

Impact of Ethical Leadership and Digital Work Environment toward Employee Performance: The Role of Work Discipline as Mediation

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Abstract. Performance is an organizational achievement that can be a benchmark for whether work is carried out as planned or even exceeds what has been determined. This research aims to provide empirical evidence about how Work Discipline mediates between Ethical Leadership and the Digital Work Environment on Employee Performance. The respondents of this research were employees of state companies in Cilacap, Indonesia using a sampling technique, namely purposive sampling. Using a quantitative approach, primary data was obtained from the results of a closed questionnaire distribution with seven Likert scales. Hypothesis testing uses the SPSS software analysis tool. This research provides different results from previous studies in that Ethical Leadership does not affect Employee Performance. One of the seven hypotheses was found to be false. Hence, employee performance is positively impacted by the Digital Work Environment, as demonstrated empirically by this study. This study additionally presents evidence that Work Discipline can act as a mediator for the impact of Ethical Leadership and Digital Work Environment on Employee Performance. This study presents empirical results that enhance the understanding of the relationship between the variables under consideration.

1 Introduction

Employee performance (EP) has always been an interesting topic discussed by academics and practitioners. Various discussions and research examine the factors that determine or predict performance. Among the various variables investigated in the literature, previous research has identified supervisory behavior as playing a key role in influencing employee performance as an organizational driver [1]. Examining the digital work environment is crucial in the competitive business landscape of the digital era, where the focus is on services and people. This environment has a significant role in driving employee performance [2]. Digital work environment (DWE) refers to the use of technology and digital tools in the workplace to increase productivity, collaboration, and efficiency. This involves the integration of digital resources, such as software applications, communication platforms, and data management systems, into an organization's work processes and workflows [4].

One of the strong drivers of Employee Performance is Ethical Leadership (EL), which is normative behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and this behavior involves followers through communication, reinforcement, and decision-making [5]. This study began with research into the relationship gap between EL and EP. Some studies [9] show a significant positive effect, while other studies show different results. Research by Kelidbari, H. R. R. et. al (2016) stated that ethical leadership does show a direct and significant relationship to staff performance. Studies reveal that ethical leadership influences staff performance more accurately if there are intermediary variables, so the influence of ethical leadership on staff performance is likely an indirect impact [10]. A study conducted by Karjuni, A et. al. (2022) emphasizes that the drivers of EP are EL and work discipline (WD). So this study aims to test work discipline as a mediating variable in the influence between EL and EP [11].

2 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Employee Performance

Employee Performance is the extent to which they contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives during a specified period. Performance can be defined as how objectives, quality, quantity are effectively accomplished. Good performing employees can enhance their performance by following their capabilities [6]. Employee performance is also illustrated as the extent to which the level of productivity meets company performance standards. This means that employees fully understand the job function, performance requirements, and standards that must be met. Employees tend to do this to obtain guidance in carrying out their duties and responsibilities [12]. Mishra et al. (2020) stated that employee

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performance is the way employees behave in their work and how well they complete their tasks, which is the main pillar in supporting an organization toward success [13, 14].

2.2 Ethical Leadership

Ethical leaders are individuals who possess strong moral values and are regarded as both honest and trustworthy by others who follow them [30]. Furthermore, ethical leaders are frequently perceived as impartial and principled individuals who prioritize the wellbeing of their firm, workers, and community (such as customers). They consistently demonstrate ethical conduct in both their personal and professional lives. Ethical leaders are regarded as proficient exemplars since their choices are grounded on what key stakeholders perceive as ethical [7, 11, 15].

Given their concern for the organization's future and their commitment to making fair and principled decisions, it is only natural that an ethical leader would promote employee performance. Ethical leaders are regarded as exemplars of competence. An ethical leader demonstrates fairness and effectiveness sustainably, thereby contributing to the organization's overall success [16]. Ethical leadership behavior exemplifies moral character and positively impacts the moral conduct of subordinates [17]. Therefore, the first hypothesis proposed is:

