The Role of Work Ethic in Mediating the Influence of Leadership on Employee Performance at the Housing and Settlement Agency, Langkat Regency

Ferisna Yuliamita Saragih, Kholilul Kholik, Saimara Sebayang

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of work ethic in mediating the influence of leadership on employee performance at the Langkat Regency Housing and Settlement Agency. This study used a quantitative approach with a survey method. The population in this study was all 50 employees of the Langkat Regency Housing and Settlement Agency. The sampling technique used total sampling, so the entire population served as the research sample. Data collection was conducted through a Likert-scale questionnaire, while data analysis used the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method with the assistance of the SmartPLS 3.0 application. The results showed that leadership had a positive and significant effect on work ethic with a path coefficient of 0.818, a t-statistic of 21.055, and a p-value of 0.000. Leadership also had a positive and significant effect on employee performance with a path coefficient of 0.802, a t-statistic of 10.281, and a p-value of 0.000. Furthermore, work ethic has a positive and significant effect on employee performance with a path coefficient value of 0.203, t-statistics of 2.034, and p-value of 0.043. The results of the indirect effect test show that work ethic is able to mediate the influence of leadership on employee performance with a coefficient value of 0.103 and a p-value of 0.047. The R Square value of work ethic is 0.669 and employee performance is 0.808, which indicates that the research model has a strong ability to explain the relationship between variables. Thus, it can be concluded that leadership plays an important role in improving employee performance, both directly and through work ethic as an intervening variable.

Keywords: *Leadership, Work Ethic, Employee Performance, Intervening Variables, PLSSEM.*

Ferisna Yuliamita Saragih[1]
[1]Master's Student in Management, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: inamithasaragih@gmail.com[1]

Kholilul Kholik[2], Saimara Sebayang[3]
[2,3]Master of Management, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: kholilulkholik@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id[2], saimarasebayang@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id[3]
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Introduction

Human resources are a crucial factor in determining the success of any organization, including government agencies. In public organizations, employee quality is the primary asset for achieving effective, responsive, and accountable services. Therefore, increasing the capacity of staff is crucial in supporting the achievement of organizational goals and improving the quality of public services.

Employee performance is a crucial aspect in assessing the success of an agency. Good performance will encourage optimal public services, while poor performance can hinder program implementation and reduce service quality. Research by Emilia Putri and Daryono (2025) shows that employee performance is closely related to the quality of public services, particularly in the areas of responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

One factor influencing employee performance is leadership. Effective leaders not only direct employees but also foster motivation, engagement, and a work environment that supports the achievement of organizational goals. Mareta and Sawiji (2025) found that leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This finding aligns with Iddrisu and Mohammed (2025), who assert that leadership contributes to organizational effectiveness by increasing employee motivation and engagement, particularly in the public sector context.

However, the influence of leadership on employee performance is not always direct. Other factors can strengthen or bridge this relationship, one of which is work ethic. Work ethic reflects a positive attitude toward work demonstrated through responsibility, discipline, commitment, and a results-oriented approach. Santanu (2024) demonstrated that work ethic has a positive and significant influence on employee performance. Furthermore, Fitri, Purwanto, and Cadith (2026) emphasized that work ethic plays a role in strengthening the direction of work behavior and encouraging optimal productivity and target achievement.

Work ethic can also be influenced by leadership. Leaders who are able to serve as role models, provide clear direction, and build work motivation will more easily foster employee enthusiasm, discipline, and responsibility in carrying out their duties. In this context, work ethic functions not only as an individual factor but can also be an intervening variable explaining how leadership influences employee performance.

At the Langkat Regency Housing and Settlement Agency, employee performance is a crucial element in supporting the implementation of government duties and public services in the housing and settlement sector. To achieve optimal service, effective leadership and employees with a strong work ethic are required. Therefore, this study is important to analyze the role of work ethic in mediating the influence of leadership on employee performance at the Langkat Regency Housing and Settlement Agency.

Conceptual Framework

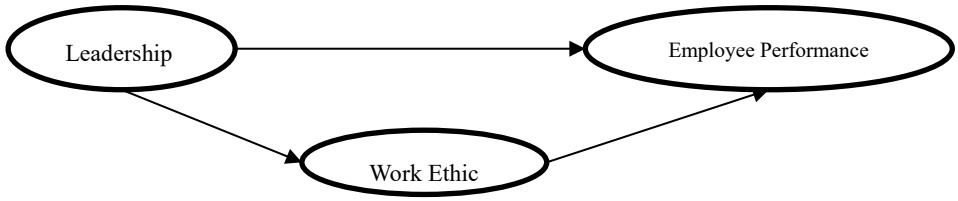

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework **Hypothesis:**

H1: Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee work ethic at the Housing and Settlement Agency of Langkat Regency.

