

# Does Ethical Leadership and Employees' Personality Effect Employees Performance: Regional Government in Indonesia

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# Does Ethical Leadership and Employees' Personality Effect Employees Performance: Regional Government in Indonesia

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This paper examines what ethical leadership influences employee performance by focusing on the mediating effects of employee personality. This study used a questionnaire survey. Findings from 287 regional governments argue that ethical leadership is linked to employee performance which is mediated by employee personality. These results likewise prove that ethical leadership has an effect on employee personality. The findings further prove that employee personality significantly mediates the relationship. This study results have several implications for those involved in ethical leadership practices and employee personality. In contrast, Indonesia's focus is unique and contributes to the generalisation of previous studies on the influence of ethical leadership on employee performance.

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**Key words;** *Ethical Leadership; Employee Personality; Employee Performance; Regional Government*

## Introduction

Employee performance (EP) refers to the employees' behavior as the main criterion for organisational success (Pradhan & Jena, 2017). It means organisations provide various resources to improve employee performance (Rose, 2016). The concept of employee performance is measured by operational efficiency, employee productivity, and long-term organisation success. According to the studies, employee performance is an effective evaluation tool and contributes to achieving organisational goals (Star, Russ-Eft, Braverman, & Levine, 2016). Several studies then confirmed that the subordinates with strictly employee



performance monitoring and evaluation from ethical leaders would further improve the employee performance (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

In this study, the authors examine that ethical leadership may play an important role in increasing employee performance. Brown, Treviño, & Harrison (2005) argue that decision making, communication, and reinforcement are ethical leaders' behaviours to their subordinates. Brown and Mitchell (2010) and Hartog (2015) found that there is a significant influence of ethical leadership on employee performance. Moreover, the mediating variable also needs to evaluate on impact of EL on EP. In this study, the authors argue that EPT may mediate the effect of EL on EP.

Employee personality (EPT) is personality traits that refer to individual differences, namely the way people think, feel, and behave in different situations (Manaf, Armstrong, Lawton, & Harvey, 2018). Personality differences caused people to behave in different ways (Yang & Hwang, 2014). One of the personality models used the big five taxonomy (DeYoung, 2015). Previous research found that employee personality influence a number of organisational outcomes such as a job performance, job satisfaction (Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006), transformational leadership, and transactional leadership (Bono & Judge, 2004). Additionally, there is no research employee personality that mediates ethical leadership's effect on employee performance.

The current research studies how the effect ethical leadership on government organisations' outcomes, especially employee personality and employee performance in the public sector. This paper is structured as follows: The authors initiate with a literature review in line with prior studies, and formulate research hypotheses on ethical leadership, employee personality, and employee performance. Next, the authors tested empirically the hypothesis by using path analysis. Finally, the authors discuss the research findings and both the theoretical and practical implications.

### Literature review

Brown et al. (2005) state that the Ethical leaders are "considerate, trustworthy, and morally honest individuals who make fair decisions, openly communicate acceptable ethical standards to their followers, and role models". Piccolo et al. (2010) found that job performance and autonomy have been positive impacted by ethical leadership. And also, Walumbwa et al. (2011) found that "leader-member-exchange, self-efficacy, and organisational identification" have been affected by ethical leadership. In other word, a shared understanding of acceptable behaviour among subordinate makes them learn and imitate the behaviour of their leaders, thus increasing task performance (Piccolo et al., 2010). The present study indicates that experience of public service professionals about ethical leadership would positively affect the loyalty of public service professionals via public organisations. To examine this reason, the authors propose a hypothesis.



H<sub>1</sub> Ethical leadership is positively associated with employee's performance in public organisations

### ***Employee Personality and Employee Performance***

Employee personality is defined as a characteristic in which individuals react and interact to others (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Some scholars (e.g. Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki, & Cortina, 2006; Ellershaw, Fullarton, Rodwell, & McWilliams, 2016) agree that employee personality is an antecedent of job performance. Ellershaw et al. (2016) have studied 393 hospital nurses in Australia, and they found that one of employee personality dimensions is Conscientiousness. It's the strongest predictor of nurse performance, while extraversion also has positive effect on nurse performance. Other employee personality dimensions are openness and neuroticism. Openness has a weak correlation to employee performance, it was conducted on 66 sales consultants (Furnham & Fudge, 2008); on the contrary, neuroticism negatively affected managerial performance (e.g. objective performance goals, behaviours aligned with corporate strategy and team morale), and leadership (Cavazotte, Moreno, & Hickmann, 2012). Therefore, the authors propose that employee personality would affect their perception of employee performance.

H<sub>2</sub>. Employees personality is passively associated to employee's performance in public organisations.

