

The Role of Organizational Commitment in Mediating the Effect of Ethical Leadership on Employee Performance

Ikbal Alrasyid, Mesra B, Elfitra Desy Surya

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of ethical leadership on employee performance, with organizational commitment as a mediating variable, at the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police. This study employs a quantitative approach using a survey method. The study population consisted of 115 employees, and the entire population was sampled using a saturation sampling technique. Data were collected via a questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS)-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS software. The analysis results indicate that all research indicators met the criteria for validity and reliability. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that ethical leadership explains 11.2% of the variation in organizational commitment, while ethical leadership combined with organizational commitment explains 41.7% of the variation in employee performance. Hypothesis testing revealed that ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.211$; $p < 0.001$) as well as on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.335$; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, organizational commitment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.544$; $p < 0.001$). The results of the indirect effect test indicate that organizational commitment positively and significantly mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance ($\beta = 0.182$; $p < 0.001$). The research findings indicate that the implementation of leadership grounded in ethical values can enhance employees' organizational commitment, which ultimately leads to improved employee performance. Therefore, strengthening ethical leadership and organizational commitment is a crucial strategy for improving employee performance within the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Organizational Commitment, Employee Performance

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Introduction

Human resources are strategic assets that determine an organization's success in achieving its established goals. Organizational success is influenced not only by the availability of resources, technology, and work systems but also by the quality of employee performance. Optimal employee performance reflects an individual's ability to carry out tasks in accordance with assigned responsibilities, thereby contributing to enhancing the organization's effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, organizations must consider various factors that can influence employee performance, whether stemming from the individual or the organizational environment.

One factor believed to influence employee performance is ethical leadership. Ethical leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes moral values, honesty, integrity, fairness, responsibility, and behavior that aligns with norms and ethics in carrying out organizational duties. Leaders who apply ethical principles not only serve as role models for their subordinates but are also able to create a conducive work environment characterized by mutual trust and respect for every individual. Under such conditions, employees tend to be more motivated to work professionally and deliver optimal results.

However, the influence of ethical leadership on employee performance is not always direct. Various studies indicate that this relationship can be influenced by psychological and organizational factors that act as mediating variables. One variable considered crucial is organizational commitment. Organizational commitment reflects the level of emotional attachment, loyalty, and an employee's willingness to remain part of the organization and strive to achieve its goals. Employees with high organizational commitment tend to demonstrate greater responsibility, work discipline, and a willingness to contribute their best to the organization.

Ethical leadership has the potential to enhance organizational commitment by fostering work relationships based on trust, fairness, and respect for employees. When employees perceive that their leaders act fairly, consistently, and with integrity, they develop a stronger sense of belonging to the organization. It is hoped that this increased commitment will ultimately drive improvements in employee performance. Thus, organizational commitment is hypothesized to serve as a mediating variable that explains the mechanism through which ethical leadership influences employee performance.

On the other hand, there remains a phenomenon in various organizations—both in the public and private sectors—indicating that improvements in leadership quality do not always lead to optimal improvements in employee performance. Several issues—such as low employee loyalty, lack of engagement in work, high employee turnover, and declining work motivation—indicate that leadership success is also influenced by the level of organizational commitment held by employees. These conditions highlight the importance of examining the relationship between ethical leadership, organizational commitment, and employee performance more comprehensively.

Numerous studies have been conducted on ethical leadership, organizational commitment, and employee performance. However, previous research findings remain inconsistent regarding the extent of ethical leadership's influence on employee performance and the role of organizational commitment as a mediating variable. These differing results open opportunities for further research in different organizational contexts, employee characteristics, and work environments to provide stronger empirical evidence.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the influence of ethical leadership on employee performance and to test the role of organizational commitment as a mediating variable in this relationship. The research findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of human resource management, particularly regarding ethical leadership and organizational behavior. Additionally, this study is expected to provide practical insights for organizations in formulating leadership strategies capable of sustainably enhancing organizational commitment and employee performance.

Literature Review

1. Employee Performance

a) Definition of Employee Performance

According to Armstrong (2021), performance is the result of the interaction between an individual's abilities, motivation, and work opportunities in achieving organizational goals. Thus, performance is not only related to the final outcome of work but also encompasses the work processes employees undertake to achieve predetermined targets. Consequently, employee performance within public organizations such as the North Sumatra Regional Police also reflects the level of success in carrying out service duties, enforcing the law, and maintaining public safety and order in accordance with applicable professional standards.

b) Employee Performance Indicators

Employee performance indicators (Armstrong, 2021):

1) Work Quality

Work quality describes the level of accuracy, neatness, and conformity of an employee's work results to the standards set by the organization. The higher the quality of work produced, the greater the employee's contribution to achieving the organization's goals.

