

The Influence of Ethical Leadership on Employee Engagement: Analyzing the Role of Work-Life Balance as a Mediating Variable

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the creative economy industry, which is often characterized by a dynamic work environment and high work expectations, employee engagement is crucial to increase productivity and retain the best talent. This study aims to analyze the effect of ethical leadership on employee engagement by considering work-life balance as a mediating variable in the creative economy industry in Indonesia. The sample used was 150 respondents, determined by the purposive sampling method, and then analyzed using the SEM-PLS method. The results of this study confirm that ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on work-life balance. Furthermore, ethical leadership and work-life balance positively and significantly affect employee engagement. The mediation effect analysis also proves that work-life balance can mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement. This study is expected to provide new insights into how ethical leadership can effectively increase employee engagement through work-life balance and provide practical recommendations for leaders to support employee well-being in this competitive industry.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership; Work-Life Balance; Employee Engagement; Creative Industries

INTRODUCTION

The creative economy industry in Indonesia is now an important sector for national economic development due to its significant contribution to creating jobs and fostering innovation (Sidiq et al., 2022). Amidst the tight competition in this industry, companies face the challenge of retaining competent and motivated employees (Eko Putra Sri Sentanu & Praharjo, 2020). Employee engagement is a crucial factor that can affect the overall performance of an organization (Sofiyani et al., 2022); (Romi et al., 2023). With a high level of engagement, employees will feel more enthusiastic and intensely loyal to the organization (Ahiwale & Bhand, 2020); (Silalahi et al., 2022). Therefore, companies need to understand the factors that can increase employee engagement, including the role of leadership in creating a supportive work environment (Efendi et al., 2023); (Hartini et al., 2021).

One leadership approach that can have a positive influence on employee engagement is ethical leadership (Jia et al., 2022). Ethical leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes the importance of ethical values, integrity, and fairness in decision-making (Qing et al., 2020). Ethical leaders not only demonstrate honest and transparent behavior but also care about the welfare of employees. In the context of the creative economy industry, where employees often face high work pressure and a dynamic environment, the presence of ethical leaders can provide a sense of

security and emotional support that is important for employees (Molnár et al., 2021). In the creative economy industry, the role of leaders becomes more crucial because the flexible nature of work often requires employees to be able to work with high autonomy. Therefore, ethical leadership is expected to encourage employees to be more involved (Sahid & Abadi, 2023);(Sugianingrat et al., 2019).

Several previous studies have proven the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement. According to (Van et al., 2023);(Nasser et al., 2022), ethical leadership influences employee attitudes and behaviors by instilling solid ethical values. Ethical leaders tend to pay attention to employee welfare and create a comfortable work atmosphere, strengthening employee engagement. Another study by (Ernawati & Fadli, 2022);(Domiyandra & Rivai, 2013), showed that ethical leadership significantly influences employee engagement because of the trust built between leaders and employees. However, although the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement has been widely discussed, there is still a knowledge gap regarding how work-life balance factors can strengthen this relationship. In a work environment that often demands high flexibility, such as the creative economy industry, balancing work and personal life is increasingly vital for employees to work optimally.

In addition to ethical leadership, work-life balance is essential to employee engagement (Butarbutar et al., 2022);(Kakar et al., 2021). Work-life balance allows employees to balance time and energy between work and personal life, which contributes to job satisfaction and mental health (Dinh, 2020). (Pathak & Lawande, 2021), stated that work-life balance can increase employee satisfaction because they feel that the company supports their personal needs. In this context, work-life balance can act as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement. Ethical leaders pay attention to employees' needs to balance their work and personal lives. Companies that actively encourage a healthy work-life balance will have lower absenteeism rates, and workplace well-being and productivity will increase. Therefore, organizations need to implement rules related to work-life balance to ensure job satisfaction, increase employee engagement, and reduce stress (Boamah et al., 2022);(Kakar et al., 2021).

