

# The role of ethical leadership on employees' behaviours and commitment to the organisation



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**Orientation:** The rapid competition among companies puts pressure on managers to maintain their business's competitive advantage. However, because of the massive competition and economic downturn during and after the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, financial scandals occurred at a much higher rate than in the past. This phenomenon has caused organisational leaders to shift their focus from material concerns to ethical leadership contexts in the workplace. It has a strong correlation with employee attitudes.

**Research purpose:** This research examined the effects of ethical leadership on work engagement and knowledge sharing, which influence job performance and commitment among employees to the organisations.

**Motivation for the study:** Investigating the relationship between ethical leadership, work engagement, and knowledge sharing among employees in Indonesia can provide insight on strategies to enhance employees' job performance and commitment to the organisation. It plays an important role in significantly obtaining organisational outcomes and goals.

**Main findings:** A survey was conducted with 670 Indonesian government employees, and structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to validate the research framework. The results showed that ethical leadership significantly affects employees' work engagement and knowledge-sharing, which further enhances employees' job performance and commitment to organisations. Furthermore, the mediator variables partially mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and outcome variables (e.g., employees' job performance and organisational commitment).

**Practical/managerial implications:** The leaders of public organisations should address moral and rational concerns to improve service quality in society. Additionally, it should be centred on purifying employees' and organisation leaders' ethical concerns and communication patterns to promote society's service quality.

**Contribution:** The research outcomes provide insight into the fact that leadership style plays an important role in employees' attitudes and commitment. Hence, the organisation leaders should apply it to enhance employees' commitment to organisations and performance.

**Keywords:** ethical leadership; work engagement; knowledge sharing; employees' job performance; organisation commitment.

## Introduction

Rapid competition between companies locally and globally puts pressure on managers to maintain the business. In addition, the shareholders have been paying attention to the morale and skills of the employees through the management style of the company. Because of the massive competition and economic downturn during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, financial scandals occurred at a much higher rate than in the past. This phenomenon has caused organisational leaders to shift their focus from material concern (e.g., capital and revenue) to ethical considerations and knowledge (Sims, 2009; Van Driel, 2019). Regulators and organisational leaders need to develop ethical standards and facilitate knowledge exchange among employees and decision-makers to improve the value of organisations and guard against ethical and financial dishonesty in business. In both public and private organisations, ethical leadership, integrity and skill have become critical issues among employees and managers (Brown et al., 2005; Downe et al., 2016; Kahn, 1990). Ethical leadership has become a crucial issue in both private and public organisations. However, few studies investigate ethical leadership and employees' behaviours in the workplace with inconclusive and inconsistent findings (Bachmann, 2017; Junaidi, 2023; Van Driel, 2019).

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It challenged researchers to uncover the main ethical organisation problem as a result of the recent situation.

Ethical leadership serves to differentiate employees and organisations from others, thus developing engagement in the workplace and perceptions of what are acceptable and unacceptable actions (Sarwar et al., 2020). Nowadays, global and local companies need to understand and apply clear ethical rules for their employees at all levels because of financial scandals and conflicts of interest between employees and company leaders (Southgate et al., 2023). Organisational leaders attitudes and behaviours have become role models for employees and organisation members (Fosse et al., 2019; Limpo & Junaidi, 2023). Özsungur (2020) pointed out that unethical behaviour by leaders leads to organisational and corporate failure, such as bribery, corruption, and employee turnover. Therefore, a greater understanding of employee ethics is critical to organisational goals, especially in government agencies in developing countries where employees must do their best to serve the people.

Preliminary studies by Sasmita et al. (2023) concluded that leadership style has a positive and significant effect on influencing employee job satisfaction, knowledge sharing (KS), and job satisfaction in Indonesia. Özsungur (2020) found that there is a strong correlation between ethical leadership, work engagement, and employee innovation in Turkey. Furthermore, Sharma et al. (2019) found that ethical leadership plays a crucial role in promoting KS. The same pattern is evident in India, where ethical leadership has a significant impact on employee engagement (Sugianingrat et al., 2019) and KS (Goswami & Agrawal, 2023). As the environment and organisation change, most people, including staff, are shifting information and KS from the traditional to the digital pattern. This phenomenon leads employees to share their knowledge frequently within and between communities worldwide (Na-Nan & Arunyaphum, 2021). Hence, it is useful to explore the role of ethical leadership in the organisation (Islam & Asad, 2021). Ethical leadership also has a positive role, which in turn influences performance and organisational commitment among employees in China, Indonesia, Iran, Kuwait (Bahadori et al., 2021) and Portugal (Curado & Vieira, 2019). However, ethical leadership in Iraq has less effect on employees' commitment (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). In addition, employees' performance in the workplace and psychological well-being depend on ethical leadership. However, prior research tends to focus on the qualitative and pedagogical domains by practitioners and consultancies. Therefore, the theoretical basis is weak as it is applied from different perspectives (Atapattu & Huybers, 2022; Fischer & Döring, 2022; Ismail et al., 2019). This study aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of ethical leadership among employees in government offices.