### ***Ethical Leadership and Employee Personality***

The ethical leader behaviour is a variety of leadership style. For example, transformational leadership has been described as combining an ethical component (Sekaran & Roger, 2016). Ethical leadership has elements to empower employees such as open communication and transparency with employees (Resick, Hargis, Shao, & Dust, 2013). Furthermore, Kalshoven et al. (2011) emphasise that employees have to know to contribute and achieve organisational goals. Ethical leaders who behave consistently, have clear guidelines, in accordance with norms, and meet employee expectations, will affect conscientiousness (one of employee personality dimensions) (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Meanwhile, agreeableness and emotional stability of personality dimensions have a positive effect on an ethical leadership (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

H<sub>3</sub>. Ethical leadership is positively associated to employee's personality in public organisations.

### ***Mediating Role of Employee Personality***

For a few decades, employee personality has attracted the interest of scholars and has become a relevant topic (Manaf et al., 2018). Employee personality dimensions consist of extraversion,



conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Extraversion refers to socialisation, assertiveness, and enthusiasm (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Openness refers to the imaginative, unconventional, and autonomous (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Agreeableness refers to trusting, and being obedient, caring, and gentle (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Neuroticism refers to emotional stability (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Employee personality as a mediator relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance, means that some personality traits are more related to job performance than others (Cavazotte et al., 2012). Ethical leadership meets employee personality leads to better job performance. Thus, ethical leadership affects employee performance through employee personality. To examine this reason, the authors propose a hypothesis:

H4. Ethical leadership affects employee performance mediated by employee personality

## Methodology

### *Sample and Procedure*

The sample consisted of government employees from a regional government in Indonesia. The authors used the government employee as a sample on the assumption that they know, understand, feel, and serve the community in daily activities. Sampling in this study used a purposive sampling method, with the aim of conducting a survey of their attitudes and opinions (Donald, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 156). The distribution of questionnaires was using online surveys via social media and email. The online survey was chosen because of its wide use for occupational psychology (Porcu & Kitchen, 2017) and its accessibility to geographically different groups of respondents (Evans, Mathur, & Cheung, 2018). Additionally, web-based surveys have been found to produce data that is more reliable and cheaper than mail and telephone surveys (Yeager et al., 2011).

### *Measurement*

#### *Employee performance*

The authors used Na-Nan, Chaiprasit, and Pukkeeree (2018) six-item measure of employee performance ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Sample item: "I complete work in accordance with the work specifications and standards". Respondents choose answers to use a five-point scale of range from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Prior study has shown that job performance is positively related to the relationship with education (Ng & Feldman, 2009). People who have higher education are more able to help others and have better relationships than the less educated. Therefore, in addition to gaining knowledge and skill, highly educated people also get job values that are closely related to employee personality. Therefore, the authors have controlled for education level (coded Diploma = 1, Bachelor = 2, Master = 3). In addition, Ng and Sorensen (2008) argue that job performance, safety performance, counterproductive



behaviour, workplace aggression, and substance use in the workplace, and tardiness and absence are constantly associated with age. Whereas, Ng and Feldman (2009) reveal that age has an inherently curved effect on task performance and counterproductive behaviour. According to Maurer, Weiss, and Barbeite, (2003) age has a negative effect on performance because older employees cannot take part in the same training and development as younger employees. Therefore, the authors also have controlled for age (code “less than 40 years’ and 40 years’ and over”). In summary, differences in performance across organisations can be attributed to variations in organisational capital, such as “human capital, values and norms, skill, knowledge and ability”. Consequently, education, job tenure, age, and gender variables have been controlled in a hypothetical model (Benoliel & Somech, 2014).

### ***Ethical Leadership***

Lent and Brown (2013) measured “ethical leadership” ( $\alpha = .78$ ) using a six-items scale. Example: “My supervisor sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics”. Five alternative responses; (5) “always”, (4) “often”, (3) “sometimes” (2) “rarely”, and (1) “never”.

### ***Employee Personality***

Employee personality was tested using a questionnaire consisting of six items to obtain responses from respondents. Employee personality questionnaires were measured by Caprara et al. (1993). Sample item: “My supervisor gives me the opportunity to discuss my career with him”. Five alternative responses; (5) “always”, (4) “often”, (3) “sometimes” (2) “rarely”, and (1) “never”.

## **Results and Findings**

### ***Descriptive Statistics***

Respondents of this study are employees of a regional government in Indonesia. Table 1 shows that the sample of 287 respondents was mostly male 152 (53%), 41-50 years of age (45%), most had a master’s degree (53%), and had 5 - 10 years (64%) of job tenure.



Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Employee	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	152	53
Female	135	47
Age		
30 – 40 years	112	39
41 – 50 years	129	45
51 – 60 years	46	16
Education		
Bachelor	45	47
Master	142	53
Job tenure		
5-10 years	103	36
> 10years	184	64

Table 2 showed the correlation between employee personality and employee performance ( $r = .83, p < .001$ ), ethical leadership to employee performance ( $r = .69, p < .001$ ), ethical leadership and employee personality ( $r = .74, p < .001$ ). Table 2 also presents “means” and “standard deviations” (SD).

Table 2 Relationship among employees with regard to personality, ethical leadership, and employee performance ( $n = 287$ )

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Employee Performance	21.62	4.513	-						
Ethical leadership	22.00	4.49	0.69	-					
Employee personality	21.35	4.39	0.83	0.74	-				
Gender	1.53	.50	0.02	0.01	0.11	-			
Education	2.53	.50	0.09	0.11	0.08	-0.06	-		
Job tenure	1.64	.48	0.38	0.31	0.39	0.08	-0.68	-	
Age	1.77	.71	0.31	0.29	0.30	-0.04	-0.07	0.47	-

### Measurement Model

Partial least square (PLS) was used to analyse data (Sekaran & Roger, 2016). Conceptual models with various constructs can be appropriately tested by PLS. In addition, the conceptual model can be estimated by PLS using a small sample size (observation). PLS analysis is one of the structural equation modelling techniques (Hair et al., 2018). The study uses PLS to evaluate the relationships between variables. The PLS analysis can provide information about the reliability and validity of the constructs. Table 3 shows “loading factors”, “reliability”, “composite reliability”, “Cronbach's  $\alpha$  items”, and “average variance extraction” (AVE).



**Convergent Validity**

The authors analysed the measurement model via a convergent validity test to determine items that are in accordance with the concept. Determining the value of convergent validity was indicated by the loading factor, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al., 2018). Hair et al. (2018) suggested a value of 0.5 for loading. On the other hand, for CR, which represents the extent to which the construct indicators determine the latent construct, vary from 0.936 to 0.947 in this study exceeding the recommended value "0.7" (Hair et al., 2018). The AVE is also found to be 0.710 which is the lowest for employee personality but higher than the cut off value "0.5" (Hair et al., 2018).

**Reliability Analysis**

Reliability measurement of quantitative data is significant to specify the consistency of measurement of the data obtained (Cheung & Lee, 2010). Table 3 demonstrates that all the  $\alpha$  values are greater than 0.6 (Cheung & Lee, 2010) with minimum value for the employee personality construct (0.68). The authors are able to deduce that the measurements are reliable.

Table 3. Loadings, reliability, composite reliability dan variance extracted

Variable	Indicators	Factor loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Employee performance	EP1	0,887	0.932	0.947	0.747
	EP2	0,839			
	EP3	0,899			
	EP4	0,824			
	EP5	0,827			
	EP6	0,868			
Ethical leadership	EL1	0,865	0.934	0.948	0.753
	EL2	0,931			
	EL3	0,844			
	EL4	0,850			
	EL5	0,851			
	EL6	0,862			
Employee personality	EPT1	0,863	0.919	0.936	0.710
	EPT2	0,866			
	EPT3	0,779			
	EPT4	0,857			
	EPT5	0,792			
	EPT6	0,895			

Notes: All factor loads are significant on  $p < 0.01$

**Discriminant Validity**

Table 4 presents the square root of the AVE (discriminant validity) and the correlations of the variables. The square root of the AVE was performed to assess discriminant validity, when the square root of the AVE for each construct is higher than the correlation value. Therefore, the measurement model is indicated that the model has suitable discriminant validity.



Table 4. Discriminant validity

Latent Variable	1	2	3
1. Employee performance	(0.87)		
2. Ethical leadership	0.69**	(0.89)	
3. Employee personality	0.84**	0.74**	(0.84)

Notes: Square root of AVE, \* Significant  $p < .05$ ; \*\* Significant  $p < .01$ )

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### Structural Model

The causal relationship model between constructs is demonstrated in the structural model (beta coefficient and R2 value). The beta coefficient (significance) and R2 value prove that the model fits the research data, thus, they support the hypothesised causal relationship (Sang, Lee, & Lee, 2010). Table 5 and Figure 2 show the result of the structural model from the PLS output. In the structural model, after controlling for employee age, gender, education, and job tenure, the results indicated that ethical leadership has an effect on employee performance ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $\rho < 0.01$ ) ( $H_1$  not supported), employee personality on employee performance ( $\beta = 0.109$ ,  $\rho < 0.01$ ) ( $H_2$  supported), ethical leadership ( $\beta = 0.103$ ,  $\rho < 0.05$ ) significantly and positively affected employee personality ( $H_3$  supported), and employee personality mediated the effects of ethical leadership on employee performance ( $\beta = 0.435$ ,  $\rho < 0.001$ ) ( $H_4$  fully supported).