H1. Ethical Leadership has a positive effect on Employee Performance

2.3 Digital Work Environment

A digital work environment is a setting in which work-related tasks and activities are carried out using digital technology. The term "digital work environment" encompasses several domains such as education, marketing, corporate, and project management. [18]. Digital work environments foster employee conduct in digital educational settings and have the potential to shape the emergence of novel behaviors referred to as digital behavior. The digital work environment has the potential to offer employees increased flexibility in terms of their work schedule and location, leading to improved work life balance and job satisfaction [19, 20]. The findings of the research demonstrated that the digital workplace exhibits a robust correlation with critical digital elements, which have a beneficial effect on the performance of the organization. Therefore, the second hypothesis proposed is:

H2. Digital Work Environment has a positive effect on Employee Performance

2.4 Work Discipline

Discipline is a sort of adherence to organizational principles and regulations. Employees who lack a strong work ethic are more likely to disregard company norms and regulations. On the other hand, if employees are subject to business regulations, they are more likely to follow them, indicating good disciplinary conditions. Discipline is a person's skill and willingness to follow all societal regulations and practices. Thus, work discipline is an order in which a person or group inside an organization follows and implements existing norms, both written and unwritten [21]. Discipline in the workplace is the most essential operational function in human resource management since it has a direct impact on employee performance. Proper work discipline is critical for a company's success. Discipline is the quality of an individual who consciously adheres to the norms and regulations of a specific organization [22].

Based on the established rationale that ethical leadership invariably enhances work discipline, the subsequent hypothesis is formulated:

H3. Ethical Leadership has a positive effect on Work Discipline

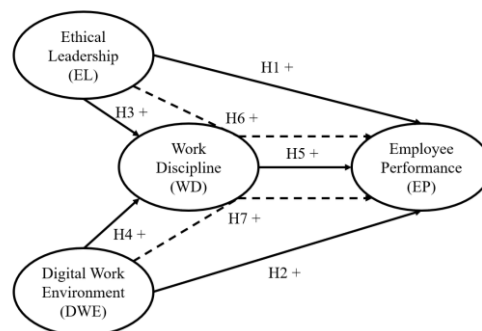


Fig. 1. Research model

The availability of DWE is also a convenient tool for organizations in monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, DWE will encourage discipline in the organization. Organizations that implement good discipline will certainly have an impact on performance. Thus, hypothesis 4 and hypothesis 5 proposed are:

H4: Digital Work Environment has a positive effect on Work Discipline.

H5: Work Discipline has a positive effect on Employee Performance.

This study also tested WD as a mediator of the relationship between EL and DWE on EP. Hypotheses 6 and 7 are proposed as follows:

H6: Ethical Leadership influences Employee Performance through Work Discipline as a mediating variable.
 H7: Digital work environment influences Employee Performance through Work Discipline as a mediating variable.

3 Research Method

This study employs a quantitative methodology rooted in the positivist approach, to empirically test hypotheses using numerical data. The data collection process involved the distribution of a questionnaire directly to respondents workers of the Human Capital Department of PT. Kilang Pertamina Internasional RU IV Cilacap, Indonesia. The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling, specifically targeting permanent employees who have a minimum work experience of one year. Google Forms is the tool that is utilized to distribute the closed questionnaire. Every work unit delivered questionnaires to all employees through WhatsApp groups. On a Likert scale with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 7 representing "strongly agree," respondents assess their answers. After respondents who met the selected criteria filled out the electronic questionnaire, a total of 158 surveys were completed completely, and all data (normal and free of outliers) could be processed.

Four variables are examined in this study: EL, DWE, WD, and EP. Table 1 contains the operational definitions and sources for each research variable, which serve as the foundation for developing constructs and variable measurement items. EL is comprised of five statement items, while DWE and EP each consist of six and four items, respectively. EP is measured with five statement items. Thus, the items comprise a total of twenty statements.

Table 1. Operational Definition of Research Variable.

Variable	Definition	Items of Variables
Employee Performance (EP)	Employee perceptions of their self-assessment when making a decision or as a development of performance feedback that has been carried out [13].	Working fine (EP1) Working as intended (EP2) Satisfactory quantity of work (EP3) Satisfied with tasks completed (EP4) Tasks completed on time (EP5)
Ethical Leadership (EL)	Employee perceptions of ethical leadership refer to the alignment of attitudes and behaviors with ethical standards, demonstrated via individual conduct and interpersonal interactions [16].	Orientation to people (EL1) Integrity (EL2) Justice (EL3) Simplicity (EL4) Responsibility EL5)
Digital Work Environment (DWE)	Employee perceptions of the digital work environment refer to the physical, social, technological, and organizational context in which work is performed [18].	Equipment and Technology (DWE1) Connectivity (DWE2) Cooperation & Communication (DWE3) Information Security (DWE4) Work Flexibility & Balance (DWE5) Technical Support (DWE6)
Work Discipline (WD)	Employee perceptions of work discipline refer to the level of control and order a person maintains in their work environment [21].	Presence (WD1) Obedience to superiors (WD2) Working awareness (WD3) Responsible (WD4)