2) Quantity of Work

Work quantity indicates the amount of work an employee is able to complete within a specific time period in accordance with the targets set by the organization.

3) Timeliness

Timeliness describes an employee's ability to complete work by the deadlines set by the organization.

4) Effectiveness

Effectiveness describes an employee's ability to optimally utilize available resources to achieve the results expected by the organization.

5) Independence

Independence refers to an employee's ability to carry out their duties and responsibilities without relying heavily on the guidance or assistance of others.

2. Organizational Commitment

a) Definition of Organizational Commitment

According to Meyer and Allen (2020), organizational commitment is a psychological state that reflects the relationship between an individual and their organization, consisting of three main components: affective commitment (emotional attachment), continuance commitment (consideration of the costs of leaving the organization), and normative commitment (a sense of obligation to remain in the organization).

b) Indicators of Organizational Commitment

According to Meyer and Allen (2020), organizational commitment consists of three main dimensions that serve as measurement indicators, namely:

1) Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is an employee's emotional attachment to the organization that arises from shared values, a sense of belonging, and emotional involvement with the organization.

2) Continuance Commitment

Continuance commitment is an employee's attachment to the organization due to concerns about the costs or losses that would result from leaving the organization.

3) Normative Commitment

Normative commitment is the sense of moral obligation employees feel to remain loyal and stay with the organization. Employees with high normative commitment

feel that staying with the organization is the right thing to do and aligns with moral or ethical values, thereby fostering a sense of responsibility not to leave the organization.

3. Ethical Leadership

a) Definition of Ethical Leadership

According to Brown and Treviño (2021), ethical leadership is a process of social influence demonstrated through behavior that aligns with moral and ethical norms, and conveyed through communication, reinforcement, and setting a good example within the organization. Ethical leaders focus not only on achieving organizational goals but also on doing so in a just and moral manner.

b) Indicators of Ethical Leadership

According to Brown and Treviño (2021), ethical leadership can be measured through the following key indicators:

1) Honesty

Honesty reflects a leader's behavior in conveying information truthfully without manipulation or fabrication. An honest leader always speaks according to the facts, does not withhold important information, and builds trust with subordinates through openness in communication and actions.

2) Integrity

Integrity describes the consistency between a leader's values, words, and actions in carrying out organizational duties. Leaders with high integrity act in accordance with moral principles and organizational rules and do not abuse their authority.

3) Fairness

Fairness demonstrates a leader's ability to treat all employees equally without discrimination. A fair leader makes decisions based on objectivity, provides equal opportunities, and remains impartial in evaluating and treating subordinates.

4) Exemplary Behavior

Setting a good example describes the extent to which a leader serves as a model of ethical behavior for their subordinates. Ethical leaders demonstrate attitudes and behaviors that employees can emulate, such as discipline, responsibility, and professionalism at work.

5) Ethical Communication

Ethical communication is the way a leader conveys information openly, politely, and responsibly. Leaders who practice ethical communication are able to provide clear direction, value the opinions of their subordinates, and foster healthy dialogue within the organization.

Conceptual Framework

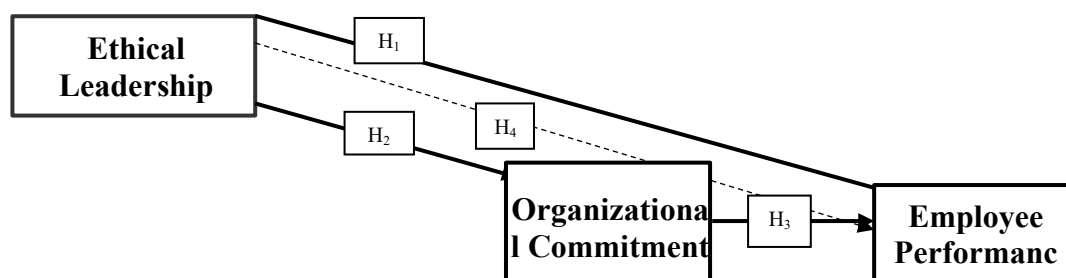


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Hypotheses

H₁: Ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police.

- H₂: Ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational commitment among employees of the North Sumatra Regional Police.
- H₃: Organizational commitment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police.
- H₄: Organizational commitment mediates the effect of ethical leadership on employee performance at the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police.