Firstly, this study examines the impact of ethical leadership on employees' work engagement, KS, and performance. Secondly, this study addresses the relationship between ethical factors in the field of public organisations and provides an insight of the mediator variables (e.g., work engagement, KS and job performance) that has been neglected

in previous studies (Shimazu et al., 2015; Tripathi et al., 2021). From an ethical perspective, this study also offers insights into the cultural structure leadership patterns in private and public organisations. Thus, it is possible to gain a deep understanding and knowledge across cultures and regions.

## Literature review and research hypotheses development

### Ethical leadership and employees' work engagement

Personal and social interaction has shifted the standard of legal rules towards an ethical core. Ethics influences almost all areas of our lives by supporting critical processes and addressing people's attitudes and behaviours based on good or bad standards to enhance employee performance and commitment to organisations (Goswami & Agrawal, 2023; Ismail et al., 2019). Therefore, empathetic ethics is important to people as it has a direct impact on their behaviour and commitment to organisations (Sasmita et al., 2023). According to Brown et al. (2005), ethical leadership refers to the right attitude in relation to specific actions and interactive relationships between managers and employees. It is also associated with individual characteristics, including honesty, trustworthiness, and altruistic motivation and practically with two-way communication in empowering employees and decision-making. Brown et al. (2005:120) defined ethical leadership as 'the practice of modelling normatively acceptable behaviour by one's own actions and interactions with others, as well as encouraging followers to adopt similar behaviour through decision-making, two-way communication, and reward'. Other scholars defined unethical leadership as the moral hazard of a leader violating the ethical code of conduct (Sarwar et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2019). In summary, these definitions suggest that ethical leadership plays an important role in characterising the organisation's moving targets in the best possible way. Nevertheless, the norms of ethical or unethical standards may change because of different goals, cultures, and locations. Therefore, a normative foundational study is needed for the field of ethical leadership in terms of the specific function of personal needs and transformation.

The literature on human resources development describes the effect of ethical leadership on workers in general. For example, ethical leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on workers and their work environment in Hainan County, China (Fu et al., 2020). Sarwar et al. (2020) concluded that ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on ethical culture, employee well-being, performance, and work engagement in the Italian and Pakistani hospitality industries. Based on qualitative and quantitative approaches, Özsungur (2020) found a significant effect on employees' work engagement and innovation in Turkey when they feel that their work environment contributes to their values towards ethical leadership. Similarly, ethical leaders in Thailand either highlight the important tasks or make employees feel the importance of their responsibilities (Na-Nan & Arunyaphum, 2021). Some researchers found a negative correlation between ethical

leadership and psychological (Tripathi et al., 2021) and employee commitment (Joplin et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the emotional commitment and credibility of leaders play an important role in the sustainability of their organisations (Al Halbusi et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2005). Ethical leadership is therefore closely related to employee work engagement. This study therefore hypothesises the following:

**H1:** Ethical leadership has a positive impact on employee engagement.

## Ethical leadership and knowledge sharing

Knowledge is a strategic resource and value as it is a guiding force to achieve goals and sustainability (Goswami & Agrawal, 2023). In recent times, the competitive change has led to a much greater momentum for knowledge management among researchers and organisation leaders than in the past. One of the most important aspects of knowledge management is knowledge sharing. The significant development of information and technology is leading workers to shift KS activities from the face-to-face approach to communities through social networking sites (SNS), as KS is an indispensable and crucial aspect among community members (De Vries et al., 2010). Knowledge sharing is an individual and social process of mutual exchange and plays an important role in the success of a company, as employees may leave their company if their knowledge and skills stagnate. In some regions such as Iraq (Al Halbusi et al., 2021), Pakistan (Amber et al., 2022), Iran (Bahadori et al., 2021), and Indonesia (Sasmita et al., 2023), ethical leadership correlates strongly with knowledge transfer. A sense of belonging among employees cannot emerge without the role of leaders. Knowledge and ethics are the unified aspects of leadership needed to achieve success to avoid unethical actions in the form of financial scandals (Islam & Asad, 2021).