Table 5 Summary of the structural model

Paths	B-Value	t-Value	Decision
EL → EP	0.14	1.44	Not Supported
EPT → EP	0.74	8.69***	Supported
EL → EPT	0.73	10.49***	Supported
EL → EPT → EP	0.55	7.41***	Supported

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

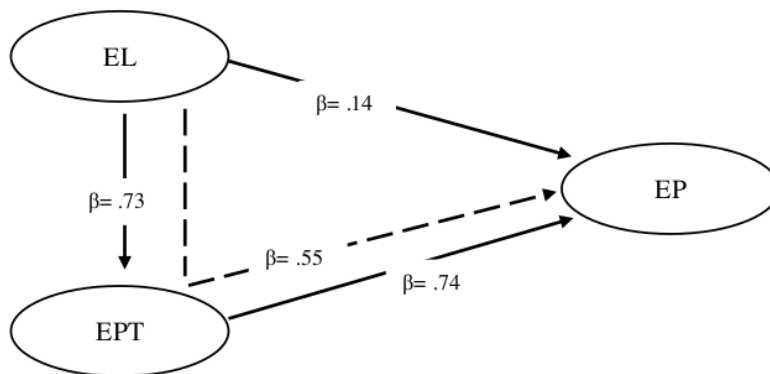


Fig 2: The structural model



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### Discussion

This study fills in a gap that is not explored by previous research. Previous researchers have evidently identified different predictors that affect employee performance. The authors have not found in the previous literature research that examines employee personality to mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance. This study found that an ethical leadership affected employee personality and employee personality affected employee performance positively and significantly. Past studies have also proven that employee personality can improve employee performance in organisations (Furnham & Fudge, 2008).

### Theoretical Implications

As this study's findings indicate, ethical leadership has an influence on improving employee performance. Thus, theoretically, regional governments could increase employee performance by indicating ethical leadership to employees. Therefore, it could be recommended that the regional governments should actively increase the ethical leadership in the organisations because this would improve a higher level of employee performance. Brown et al., (2007) argued that "ethical leaders can communicate values of performance to the employees". In this issue, ethical leadership can usually be the rhythm for performance at the workplace.

The present study results indicated that employee personality is fully mediated by the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance. The findings show that ethical leadership could be looked at as a significant part of employee personality and employee performance (Liu et al., 2013; Demirtas, 2013). In addition, the study found that there is an indirect effect of ethical leadership on employee performance via perceptions of employee personality. Consequently, to improve the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance, the regional government needs to give the necessary effort to improve employee personality (Tu & Lu, 2016).

### Practical Implications

The present study found that the effect of ethical leadership on employee performance mediated by employee personality, has some practical implications for organisations and employees.

For employees, we found that there is the effect of ethical leadership on employee performance, mediated by employee personality which can be manifested by developing employee personality with training and development. Specifically, to provide an employee development overview, Cavazotte et al. (2012) explained that employee development was an effort to improve technical theoretical, conceptual, and personality skills in accordance with job needs via training and development. In other words, employee development means to improve abilities via training and development so that activities carried out are in accordance with job needs, and the realisation of employee personality development is training and development.



Our findings suggest that organisations should focus on employee personality training which is the impact of ethical leadership on employee performance. Employee personalities cannot be easily changed, but organisations could develop employee personalities with experience and training. With the implementation of experience and training, employee performance can increase because they have received new knowledge that enables them to work optimally. In addition, employee personality training improve good employee performance. Therefore, organisations cannot only see the direct effect of ethical leadership on employee performance but also examine employee personality as intervening in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance, by providing personality training for their employees.

### *Limitations and Conclusion*

Some limitations of this study: The first limitation of our research concerns data that is cross-sectional. Thus, the theory in this study shows that ethical leadership streams from executive management to superiors and employees. Causality analysis used cross-sectional data which has constraints in making definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, our findings are in line with the theory and prior study that “top management leadership flows to employees” (Bass, 1999). The second limitation is that there is some bias to respondent responses. Nonetheless, the authors attempted to overcome this potential limitation by collecting data from various sources, gathering training data, and using separate sampling techniques. The third limitation of this study only examines individual behaviour with three variables, namely, ethical leadership and employee personality on individual employee performance; future study is expected to examine team performance. The fourth limitation: we took four months to investigate the effect of ethical leadership on employee performance via employee personality. This design can introduce the possibility that other factors influence employee performance variables, such that the measurement of the relationship between variables is developed involving only employees. Therefore, further study is needed to use measurements involving leaders and subordinates.



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