Research Methodology

Type of Research

The type of research used is quantitative research. According to Sugiyono (2022), quantitative research is defined as a method grounded in the philosophy of positivism, used to study a specific population or sample; sampling techniques are generally conducted randomly; data collection uses research instruments; and data analysis is quantitative/statistical in nature, with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses. This quantitative research was conducted to examine the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational culture and employee performance, with organizational commitment serving as an intervening variable, at the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police.

Research Location and Timeframe

The research was conducted at the North Sumatra Regional Police, located at Jalan Sisingamangaraja Km. 10.5 No. 60, Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas District, Medan City. The research was conducted over a period of 3 months, from May to August 2026.

Population and Sample

According to Sugiyono (2025), the population consists of all objects or subjects possessing specific characteristics defined by the researcher for study, from which conclusions are subsequently drawn. Based on this definition, the population in this study comprises all employees of the Human Resources Bureau (Ro SDM) of the North Sumatra Regional Police, totaling 115 individuals.

The sample in this study consists of all employees of the Human Resources Bureau (Ro SDM) of the North Sumatra Regional Police, totaling 115 individuals. The sampling technique used is saturation sampling, which involves selecting the entire population as the study sample.

Research Data Sources

The data source used in this study was primary data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Outer Model Analysis

The *Outer Model* analysis, using the *PLS algorithm*, yielded the following results:

Validity Test

Table 1. Outer Loadings Values

	Ethical Leadership	Employee Performance	Organizational Commitment
X1.1	0.780		
X1.2	0.710		
X1.3	0.858		
X1.4	0.778		
X1.5	0.815		
Y.1		0.681	
Y.2		0.839	
Y.3		0.782	
Y.4		0.832	
Y.5		0.819	

Z.1			0.841
Z.2			0.826
Z.3			0.887

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

Based on the values in Table 1 above, the results of the outer model test using factor loadings/outer loadings show that all indicators for each variable have loadings ≥ 0.60 . This indicates that each indicator is measured validly. Therefore, it can be concluded that all items in the questionnaire meet the validity criteria, as shown in the following figure.

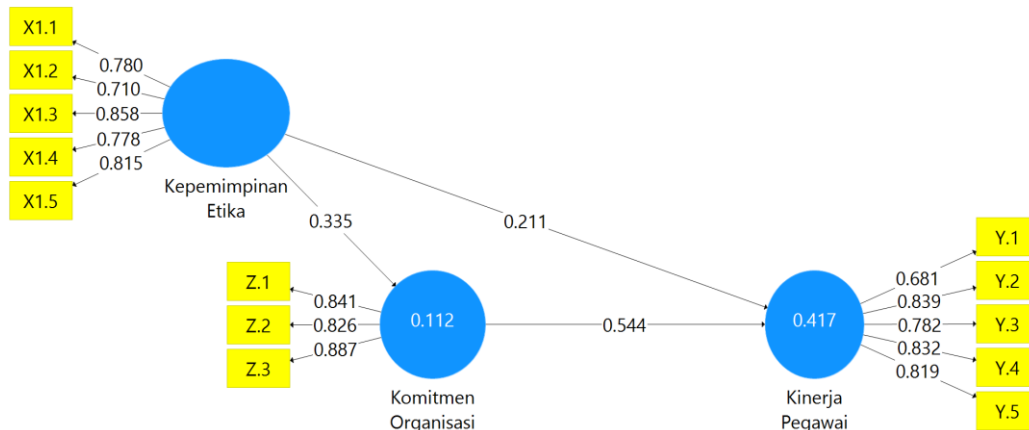


Figure 1. Outer Loadings

Reliability Test

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Ethical Leadership	0.849	0.858	0.892	0.624
Employee Performance	0.851	0.863	0.894	0.629
Organizational Commitment	0.812	0.827	0.888	0.725
Ethical Leadership	0.849	0.858	0.892	0.624

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

From Table 2 above, the reliability test results show that the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all constructs are above 0.70, and the AVE values are above 0.05. This indicates that all indicators have high internal consistency and are reliable for measuring their respective constructs. Therefore, the research instrument is deemed reliable and suitable for use in structural equation modeling.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

When evaluating a model using PLS, the analysis begins by examining the R-squared value for each latent dependent variable. The table below presents the estimated R-squared values obtained using SmartPLS.

Table 3. R-Square Results

	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square
Organizational Commitment	0.112	0.109
Employee Performance	0.417	0.413

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

Table 3 shows the R-squared values for both dependent variables. For the organizational commitment variable, the R-squared value is 0.112; this means that ethical leadership contributes 0.112, or 11.2%. The remainder is attributed to other variables outside the model.

The R-squared value for employee performance is 0.417, meaning that ethical leadership and organizational commitment account for 0.417 or 41.7%; the remainder is attributed to other variables outside the model.