Preliminary studies such as those by Goswami and Agrawal (2023) and Tripathi et al. (2021) have attempted to validate the ethical aspects of organisational leaders in India and found that ethical leadership plays a crucial role in KS. Interestingly, employee motivation for KS and employee moral identity play an important role in mediating the relationship between ethical leadership and KS in Hong Kong (Bavik et al., 2018). In addition, KS can provide a sense of belonging and enhance employees' ability to make decisions in line with organisational goals. Ethical leadership has two main dimensions: a moral person refers to personal ethical qualities such as honesty and integrity, while moral leaders are more inclined to social activities, such as discussion of ethical issues between leaders and employees that includes reward and punishment for ethical and unethical actions, towards two-way communication, and making an ethical decision (Liu et al., 2021). Another pair of researchers, Amber et al. (2022) and Bhatti et al. (2020), found a similar pattern where ethical leadership plays a crucial role in employee information and knowledge exchange in Pakistan. Therefore, this study hypothesises the following:

**H2:** Ethical leadership has a positive influence on KS among employees.

## Work engagement and knowledge sharing

Employee engagement in the workplace is key to the success of an organisation (Fait et al., 2023). Employee and work engagement can also enhance productivity and business value in human resource management and increase competitiveness. This implies that it is important to create and develop a pleasant workplace environment to enhance employee motivation. Employees' reasons and expectations are important because they directly correlate with their actions (Karim et al. 2023). Moreover, Amber et al. (2022) and Islam and Asad (2021) found that KS facilitates work and makes production more efficient by sharing relevant information and knowledge. Moreover, employee engagement implies high energy levels and good psychology (Juan et al., 2018). The growing number of globally operating companies also opens up prospects for sharing information and knowledge, which directly affects work outcomes and promotes more creative work (Shahzad et al., 2020). It also encourages employees to share their work-related knowledge and strengthens their resolve to innovate in terms of sharing work-related ideas and expertise.

Several scholars attempted to validate the relationship between work engagement and KS. For example, Na-Nan and Arunyaphum (2021) found that employee engagement has a positive impact on the proper state of the organisation. It also plays a crucial role for managers and workers in sharing information and knowledge. Juan et al. (2018) argued that employee and work engagement positively influence KS activity. Knowledge sharing has become an important resource for organisations to maintain competitive advantage in a knowledge-based economy. Recently, Atapattu and Huybers (2022) found that teamwork and work engagement positively influence knowledge management in Sri Lanka. Similarly, Singh (2022) found that work engagement also has a positive impact on KS in the US.

Ethical leadership has a strong correlation with work engagement (Fu et al, 2020; Joplin et al., 2021) and KS (Bavik et al., 2018; Bhatti et al, 2020). Hence, in this study, work engagement was adopted as a mediator to examine the relationship between ethical leadership and KS. To validate the mediator variables, this study provided the quality of inferences that ethical leadership facilitates on employees' work engagement and KS to uncover a correlation between the variables under study. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**H3:** Work engagement has a positive impact on employee knowledge sharing.

**H4:** Work engagement positively mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and knowledge sharing.

## Work engagement, job performance, and organisational commitment

Today, scholars have looked at employee engagement and work in an organisational context (Singh, 2022; Tripathi et al., 2021). Preliminary studies concluded that work engagement is strongly correlated with employees' job performance and

commitment (Sugianingrat et al., 2019). Kahn (1990) defined work engagement as the way employees use their cognitive, physical, and psychological abilities at work. However, most scholars refer to Schaufeli and Salanova (2011) who refer to work engagement as positive fulfilment and work in terms of positive characterisation and dedication. Moreover, work engagement refers to the connection between employees' work engagement and KS, including their commitment to the organisation (Fait et al., 2023). In this case, they are more enthusiastic about creating additional work resources and completing comprehensive routine tasks faster and providing additional time and resources.