The need for work-life balance is increasingly felt in the creative economy industry, where flexible working hours and high job dynamics are common (Puspitasasri & Darwin, 2021). Previous studies have shown that employees with work-life balance tend to be more engaged in their work because they feel more appreciated and supported by the company in maintaining a balance between personal life and work. This is supported by a study by (Safria, 2022);(Riyanto et al., 2019), which revealed that a good work-life balance can reduce stress and increase job satisfaction, which leads to increased employee engagement. In addition, employee engagement is also influenced by employee perceptions of organizational support in realizing work-life balance. Research by (Siska et al., 2022);(Jaharuddin & Zainol, 2019) found that employees who feel the company supports work-life balance tend to have higher commitment and are more motivated in carrying out their duties. In the creative economy industry context, work-life balance is a very relevant factor because the nature of work often demands creativity and innovation. Employees who have balance in their lives are better able to work energetically and creatively,

contributing to their workplace engagement (Thomas et al., 2024);(Pathak & Lawande, 2021). Although several studies provide empirical evidence of this relationship, there is still a gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms, especially in the creative industries sector. Therefore, conducting research to design hypotheses:

H1: Ethical leadership influences work-life balance.

H2: Work-life balance influences employee engagement.

H3: Ethical leadership influences employee engagement.

H4: Ethical leadership influences employee engagement with work-life balance as a mediating variable.

Following the results of previous studies, this study aims to deepen the understanding of the mediating role of work-life balance in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement in the creative economy industry in Indonesia. Human resource development must be carried out by organizations so that their knowledge, abilities, and skills follow the demands of their work. This development activity is expected to improve and overcome deficiencies in carrying out work better, following the development of science and technology used by the organization. This study is expected to contribute to the literature on ethical leadership and employee engagement by providing empirical evidence regarding the importance of ethical leadership and work-life balance in increasing employee engagement in this challenging industrial sector.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with the Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method to analyze the effect of ethical leadership on employee engagement by considering work-life balance as a mediating variable(Joseph F. Hair et al., 2018). SEM-PLS was chosen because this method is effective for analyzing the relationship between latent variables in relatively small samples and does not require the assumption of normal distribution (Edeh et al., 2023). The sample of this study consisted of 150 respondents working in the creative economy industry in Indonesia, who were selected using the purposive sampling method. The respondents selected were employees with at least one year of work experience in this industry, so the data obtained were expected to represent relevant characteristics in the context of this study. Data was collected online through questionnaires distributed using an online survey platform. Each respondent was given an introduction explaining the purpose of the study and a guarantee of the confidentiality of their data to encourage openness and honesty in answering. The online questionnaire was chosen to facilitate access for respondents spread across various regions in Indonesia and speed up the data collection process.

After the data is collected, the analysis stage begins with a validity and reliability test on each construct to ensure that the instrument used has consistency and accuracy in measuring the research variables. In SEM-PLS, the validity test is carried out by measuring convergent and discriminant validity, while reliability is measured by composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. Furthermore, the structural model is tested to see the direct relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement and the mediating role of work-life balance in the relationship. SEM-PLS uses software such as SmartPLS, allowing model testing with

an iterative method to produce accurate estimates. In testing the mediating role, this study uses the bootstrapping approach in SEM-PLS to test the significance of the mediation effect without having to assume a normal data distribution (Sarstedt et al., 2020). With the bootstrapping method, testing is carried out on the mediation path to see if the work-life balance has a significant effect as a mediating variable between ethical leadership and employee engagement. Furthermore, the measurement of research variable indicators is summarized in the variable operational definition table, which can be explained in Table 1:

Table 1. Operational Definition of Research Variables

Variable	Code	Items	Adapted From
Ethical Leadership	EL1	Ethical Standards	(Jia et al., 2022);(Qing et al., 2020)
	EL2	Ethical Manners	
	EL3	Balanced Decisions	
	EL4	Business Ethics	
	EL5	Terms of Ethics	
Work-Life Balance	WLB1	Time Balance	(Yi & Mei Peng, 2023);(Hendriana et al., 2023)
	WLB2	The Balance of Engagement	
	WLB3	Satisfaction Balance	
Employee Engagement	EE1	Vigor	(Duran & Sanchez, 2021);(Che et al., 2021)
	EE2	Dedication	
	EE3	Absorption	
	EE4	Fair Compensation Policy	
	EE5	Rewards and Recognition	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographics of the respondents in this study show diversity in terms of gender, age, education level, and type of business in the creative economy industry. Based on gender, most respondents were women, 85 people (56.67%), while men numbered 65 (43.33%). In terms of age, the 20-29 age group dominated with 55 people (36.67%), followed by 30-39 years old with 45 people (30%), then 40-49 years old with 33 people (22%), and 50-59 years old with 17 people (11.33%). In terms of education level, the majority of respondents had a high school education, 92 people (61.33%), while 48 were bachelor's graduates (32%), and only ten people (6.67%) had a master's degree. The types of businesses pursued by respondents also varied. The culinary sector is the largest, with 43 respondents (28.67%), followed by the automotive sector, with 36 respondents (24%), and the fashion sector, with 22 respondents (14.67%). Other types of businesses include event organizers with 16 respondents (10.66%), agribusiness with nine respondents (6%), and various other types of businesses covering 24 respondents (16%). These demographic data provide a comprehensive picture of the variation in respondent characteristics, reflecting the diversity in the creative economy industry in Indonesia.

1. Outer Model Measurement

Validity and reliability tests were conducted to measure the outer model. The loading factor determines a convergent validity testing and AVE with the condition that the loading factor is above 0.7 and the AVE value is 0.5(J. F Hair, 2014). The model reliability test, according to(J. F Hair, 2014), is seen from the value of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), which has a value higher than 0.7. The following will show an explanation of the measurements of the outer model, which is presented in Table 3:

Table 2. Outer Model Measurement Results

Constructs/items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Ethical Leadership		0.967	0.974	0.884
EL1	0.966			
EL2	0.948			
EL3	0.953			
EL4	0.913			
EL5	0.921			
Work-Life Balance		0.917	0.948	0.859
WLB1	0.954			
WLB2	0.870			
WLB3	0.954			
Employee Engagement		0.891	0.920	0.698
EE1	0.887			
EE2	0.863			
EE3	0.720			
EE4	0.825			
EE5	0.872			

In the validity test presented in Table 3 above, it was obtained that the value of each loading factor on the indicators of the variables of emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, job satisfaction, and teacher performance was above 0.7 and 0.5 for the average variance extracted (AVE) value. Furthermore, for Cronbach's alpha value and composite reliability, the value for each variable was above 0.7, which shows that all research variables had good reliability values. With these sound values, it can be used as an overview that the condition of the relationship between variables was also good so that further tests can be carried out.