Structural Model Testing (Inner Model)

Hypothesis Testing

Direct Effects Between Variables

Direct effects between variables can be seen in the *path coefficient* values. The data analysis results show that the direct effect values are presented in the following table.

Table 4. *Path Coefficients* (Direct Effects)

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P-Values	Conclusion
Ethical Leadership -> Employee Performance	0.211	4.345	0.000	Accepted
Ethical Leadership -> Organizational Commitment	0.335	6.768	0.000	Accepted
Organizational Commitment -> Employee Performance	0.544	11.917	0.000	Accepted

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

Table 4 shows the following direct effect values:

1. Ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a t-statistic of 4.345 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that ethical leadership has a real effect on employee performance because the significance level is below 0.05. These findings are consistent with previous research, which found that ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (Sofyan & Mesra, 2024).
2. Ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational commitment, with a t-statistic of 6.768 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that ethical leadership has a significant effect on organizational commitment because the p-value is below 0.05. These findings are consistent with previous research, which also found that ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational commitment (Lubis & Abadi, 2022).
3. Organizational commitment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a t-statistic of 11.917 (above 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that organizational commitment has a significant effect on employee performance because the p-value is below 0.05. These findings are consistent with previous research, which also found that organizational commitment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (Mekta & Siswanto, 2017).

Indirect Effects Between Variables

The indirect effects between variables can be seen in the *specific indirect effects* values. The data analysis results show that the indirect effect values are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. *Specific Indirect Effects*

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
Ethical Leadership → Organizational Commitment → Employee Performance	0.182	6.114	0.000	Accepted

Source:
Smart
PLS,
2025
Table 5
shows

the indirect effects between variables, namely: Ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance through organizational commitment, with a t-statistic value of 6.114 (above 1.96) and a significance level of 0.000 (below 0.05). This means that organizational commitment acts as an intervening variable between ethical leadership and employee performance.

CONCLUSION

1. Ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police.
2. Ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational commitment among employees of the North Sumatra Regional Police.
3. Organizational commitment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police.
4. Organizational commitment mediates the effect of ethical leadership on employee performance at the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research results and conclusions obtained, the following recommendations can be made.

1. Ethical Leadership

The leadership of the Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police is advised to continue enhancing the implementation of ethical leadership through behavior that is honest, principled, fair, communicative, and capable of serving as a role model for all employees. Leaders must provide information openly, make decisions objectively, and treat employees equally without discriminating based on position, personal relationships, or specific backgrounds.

Leaders must also ensure consistency between their words, policies, and actions to foster greater employee trust in the organization. Any violations of rules and the code of ethics must be addressed consistently, while employees who demonstrate ethical and professional behavior should be recognized. The consistent practice of ethical leadership is expected to strengthen employee commitment and improve the quality of work performance.

2. Organizational Commitment

The Human Resources Bureau of the North Sumatra Regional Police needs to enhance employees' organizational commitment, as this variable has been shown to influence performance and mediate the effects of ethical leadership and organizational culture on employee performance. Commitment can be enhanced by fostering a sense of ownership, pride, loyalty, and emotional attachment among employees toward the organization.

The organization is advised to provide fair career development opportunities, offer competency-building programs, recognize achievements, and create a safe and supportive work environment. Leaders should also involve employees in decision-making related to work performance. Employees who feel valued, treated fairly, and have opportunities for growth will have a stronger desire to remain with the organization and contribute their best.

3. Employee Performance

Improving employee performance requires consideration of work quality, quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, and autonomy. Organizations are advised to set clear, measurable, realistic performance goals that align with each employee's specific duties. Performance evaluations should be conducted objectively, transparently, and periodically based on work outcomes and work behavior.

Organizations also need to provide training, mentoring, work facilities, and technological support appropriate to job requirements. Employees who have not yet met performance standards need to receive guidance and competency development, while high-performing employees should be rewarded. Regular evaluations are necessary to identify work obstacles and determine appropriate corrective actions.

4. For Future Researchers

Future researchers are advised to expand the scope of their research to other work units within the Indonesian National Police or other government agencies so that research results can be compared and have a broader level of generalizability. Subsequent studies may also include additional variables expected to influence employee commitment and performance,

such as work motivation, job satisfaction, competence, work discipline, work environment, organizational justice, and employee engagement.

Future research could employ a mixed-methods approach by combining questionnaires, interviews, and observations to gain a deeper understanding. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted to track changes in employee commitment and performance following the implementation of ethical leadership policies and organizational culture strengthening over a specific period.

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