Some scholars confirmed that KS influences work performance; for instance, Fait et al. (2023) found that KS plays an important role in employees' work performance. Similarly, in the United States, employees' performance is strongly correlated with KS (Fischer & Doering, 2022). In Indonesia (Baskoro, 2022) and India (Sharma et al., 2019), KS also plays an important role in employees' organisational commitment. Employees' motivations and expectations are important because they directly correlate with their actions. This means that it is important to create and develop a pleasant environment in the workplace to strengthen employee motivation. In addition, employee engagement implies high energy levels and good psychology (Na-Nan & Arunyaphum, 2021). The growing number of globally operating companies also opens up prospects for sharing information and knowledge, which has a direct impact on work results. Knowledge sharing among employees has a positive impact on employees' innovation (Joplin et al., 2021; Shahzad et al., 2020). Moreover, employees are encouraged to share their work-related knowledge and increase their efforts to work innovatively by sharing work-related ideas and expertise.

Some scholars attempt to validate the relationship between work engagement, job performance, and organisational commitment. For instance, Ismail et al. (2019) found a positive effect of employee engagement on job performance in Lebanon. However, creativity plays an important role in mediating the relationship between work engagement and work performance. Panda et al. (2022) and Sugianingrat et al. (2019) found similar results where work engagement plays an important role in influencing employee performance in the workplace. Similarly, work engagement has a strong correlation with employees' job performance in India (Singh, 2022) and Pakistan (Sarwar et al., 2020). In addition, Na-Nan and Arunyaphum (2021) found that work engagement has a positive impact on employees' organisational commitment. It also plays a crucial role in helping managers and workers to enhance performance. Özsungur (2020) considered that employee engagement and work commitment positively affect employees' commitment in Turkey. In this study, the role of work engagement as a mediator is also examined to investigate the relationship between work engagement and employees' organisational commitment.

**H5:** Work engagement has a positive effect on employees' work performance.

**H6:** Professional engagement positively mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee work performance.

**H7:** Professional engagement has a positive effect on employee commitment to the organisation.

**H8:** Professional engagement has a positive effect on the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' organisational commitment.

## Knowledge sharing, job performance, and organisational commitment

Given the important role that KS and management play in the development of the organisation, the practice of human resource management and KS is inevitable. This means that all employees or members can access not only the specific information and knowledge content, but also the different types of information and knowledge within and outside the organisations (Panda et al., 2022). It is possible to increase communication and interaction between employees to uncover isolated information and knowledge. Teamwork, effective communication, and measures to stimulate knowledge collisions among employees thus form a knowledge premium and create new and available knowledge. Pointing to this topic, the current study mostly emphasises the investigation of the role of KS and management in transformational leadership (Baskoro, 2022); the relationship between employees' and leaders' psychology (Amber et al., 2022); and information availability (Fischer & Döring, 2022; Junaidi et al., 2020). Knowledge sharing strongly correlates to organisational commitment (Curado & Vieira, 2019). The recent study also examines the role of job performance as a mediator to address the relationship between KS and employees' organisational commitment. By validating the mediator variables, this study provided the quality of inferences that facilitate ethical leadership in employees' work engagement and KS and uncovers a correlation among the variables examined.

**H9:** Knowledge sharing has a positive effect on employees' job performance.

**H10:** Knowledge sharing positively mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' job performance.

**H11:** Knowledge sharing has a positive effect on employees' organisational commitment.

**H12:** Knowledge sharing positively mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' organisational commitment.

**H13:** Knowledge sharing positively mediates the relationship between work engagement and employees' job performance.

**H14:** Knowledge sharing positively mediates the relationship between work engagement and employees' organisational commitment.

## Job performance and organisational commitment

Employees' commitment to the organisation is one of the benchmarks of employee job performance. It means that employees complained to the company about the leadership style and the work environment, which were correlated to the

performance and speed of employees in providing information and knowledge. In addition, employee performance and commitment align with their capacity and knowledge. This reflects the minimal performance of employees in their workplace. It implies low adherence because the performance of the organisation is strongly influenced by the performance of the employees (Ismail et al., 2019; Sugianingrat et al., 2019). According to Amber et al. (2022), Atapattu and Huybers (2022), and Baskoro (2022), employees' job performance is an important factor in determining employee performance and commitment. This is also supported by Fischer and Döring's (2022) research that shows that KS positively affects employee job performance. Furthermore, Joplin et al. (2021), and Özsungur (2020) found that work engagement has a strong correlation to job performance and employee commitment in Italy, Turkey, and the United States. Hence, we proposed the following hypotheses.