H2: Leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Housing and Settlement Agency of Langkat Regency.

H3: Work ethic has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Housing and Settlement Agency of Langkat Regency.

H4: Work ethic mediates the influence of leadership on employee performance at the Housing and Settlement Agency of Langkat Regency.

Research Methodology

This research is quantitative, meaning it examines the relationship between variables objectively and statistically. A quantitative approach was used to analyze the influence of leadership on employee performance, with work ethic as an intervening variable, at the Langkat Regency Housing and Settlement Agency.

The research was conducted at the Langkat Regency Housing and Settlement Agency, located on Jalan Diponegoro, Kwala Bingai, Stabat District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra. The study lasted five months, from March 2026 to July 2026.

The population in this study was all 50 employees of the Langkat Regency Housing and Settlement Agency. Due to the relatively small population, the entire population was sampled using a total sampling technique, resulting in a total sample size of 50 individuals.

Data were collected through questionnaires using a Likert scale. The data source used was primary data obtained directly from respondents through their responses to the questionnaire. The research instrument was compiled based on indicators of leadership variables, work ethic, and employee performance. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method with the help of the SmartPLS 3.0 application. The analysis was carried out through outer model and inner model testing. The outer model testing aims to determine the validity and reliability of the research instrument, with the criteria of loading factor ≥ 0.70, and Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values ≥ 0.60. Meanwhile, the inner model testing aims to measure the R^2 value, test the direct influence between variables, and test the indirect influence through work ethic as an intervening variable. Hypothesis testing is carried out by looking at the Tstatistic value ≥ 1.96 and p-value ≤ 0.05.

Results

4.1 Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

Model evaluation was conducted to assess the feasibility of the research model through testing the outer model and inner model. The evaluation results were obtained from the PLS Algorithm report using SmartPLS software. This stage represents the initial phase of data processing.

a. Convergent Validity

The convergent validity test was carried out by examining the loading factor values of each indicator on the latent construct it measures. An indicator is considered valid if it has a loading factor value greater than 0.70. Based on the data processing results, the convergent validity test for the variables of Leadership, Work Ethic, and Employee Performance shows that most indicators have loading factor values above 0.70, thus they can be declared valid.

Table 1. Outer Loadings Values

Latent Variable	Work Ethic	Employee Performance	Leadership
EK1	0.852		
EK2	0.847		
EK3	0.804		
EK4	0.914		
EK5	0.753		
EK6	0.854		
KPG1			0.930

KPG2			0.916
KPG3			0.833
KPG4			0.882
KPG5			0.849
KPG6			0.813
KPP1		0.902	
KPP2		0.739	
KPP3		0.861	
KPP4		0.820	

The results show that all indicators have loading factor values above 0.70. Therefore, it can be concluded that all indicators in the variables of Leadership, Work Ethic, and Employee Performance have met the criteria of convergent validity and are suitable for use in further analysis.

4.2 Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

a. Path Coefficient

After conducting the model evaluation and confirming that each construct has met the requirements of Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, and Composite Reliability, the next step is the evaluation of the structural model. This evaluation includes testing model fit, path coefficients, and R^2. The test is used to determine whether the model fits the data. The following is Figure 1 showing the Path Coefficient:

