are mutually reinforcing: culture legitimizes leadership, leadership fosters trust, trust strengthens motivation, and motivation drives sustained performance. The analysis also reveals that fragmented or isolated interventions are insufficient and may even create systemic tensions, such as rigidity, low trust, or dependence on extrinsic incentives.

The implications of this study extend to both theory and practice. The SPEM model contributes a unified lens for understanding the human dimension of defense performance, bridging defense studies and organizational behavior. It provides guidance for policymakers and defense institutions to design integrated HRD strategies linking leadership development, cultural renewal, and motivational alignment to enhance adaptability, resilience, and long-term organizational effectiveness. Nevertheless, this study acknowledges its limitations. As a conceptual model grounded in literature synthesis, the SPEM framework requires empirical validation across diverse defense contexts. Future research should employ mixed-method and longitudinal approaches to test its assumptions, as well as comparative studies across nations to explore contextual variations. Such efforts will not only strengthen the model's theoretical rigor but also enhance its policy relevance.

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