**H15:** Job performance has a positive effect on employees' organisational commitment.

**H16:** Job performance positively mediates the relationship between work engagement and employees' commitment to the organisation.

**H17:** Job performance positively mediates the relationship between knowledge sharing and employees' commitment to the organisation.

## Methodology

### Research design

This study used pretest and pilot tests to examine the biases of all measurement items (Anderson et al., 2020; Hair Jr et al., 2019). The Indonesians who work in government offices were invited to fill out an online survey. Data were collected from 01 June 2022 to 31 August 2022, and 670 samples were obtained. This study rejected 44 samples because of the unsuitability and inconsistency of the samples: for example, the employees were not hired within 1 year. However, 626 data were valid; ; this indicates the data response rate was 93.43%. Thus, non-response bias should not be a concern. The study also applied a two-step approach, including confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM), to validate causalities among variables and hypotheses, as recommended by Hair Jr et al. (2019). Using the AMOS 22 and SPSS 22 software, the measurement and structural models were run with maximum likelihood estimation.

Table 1 provides information on the demographic profile of the participants. The total number of male respondents was greater than female respondents, with 54.5% men and 45.5% women. In addition, the most significant number of participants were over 45 years old (44.2%), followed by those 31 years – 45 years old (35.8%). The highest number of respondents completed a bachelor's degree and below (60.5%), while the second-highest finished a master's (39.5%). Furthermore, the majority of the participants have experience as employees for 11 years – 25 years (40.7%), followed by over 25 years (32.9%), and the lowest below 10 years (26.4%).

**TABLE 1:** Respondent demographics.

Demographic items	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	341	54.5
Female	285	45.5
<b>Age</b>		
Under 30 years old	125	20.0
31–45 years old	224	35.8
Over 45 years old	277	44.2
<b>Education</b>		
Bachelor and below	379	60.5
Master and PhD	247	39.5
<b>Tenure as employee</b>		
Below 10 years	165	26.4
11–25 years	255	40.7
Over 25 years	206	32.9

Source: Karim, K., Ilyas, G.B., Umar, Z.A., Tajibu, M.J., & Junaidi, J. (2023), Consumers' awareness and loyalty in Indonesia banking sector: Does emotional bonding effect matters? *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 14(10), 2668–2686. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-03-2022-0092>

We also applied a critical selection technique, part of the purposive sampling of non-probability sampling strategy in the absence of a complete list of public office employees. Critical sampling arises when a researcher uses the sample to confirm specific criteria (Anderson et al., 2020).

### Measures

A seven-point Likert scale ranging between 1 ('strongly disagree') and 7 ('strongly agree') was used for ethical leadership scales with 10 items (Enderle, 1987), which contain traits and behaviours such as our leading concern for ethical and unethical value, disciplines who violate the ethical standard, communicate a clear ethical standard for all employees and leaders, and show an example of the ethical standard in their decision. Work engagement comprises eight items and refers to Shimazu et al. (2015), which use some dimensions of process to facilitate KS, including developing new ideas in the workplace and learning on the job. Knowledge sharing comprises eight items: learning something new in the workplace, sharing information with colleagues, and being informed of what they know, referring to De Vries et al. (2010). Employees' job performance comprises achievement of work targets, integrity, and group collaboration. Following, the construct of employees' organisation commitment consist of seven items: employees' sense of belonging to their organisation, emotion, and discussion among employees refers to Fu and Deshpande (2014). As for post-detection, this study applied the Harman's single-factor test proposed by Eichhorn (2014), and the common latent factor (CLF) to conduct post-detection is the inherent weakness of the Harman's single-factor test to detect the common method variance (CMV). The explained variance of the first factor is 27.51%. Besides, the factor loading of CLF was 0.65 that indicated a 42.65% variance of CMV. The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) result shows no significant problem of CMV in the data.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance has been provided by the School Research Committee in view of the Universitas Muslim Indonesia Research Ethics and Integrity. Ethical clearance number: 127/KEP/III.3.AU/F/2022.

## Results

### Measurement model

Furthermore, the recent study applied a two-step approach, including CFA and SEM, to validate causalities among variables and research hypotheses. The model fit and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for all constructs indicate excellent convergent validity and reliability for all measurement items and constructs. Furthermore, the result of the measurement model (CFA) showed all the constructs had a good fit (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), and the composite reliability (CR) result showed an adequate level

of reliability over 0.700. The measurement model showed an adequate fit (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Anderson et al., 2020):  $\chi^2/df = 3.525$ , the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.898, the comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.951, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.068. Table 2 indicates the adequate discriminant validity of this study.