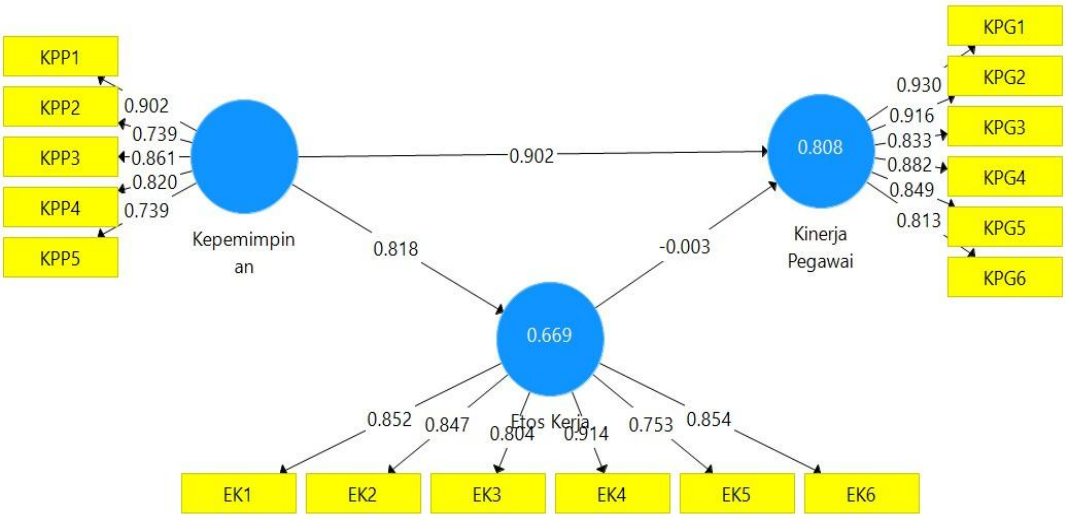

Figure 2. Path Coefficient

Based on Figure 4.2, which is the result of several valid statements, the results of the path coefficient analysis between latent variables in the structural model. The following is a table of path coefficients:

Table 1. ***Path Coeffisient***

Latent Variable	Work Ethic	Employee Performance
Work Ethic		0.275
Leadership	0.818	0.802

Based on Table 1's Path Coefficient, it can be seen that leadership has a positive effect on work ethic, with a coefficient value of 0.818. This indicates that better leadership within an organization, the higher the work ethic of employees at the Langkat Regency Housing and

Settlement Agency. Furthermore, leadership also has a positive effect on employee performance, with a coefficient value of 0.802. These results indicate that effective leadership can directly improve employee performance. Meanwhile, work ethic has a positive effect on employee performance, with a coefficient value of 0.275, indicating that the higher an employee's work ethic, the better their performance. Based on these coefficient values, it can be concluded that the most dominant variable influencing work ethic is leadership, with a coefficient value of 0.818. As for employee performance, the variable with the largest direct influence is leadership, with a coefficient value of 0.802, compared to work ethic, which has a coefficient value of 0.275.

Thus, these results indicate that leadership plays a crucial role in improving employee performance, both directly and indirectly through work ethic as an intervening variable.

4.3 Construct Validity and Reliability

After testing construct validity, the next step is to test construct reliability, which is measured using Composite Reliability (CR) from the block of indicators that measure the construct. CR is used to demonstrate good reliability. A construct is considered reliable if the composite reliability value is greater than 0.6. According to (Hair et al., 2016), the composite reliability coefficient should be greater than 0.7, although a value of 0.6 is still acceptable. Internal consistency testing is not absolutely necessary if construct validity has been met, because a valid construct is reliable; however, a reliable construct is not necessarily valid (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

Table 2. Construct Validity and Reliability

Latent Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Work Ethic	0.915	0.917	0.934	0.704
Leadership	0.871	0.879	0.907	0.664
Employee Performance	0.936	0.942	0.950	0.760

Based on Table 2, the results of construct validity and reliability testing indicate that all latent variables have met the established criteria. The Composite Reliability values for each variable are above 0.70, namely Work Ethic (0.934), Leadership (0.907), and Employee Performance (0.950). This indicates that all variables in this study are reliable. In addition, the Cronbach's Alpha values for each variable are also above 0.70, namely Work Ethic (0.915), Leadership (0.871), and Employee Performance (0.936). The rho_A values for all variables also exceed 0.70, namely Work Ethic (0.917), Leadership (0.879), and Employee Performance (0.942). Thus, all constructs demonstrate good internal consistency.

Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables are above the minimum threshold of 0.50, namely Work Ethic (0.704), Leadership (0.664), and Employee Performance (0.760). These results indicate that all variables have met convergent validity, meaning that the indicators used are able to adequately explain the measured constructs.

Based on the AVE values, the variable with the highest AVE is Employee Performance (0.760). This indicates that the Employee Performance variable has the best ability to explain the variance of its indicators compared to other variables.

a. R Square

The inner model (inner relations, structural model, and substantive theory) describes the relationships between latent variables based on substantive theory. The structural model is evaluated using the R-square value for dependent constructs. The R^2 value can be used to assess whether exogenous variables have a substantive effect on endogenous variables (Ghozali, 2018).