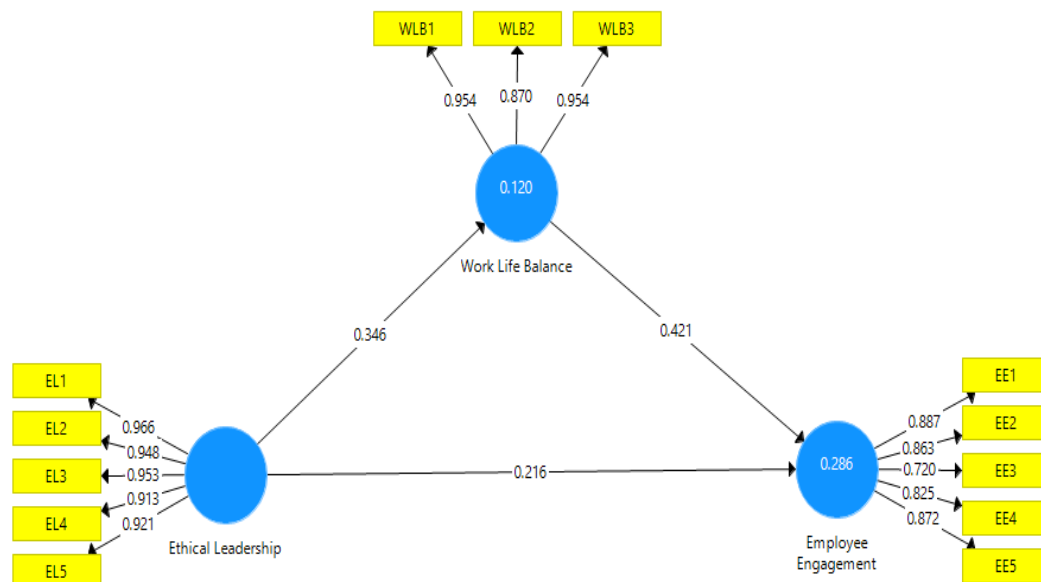


Figure 1. Outer Model Data Analysis Results

2. Inner Model Measurement

Inner model measurement was carried out by bootstrapping research data using SmartPLS 3.2.9. Two results were obtained from bootstrapping; the first was the significance of the two related variables and the study's R-square. The R-square value is the value that shows the ability of exogenous variables to build endogenous variables. According to (Chin et al., 2008), there are three categories of R-square

values; if the R-square value is 0.19, the relationship between exogenous variables forming endogenous variables is weak; if it is 0.33, it means that the relationship is moderate, and if the value is 0.67, it means that the relationship is strong.

Table 3. Calculation results of the R-Square value

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Work-Life Balance	0.120	0.116
Employee Engagement	0.286	0.280

Judging from the R-square value for the endogenous work-life balance variable, a value of 0.120 is obtained. This indicates that the overall ability of the exogenous variables to explain the work-life balance variable is weak. Then, to obtain the R-square value for the employee engagement variable, the value obtained is 0.286. This is obtained, indicating that the overall ability of the exogenous variables to explain the work-life balance variable is weak.

3. Hypothesis Testing

Furthermore, a significance test was carried out to prove the hypothesis testing, which was used to determine the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables. A significant criterion is seen in the p-value. With a significance level of 5%, if the p-value between the exogenous and endogenous variables is less than 0.05, it means that the exogenous variable has a significant effect on the endogenous variable; conversely, if the value is more significant than 0.05, it means that the exogenous variable has no significant effect on building endogenous variables. A positive or negative path coefficient indicates the direction of the influence of the relationship, while a considerable value indicates the strength of the influence between the constructs. With this approach, users can interpret test results to understand the influence between variables in the model according to the proposed hypothesis.