### Structural model

The fit of data to the proposed model was adequate (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair Jr. et al., 2019):  $\chi^2/df = 3.693$ ,

**TABLE 2:** Measurement results.

Variables Item scales	Factor Loadings	$\alpha$	CR	AVE
<b>Ethical leadership</b>	-	0.936	0.941	0.614
EL1: Our leaders conduct their personal life in an ethical manner	0.690	-	-	-
EL2: Our leaders show strong concern for ethical and moral value	0.712	-	-	-
EL3: Our leaders communicate clear ethical standard for employees	0.752	-	-	-
EL4: Our leaders show ethical behaviour in their decisions and actions	0.801	-	-	-
EL5: Our leaders discipline employees who violate ethical standards	0.755	-	-	-
EL6: Our leaders make fair and balanced decisions	0.834	-	-	-
EL7: Our leaders can be trusted	0.816	-	-	-
EL8: Our leaders discuss business ethics or values with employees	0.841	-	-	-
EL9: Our leaders are fair and objective when evaluating employees' performance	0.807	-	-	-
EL10: Our leaders hold employees accountable for using ethical practice in our work	0.812	-	-	-
<b>Work engagement</b>	-	0.934	0.936	0.620
WE1: We know what is expected out of me at work	0.799	-	-	-
WE2: Our goals match with the vision and mission of the organisation	0.845	-	-	-
WE3: We find that the work we do is useful for my company	0.817	-	-	-
WE4: We feel empowered while working for our job as it gives us confidence about our abilities	0.748	-	-	-
WE5: We believe that we are in charge of the work we do in the organisation we work for	0.852	-	-	-
WE6: We understand how our work is contributing towards achievement of organisational goals	0.759	-	-	-
WE7: We are aligned with the activities of the organisation we work for	0.776	-	-	-
WE8: We can build group collaboration on work place	0.749	-	-	-
WE9: We can maintain relationship on work place	0.732	-	-	-
<b>Knowledge sharing</b>	-	0.922	0.924	0.574
KS1: If I got something new, I tell my colleagues about it	0.728	-	-	-
KS2: I share information I have with my colleagues	0.801	-	-	-
KS3: I think it is important that my colleagues know what I am doing	0.740	-	-	-
KS4: I regularly tell my colleagues what I am doing	0.810	-	-	-
KS5: When I need certain knowledge, I ask my colleagues about it	0.800	-	-	-
KS6: I like to be informed of what my colleagues know	0.702	-	-	-
KS7: I ask my colleagues about their abilities when I need to learn something	0.753	-	-	-
KS8: When a colleague is good at something, I ask them to teach me how to do it	0.757	-	-	-
<b>Job performance</b>	0.718	0.878	0.879	0.594
JP1: I obtain achievement of work targets	0.708	-	-	-
JP2: I do with integrity and honesty in work place	0.758	-	-	-
JP3: I got spirit of achievement in work place	0.800	-	-	-
JP4: I am satisfied with my office system	0.815	-	-	-
JP5: I am satisfied with the promotional opportunities	0.768	-	-	-
<b>Organisational commitment</b>	-	0.844	0.905	0.577
CL1: I have a sense of belonging to my organisation	0.709	-	-	-
CL2: I have felt 'emotionally attached' to this organisation	0.775	-	-	-
CL3: This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me	0.798	-	-	-
CL4: I have felt like 'part of the family' at this organisation	0.761	-	-	-
CL5: I am very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation	0.767	-	-	-
CL6: I enjoy discussing my organisation with people outside it	0.729	-	-	-
CL7: I feel as if this organisation's problems are my own	0.774	-	-	-

Source: Karim, K., Ilyas, G.B., Umar, Z.A., Tajibu, M.J., & Junaidi, J. (2023), Consumers' awareness and loyalty in Indonesia banking sector: Does emotional bonding effect matters? *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 14(10), 2668–2686. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-03-2022-0092>

AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability.

Fit statistics ( $N = 626$ ).

$\chi^2/df = 3.525$ , Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) = 0.898, Non-normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.910, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.951, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.952, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.068.