Table 3. R Square

Latent Variable	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Work Ethic	0.669	0.664
Employee Performance	0.808	0.801

Based on Table 3, the R Square value for the Work Ethic variable is 0.669 and the Adjusted R Square is 0.664. This indicates that 66.9% of the variation in Work Ethic can be explained by the Leadership variable, while the remaining 33.1% is influenced by other factors outside the research model. Furthermore, the R Square value for the Employee Performance variable is 0.808 and the Adjusted R Square is 0.801. This indicates that 80.8% of the variation in Employee Performance can be explained by Leadership and Work Ethic, while the remaining 19.2% is explained by other factors outside the research model.

Based on the R Square assessment criteria, these values fall into the strong category. Therefore, it can be concluded that the research model has good capability in explaining the influence of Leadership on Employee Performance with Work Ethic as an intervening variable at the Department of Housing and Settlement Areas of Langkat Regency.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted based on the results of the Inner Model (structural model), which includes outputs such as R-square, parameter coefficients, and t-statistics. To determine whether a hypothesis is accepted or rejected, the significance values between constructs, tstatistics, and p-values are considered. Hypothesis testing in this study was carried out using SmartPLS 3.0 software. These values can be observed from the bootstrapping results. The rule of thumb used in this study is a t-statistic > 1.96 with a significance level of p-value < 0.05 (5%) and a positive beta coefficient. The following is Figure 2 showing the results of hypothesis testing.

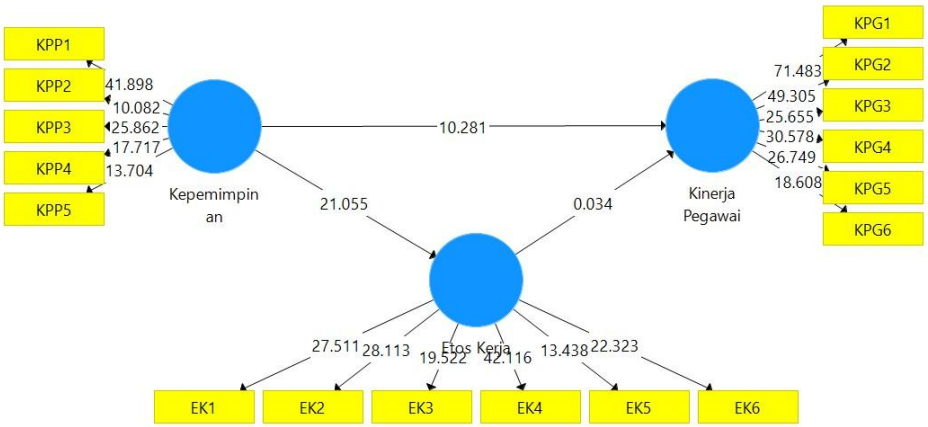

Figure 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

From Figure 3, it can be seen that to determine the structural relationships between latent variables, hypothesis testing must be conducted on the path coefficients between variables by comparing the p-value with alpha (0.05) or the t-statistic (>1.96). The p-values and t-statistics were obtained from the SmartPLS output using the bootstrapping method, as shown in the following table of direct effects.

Table 4. Direct Effects

Variabel Laten	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values

Work Ethic → Employee Performance	0,203	0,202	0,011	2,034	0,043
Leadership → Work Ethic	0,818	0,819	0,039	21,055	0,000
Leadership → Employee Performance	0,802	0,899	0,088	10,281	0,000

Explanation of Table 4 (Direct Effects):

1) The first hypothesis (H1) shows that Work Ethic has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance, with a p-value of 0.043 and a t-statistic of 2.034. Thus, H1 is accepted. The path coefficient value of 0.203 indicates that higher employee work ethic leads to a significant increase in employee performance.
2) The second hypothesis (H2) shows that Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Work Ethic, with a p-value of 0.000 and a t-statistic of 21.055. Thus, H2 is accepted. The path coefficient value of 0.818 indicates that leadership has a very strong influence on employee work ethic.
3) The third hypothesis (H3) shows that Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance, with a p-value of 0.000 and a t-statistic of 10.281. Thus, H3 is accepted. The path coefficient value of 0.802 indicates that better leadership leads to higher employee performance.