4 Result and Discussion

Table 2. Respondents Characteristic (n = 158)

Category	n	%	Category	n	%		
Gender	Male	85	53.8	Education	High School	31	19.6
	Female	73	46.2		Diploma	14	9.0
Age	<21 Year	16	10,1	Bachelor	92	58.2	
	21 – <26 Year	73	46,2	Master	21	13.0	
	26 – <31 Year	21	13,4	Length of work	1 - <4 Year	83	52.7
	31 – <36 Year	25	15,8		4 - <7 Year	14	8.7
	36 - <41 Year	16	10,1		7 - <10 Year	36	22.8
>=41 Year	7	4,4	>=10 Year	25	15.8		

The characteristics of respondents are illustrated in Table 2. 53.8% of respondents are male, which means that the number of respondents based on gender was almost equal. The age of most respondents was in the range of 21 to less than 26 years, which shows that 46.2% of the respondents in this research were young/junior employees. The highest level of education was a Bachelor's degree at 58.2% and 52.7% had worked for less than 4 years.

Table 3. Validity Test Result

Item	Loading Factor	Sig	Status	Item	Loading Factor	Sig	Status
EL1	0,752	***	Valid	DWE1	0,864	***	Valid
EL2	0,761	***	Valid	DWE2	0,79	***	Valid
EL3	0,531	***	Valid	DWE3	0,859	***	Valid
EL4	0,703	***	Valid	DWE4	0,854	***	Valid
EL5	0,736	***	Valid	DWE5	0,523	***	Valid
EP1	0,582	***	Valid	DWE6	0,841	***	Valid
EP2	0,845	***	Valid	WD1	0,687	***	Valid
EP3	0,749	***	Valid	WD2	0,73	***	Valid
EP4	0,716	***	Valid	WD3	0,777	***	Valid
EP5	0,748	***	Valid	WD4	0,801	***	Valid

Table 4. Reliability Test Result

Variable	CR	Status
Ethical Leadership	0,82	Reliable
Digital Work Environment	0,91	Reliable
Work Discipline	0,83	Reliable
Employee Performance	0,85	Reliable

The results of respondents' answers are processed to determine whether the measuring instrument used meets the validity test. Table 3 shows that the statement items for measuring the variables EL, DWE and EP were all declared valid. Table 4 presents the results of the reliability test, where the provisions used as the basis for determining that the Construct Reliability value must be greater than or equal to 0.7. All tests show that the results of each are reliable.

Table 5. Goodness of Fit Criteria

	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	TLI	CFI
Cut of Value	≤ 2,00	≤ 0,08	≥ 0,90	≥ 0,90	≥ 0,90	≥ 0,90
Result	1,486	0,056	0,868	0,831	0,953	0,959
Description	Fit	Fit	Marginal Fit	Marginal Fit	Fit	Fit

The test results using SEMAMOS are presented in Table 5, which shows that the overall goodness of fit measurements above indicate that the model proposed in this research is accepted. When examining the five variable relationships, it was found that the relationship between EL and EP has a standardized regression weight coefficient of 0,170, indicating no significant influence between the two variables. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is rejected. Four relationships between variables with a CR value < 2.00 and p value > 005 are accepted, including the relationships DWE → EP, EL → WD, DWE → WD, and WD → EP, leading to the acceptance of hypotheses H3, H4, and H5.

Table 6. Relationship of Variables

Variables	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Description
Ethical Leadership → Employee Performance (H1)	-0,170	0,127	-1,021	0,307	Not Significant
Digital Work Environment → Employee Performance (H2)	0,587	0,101	3,386	***	Significant
Ethical Leadership → Work Discipline (H3)	0,428	0,149	2,717	0,007	Significant
Digital Work Environment → Work Discipline (H4)	0,484	0,112	3,155	0,020	Significant
Work Discipline → Employee Performance (H5)	0,514	0,138	2,983	0,003	Significant

***(Significance value smallest or <0,001)

In the interim, Table 7 employs H6 and with the online calculation Sobel test. The two tests yielded Sobel test statistic values of 2.27 and 2.82, respectively, with a-tailed probability (p) of less than 0.05. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that Work Discipline acts as a mediator between the effects of Ethical Leadership and Digital Work Environment on Employee Performance.