GFI = 0.905, NFI = 0.925, CFI = 0.921, IFI = 0.921, and RMSEA = 0.066. The results supported all four research hypotheses, as shown in Table 3. This study empirically validates the fact that ethical leadership has a significant and positive effect on employees' work engagement ( $\gamma_{11} = 0.355$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and KS ( $\gamma_{21} = 0.675$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1 and H2. Furthermore, work engagement also has a positive effect on KS ( $\beta_{21} = 0.073$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), employees' job performance ( $\beta_{31} = 0.092$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and organisational commitment ( $\beta_{41} = 0.040$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), thus supporting H3, H5, and H7. In the communication and knowledge context, employees' KS plays an important role in enhancing employees' job performance ( $\beta_{32} = 0.602$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and commitment to the organisation ( $\beta_{42} = 0.132$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H9 and H11. Moreover, this study also shows that

employees' job performance has a significant and positive effect on employees' commitment to the organisation ( $\beta_{43} = 0.873$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); hence, H15 is supported. Table 4 and Figure 1 show the results of the research hypotheses.

### Mediating effect

This study adopted the procedure recommended by Hayes (2018) to validate mediator variables (e.g., work engagement, KS, and job performance). It concluded the fact that all mediator variables have a significant direct and indirect effect on bridging the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' commitment to the organisation. Work engagement has a positive role in mediating the relationship between predictor variables (e.g., ethical

**TABLE 3:** Proposed model results.

Hypotheses	Symbol	Path		Coefficients	Test results	
H1	$\gamma_{11}$	Ethical leadership	→	Work engagement	0.355****	Supported
H2	$\gamma_{21}$	Ethical leadership	→	Knowledge sharing	0.675***	Supported
H3	$\beta_{21}$	Work engagement	→	Knowledge sharing	0.073*	Supported
H5	$\beta_{31}$	Work engagement	→	Job performance	0.092**	Supported
H7	$\beta_{41}$	Work engagement	→	Organisation commitment	0.040*	Supported
H9	$\beta_{32}$	Knowledge sharing	→	Job performance	0.602***	Supported
H11	$\beta_{42}$	Knowledge sharing	→	Organisation commitment	0.132***	Supported
H15	$\beta_{43}$	Job performance	→	Organisation commitment	0.873***	Supported

Fit statistics (N = 626).

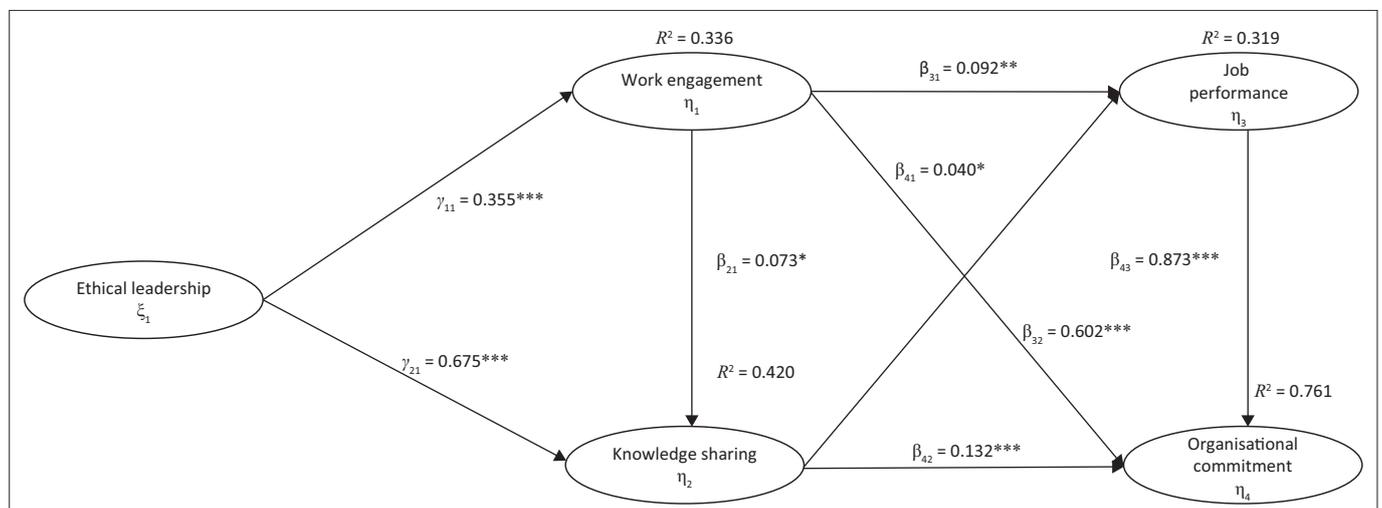
$\chi^2/df = 3.525$ , Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) = 0.898, Non-normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.910, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.951, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.952, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.068.