To further examine the structural relationships between latent variables, hypothesis testing on path coefficients was also conducted using the bootstrapping method for indirect effects, as shown in the following table:

Table 5. Indirect Effects

Variabel Laten	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Leadership → Work Ethic → Employee Performance	0,103	0,143	0,283	0,133	0,047

Explanation of Table 5:

4) The fourth hypothesis (H4) shows that Leadership has a positive and significant indirect effect on Employee Performance through Work Ethic. This is evidenced by a p-value of 0.047. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, H4 is accepted. The path coefficient value of 0.103 indicates that Work Ethic is able to mediate the effect of Leadership on Employee Performance.

Thus, the better the leadership applied, the more it will improve employee performance through increased work ethic. Overall, the results of the indirect effect testing show that Work Ethic is able to mediate the relationship between Leadership and Employee Performance at the Department of Housing and Settlement Areas of Langkat Regency.

4.5 Discussion

The results of the study show that leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee work ethic at the Department of Housing and Settlement Areas of Langkat Regency. The path coefficient value of 0.818 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates that the better the leadership applied, the higher the employee work ethic. This finding suggests that leaders play an important role in shaping employees' work spirit, discipline, responsibility, and commitment in carrying out their duties. Leadership that is able to provide direction, motivation, and good examples will encourage employees to work more seriously and develop a positive attitude toward their work.

In addition, the results of the study also show that leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a path coefficient value of 0.802 and a p-value of 0.000.

This means that good leadership is able to directly improve employee performance. In the context of public organizations, leaders act as key drivers in achieving organizational goals. When leaders are able to create a conducive work environment, establish good communication, and provide support to employees, employees will be more motivated to work optimally, resulting in improved performance.

Furthermore, this study finds that work ethic has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a path coefficient value of 0.203 and a p-value of 0.043. These results indicate that the higher the employee work ethic, the better the performance produced. A high work ethic is reflected in discipline, hard work, responsibility, and seriousness in completing tasks. Employees with a high work ethic tend to be more committed in carrying out their duties, able to use time effectively, and strive to achieve optimal work results. Therefore, work ethic is an important factor in improving employee performance.

The results also show that work ethic is able to mediate the effect of leadership on employee performance, with an indirect effect coefficient value of 0.103 and a p-value of 0.047. This indicates that leadership not only has a direct effect on employee performance but also an indirect effect through work ethic. In other words, effective leadership will shape a better work ethic, which in turn leads to improved employee performance. This finding emphasizes that efforts to improve employee performance at the Department of Housing and Settlement Areas of Langkat Regency should be carried out through strengthening leadership while also fostering employee work ethic to achieve organizational goals optimally.

4.6 Research Implications

The results of this study indicate that leadership plays an important role in improving work ethic and employee performance at the Department of Housing and Settlement Areas of Langkat Regency. The practical implication of this finding is the need for leaders to implement effective leadership through clear direction, role modeling, motivation, and good communication with employees. In addition, the institution also needs to strengthen employees' work ethic through the development of discipline, responsibility, work commitment, and work spirit so that employee performance can improve optimally.

From a theoretical perspective, this study implies that work ethic acts as an intervening variable in the relationship between leadership and employee performance. This confirms that good leadership not only has a direct effect on performance but also an indirect effect through the development of a positive work ethic. Therefore, the results of this study can serve as a reference for the development of human resource management studies, particularly those related to leadership, work ethic, and employee performance in public organizations

Conclussion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee work ethic, with a path coefficient value of 0.818, a t-statistic value of 21.055, and a p-value of 0.000. In addition, leadership also has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a path coefficient value of 0.802, a t-statistic value of 10.281, and a p-value of 0.000. These results indicate that the better the leadership applied, the higher the work ethic and employee performance at the Department of Housing and Settlement Areas of Langkat Regency.

Furthermore, work ethic has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a path coefficient value of 0.203, a t-statistic value of 2.034, and a p-value of 0.043. In testing the indirect effect, a coefficient value of 0.103 with a p-value of 0.047 was obtained, indicating that work ethic is able to mediate the effect of leadership on employee performance. In addition, the R Square value for work ethic is 0.669, indicating that 66.9% of the variation in work ethic can be explained by leadership, while the R Square value for employee performance

is 0.808, indicating that 80.8% of the variation in employee performance can be explained by leadership and work ethic.

Thus, it can be concluded that leadership is a very important factor in improving employee performance, both directly and indirectly through work ethic as an intervening variable.

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