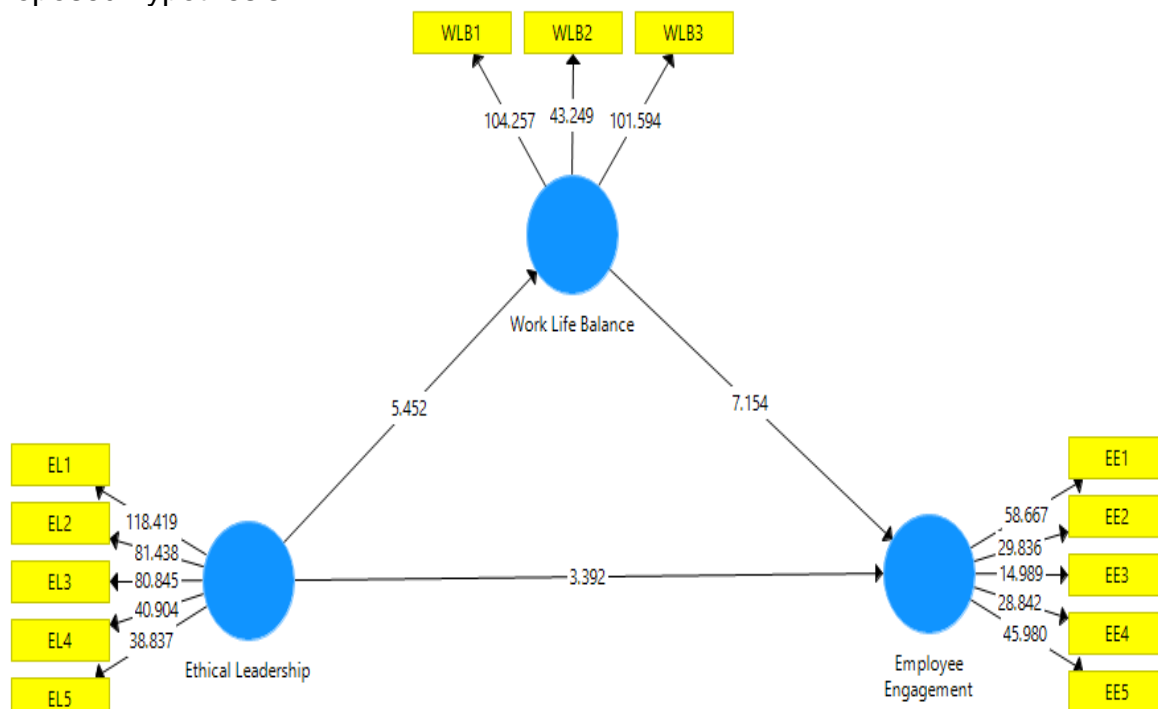


Figure 2. Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results

Path Between Variables	Coefficient	t-count	P-Value	Conclusion
Ethical Leadership >>Work Life Balance	0.179	2,956	0.003	Accepted
Work-Life Balance>>Employee Engagement	0.042	0.676	0.499	Rejected
Ethical Leadership >>Employee Engagement	0.405	6,662	0.000	Accepted

Based on the results of the processed data presented in Table 5, it is known that three hypotheses were accepted from the compiled hypotheses. The first data analysis confirmed that ethical leadership positively and significantly affects work-life balance. The second data analysis stated a significant positive effect between work-life balance and employee engagement. The results of the last data analysis also stated a positive and significant effect between ethical leadership and employee engagement.

4. Testing the Mediation Effect

Mediation testing aims to detect the position of the intervening variable. To test the significance of the indirect effect, it is necessary to test the t value of the ab coefficient. The calculated t value is compared with the t table value; if the calculated t value > t table value, then it can be concluded that there is a mediation effect, then see the nature of the relationship between the variables either as a perfect mediation variable or partial mediation or not as a mediation variable. The following is a complete explanation of the mediation effect test based on the indirect effect.

Table 5. Hypothesis Test Results

Path Between Variables	Coefficient	t-count	P-Value	Conclusion
Ethical Leadership >>Work Life Balance>>Employee Engagement	0.146	4,561	0.000	Accepted

In the mediation analysis of work-life balance, it can be seen in Table 6 that the T-statistic value shows a figure of 4,561, which is > 1.96 and can also be proven by the P-value of 0.000 or is said to be smaller than 0.05. This proves that work-life balance can mediate the influence of ethical leadership on employee engagement.

Discussion

According to the results of the data analysis, ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on work-life balance. Ethical leaders tend to show concern for employee welfare, including the balance between their work and personal lives. Leaders with an ethical leadership style practice values such as honesty, integrity, and empathy, which make employees feel appreciated and supported. In the creative economy sector, which often requires flexible working hours and creative ideas, the support of ethical leaders can reduce the stress and fatigue that employees often experience. By giving employees the freedom to manage their time, resources, and commitments in a more balanced way, ethical leadership helps create a healthier and more productive work environment. In addition, ethical leadership plays a role in building an organizational culture that supports work-life balance, which is very much needed in the dynamic and rapidly changing creative economy industry. Ethical leaders not only encourage productivity but also consider the human aspects of employees, such as the need for family time and activities outside of work. With the support of ethical leaders, employees feel more comfortable balancing their work and personal responsibilities, which ultimately increases job satisfaction and motivation.