Table 7. Sobel Test

	EL → WD → EP	DWE → WD → EP
Sobel test statistic	2,2746200	2,82131394
Onetailed probability	0,0114643	0,00239137
Two-tailed probability	0,0229287	0,00478274

5 DISCUSSION

There have been examinations of seven hypotheses in this study. In this case, only the first hypothesis that examined the impact of the EL variable on EP was denied. The findings presented here align with the research conducted by Dey et al. (2022), which concluded that there was no significant impact of ethical leadership on employee performance [7]. The findings of this study are predicated on the notion that adherence to values such as employee orientation, integrity, justice, simplicity, and responsibility does not serve as the primary compass for performance enhancement and work. Additional research is required to determine which leadership styles affect employee performance. The second hypothesis examines how DWE influences EP. The purpose of the environment under investigation is to enhance organizational flexibility and facilitate the recruitment and retention of personnel. The findings of the study indicate that DWE exerts a beneficial impact on EP, thus supporting the proposed hypothesis. DWE is a subject of investigation within the context of an environment that strives to enhance employee performance. By implementing digital systems, organizations can enhance the security of their data through improved access control and adherence to information security regulations.

Evaluating the third hypothesis demonstrates a positive correlation between EL and WD. Leaders possess ethical ideals that they can continuously implement in their daily actions, which has an impact on WD. The fourth hypothesis tests that DWE has an effect on WD, the influence is shown by the presence of time flexibility in the digital work environment, and employees can adjust working hours at the company according to personal preferences. Several studies support the relationship between DWE and WD [26] which states that there is a positive and significant influence of DWE on WD. The digital work environment has a significant impact on work discipline by shaping the way individuals approach tasks and responsibilities. One key impact is increased flexibility and accessibility through digital tools and technology. With the ability to work flexibly, employees may find it easier to balance personal and professional commitments.

The implications of the results of the fifth hypothesis test, WD on EP, are that an increase in EP is proportional to the quality of the WD. Consistent with prior research [27], this study demonstrates that WD exerts a substantial impact on EP. Possessing strong work discipline can positively impact the performance of employees within an organization. A multitude of organizational factors, including but not limited to remuneration systems, human resource management policies, and corporate culture, can significantly impact the relationship between WD and EP. How each person reacts to elements such as work discipline varies. WD plays a significant role in performance enhancement because improved work discipline within an organization positively impacts employee performance.

Hypothesis number six examines WD as a mediator between EL and EP. The findings of this study indicate that EL influences EP via WD, which functions as a mediating variable for company employees. Ethical leadership has the potential to increase WD. This is consistent with previous research [27] concerning the significance of EL on EP via the mediating role of WD, in which it was found that EL has a substantial positive correlation with both EP and WD.

The seventh hypothesis tests WD as a mediator of DWE on EP. The results show that the effect of DWE on EP through WD has been successfully proven. Digital work environments demand higher levels of intrinsic motivation and self-regulation, influencing work discipline by encouraging individuals to take responsibility for tasks and work outcomes. According to Hastuti et al., (2022) show that WD mediates between DWE and EP, which means that the influence of DWE can increase employee WD. Digital work and communication tools can influence work discipline through enhanced connectivity and information sharing [28]. The digital environment facilitates team collaboration, allowing team members to communicate seamlessly regardless of geographic location. This connectivity creates a sense of responsibility and encourages timely responses to questions and project updates [30].

6 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Work discipline research is particularly intriguing to examine in the current digital age. By investigating the role of work discipline as a mediator between ethical leadership, digital work environment, and employee performance, this study makes a valuable contribution to the field. Out of the seven hypotheses that were put forth, six of them received support. The first hypothesis is the only one that is rejected. Further research is suggested to enhance understanding of the impact of digital work environments and leadership styles on the digital employee experience. In addition, an examination of employee agility, innovative behavior, and interaction capability is suggested as means of enhancing employee performance.

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