According to the results of the data analysis, it was confirmed that work-life balance has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. These results prove that work-life balance helps employees feel more satisfied and motivated. When employees can balance work responsibilities with personal needs, they will feel more energetic and focused and can carry out their professional roles better. An excellent work-life balance in the creative economy sector, which often faces high pressure and demands for creativity, allows employees to recharge their energy optimally. Employees who feel that the organization supports their personal needs tend to have higher engagement because they feel valued and supported by the company in maintaining their quality of life. In addition, an excellent work-life balance creates a positive work atmosphere and reduces stress levels, making it easier for employees to maintain their involvement and commitment to the organization. With enough time for personal or family activities, employees become more satisfied with their jobs and feel more loyal to the company. In the creative economy industry, which relies heavily on innovative ideas and active contributions from employees, balancing work and personal life increases their spirit and enthusiasm to give their best.

According to the results of the data analysis, ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. This is because ethical leaders can create a trusted and inspiring work environment. Leaders who demonstrate integrity, fairness, and concern for employee welfare encourage a sense of security and trust among employees so they feel valued and motivated to give their best performance. In the creative economy industry that demands innovation and strong teamwork, the role of ethical leaders is very important in creating a positive work culture and supporting creativity. Employees who work under ethical leaders tend to have high employee engagement because they feel they have a meaningful common goal and feel recognized for their contributions by the organization. In addition, ethical leadership helps increase employee commitment to the organization by providing positive role models and solid moral guidelines in their daily work. Fair and transparent leaders provide inspiration and enthusiasm, which makes employees feel involved and excited about their work. In the creative economy industry that often faces challenges and rapid changes, ethical leaders also provide emotional stability for employees, allowing them to feel more focused and dedicated to their tasks.

According to the results of the data analysis, it was confirmed that work-life balance can mediate the influence of ethical leadership on employee engagement. These results prove that ethical leaders support employees' needs to balance work and personal life. In the creative economy industry of pressure and demands, caring and fair leaders allow employees to adjust their work rhythm, help reduce stress, and support personal well-being. With ethical leadership, employees feel the organization's attention to their personal needs, which improves work-life balance. In addition, support for work-life balance from ethical leaders encourages employees to remain loyal and motivated in their work. Ethical leaders motivate through words and show their commitment to employee well-being by creating a physically and emotionally healthy environment. With this balance, employees in the creative economy industry feel supported to innovate and contribute more to their work. Because work-life balance is met, employees become more satisfied and more

emotionally involved, thus strengthening the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement in this dynamic industry.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ethical leadership has a positive and significant influence on employee engagement in the creative economy industry in Indonesia, with work-life balance as a mediating variable that also strengthens the relationship. Ethical leaders who demonstrate integrity, fairness, and concern for employee welfare can create a supportive and comfortable work environment. Employees who work under ethical leadership feel more valued and supported, ultimately increasing their work engagement. In addition, work-life balance plays a vital role as a connector, where employees who can balance work and personal life show higher engagement because they feel more satisfied and motivated. These findings highlight the importance of implementing ethical leadership and supporting work-life balance to improve employee engagement in the creative and dynamic sector. In the creative economy industry that often faces high pressure and flexible work demands, ethical leaders are an important factor in maintaining employee welfare and engagement. This study's results emphasize that organizations committed to improving employee engagement must pay attention to aspects of ethical leadership and balance between work and personal life to build a productive and sustainable work environment.

Based on the results of this study, the advice that organizations in the creative economy industry can give is to prioritize the development of ethical leadership as part of the company culture. By prioritizing ethical principles in leadership, organizations can create a positive work climate and increase overall employee engagement. In addition, companies are advised to design policies and programs that support work-life balance, such as flexible working hours and employee welfare programs. These steps will help increase the productivity and retention of employees who are committed to the organization. The implications of this study suggest that organizations that want to increase employee engagement must consider the importance of ethical leadership and employee work-life balance. Support for work-life balance increases engagement and helps create a more inclusive and sustainable work environment. In the long term, this approach can increase the competitiveness of organizations in the highly competitive creative economy industry by retaining productive, innovative, and loyal employees.

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