Significant at \*,  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*,  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*,  $p < 0.001$ .

**TABLE 4:** Mediation effects.

Independent variable	Mediator variable	Dependent variable	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect
H4: Ethical leadership	Work engagement	Knowledge sharing	1.201	0.675***	0.526***
H6: Ethical leadership	Work engagement	Job performance	1.124	0.554***	0.570***
H8: Ethical leadership	Work engagement	Organisational commitment	1.250	0.612***	0.638***
H10: Ethical leadership	Knowledge sharing	Job performance	0.999	0.429***	0.570***
H12: Ethical leadership	Knowledge sharing	Organisational commitment	1.122	0.484***	0.638***
H13: Work engagement	Knowledge sharing	Job performance	0.331	0.092**	0.239***
H14: Work engagement	Knowledge sharing	Organisational commitment	0.326	0.040*	0.286***
H16: Work engagement	Job performance	Organisational commitment	0.320	0.040*	0.280***
H17: Knowledge sharing	Job performance	Organisational commitment	0.804	0.132***	0.672***

Note: Significant at \*,  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*,  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*,  $p < 0.001$ .



**FIGURE 1:** Structural model result.

leadership) and outcome variables (e.g., KS, employees' job performance, and organisational commitment). Furthermore, employees' KS activity also has a crucial role in bridging the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' work engagement as independent variables to dependent variables (e.g., employees' job performance and commitment) (Karim et al. 2023). Lastly, job performance also plays an essential role in mediating the relationship between work engagement and KS that leads to employees' organisational commitment. Table 3 shows the mediation analysis results, which show that the mediator variables have direct and indirect effects on job performance and organisational commitment.

## Discussion

### Key findings

Overall, ethical leadership can be defined as a strong concern for ethical and moral values in the workplace (Sarwar et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2019). These are moral guidelines for dialogue and decision-making procedures, as well as the application of equitable standards to assess each employee's moral character and performance at every level. It positively affects work engagement regarding the employees' understanding of organisational and team-work goals. It means that the employees perceive that they have made a positive contribution to developing the organisation's performance. It also has a positive impact on their confidence and ability to work effectively. Furthermore, a positive work environment encourages the employees to collaborate, as teamwork supports each other. The result of this study supports previous research that concluded ethical leadership has a strong correlation with employee engagement among Iraqi employees in the workplace in Iraq (Al Halbusi et al., 2021), China (Fu et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021), and India (Sharma et al., 2019). Furthermore, this study also proves that work engagement also positively affects employees' KS. This result supports prior studies that concluded that work engagement has a positive role in KS (Atapattu & Huybers, 2022; Curado & Vieira, 2019; Juan et al., 2018). It implies that the leadership approach does more than just foster a sense of belonging among employees and their organisations.

This study also confirms that ethical leadership plays a vital role in employees' KS within and across the organisation. It implies that the employees directly share information and knowledge based on their education and experiences with their colleagues. That information has a positive effect on their peers and their organisation. It also confirms that ethical leadership strengthens employees encouraging them to share their activities resulting in easier coordination and productivity enhancement. This is a crucial finding because, to our knowledge, few studies validate ethical leadership's effect on KS in a public organisation. Specifically, the recent study shows that ethical leadership has a more significant effect on KS than

work engagement. The development of information and technology is critical in increasing the value and employees' performance in terms of sharing information and knowledge. Thus, if the employees trust their leader's capacity, they will be confident in sharing their knowledge. Amber et al. (2022), Baskoro (2022), and Bavik et al. (2018) stated that ethical leadership has a positive and significant effect on the knowledge management process as well as KS among organisation members and individually. In addition, KS will occur if the organisation's leader applies ethical conduct in the workplace. This added value will continue a long-term connection between leaders and workers.

Work engagement and KS play an important role in influencing employees' job performance towards achieving work and organisation goals, the employees' integrity, and honesty in the workplace. Interestingly, the employees also obtain a spirit of achievement in the workplace, satisfied with the organisation and career system. It supports preliminary studies that concluded work engagement and KS have a positive effect on employees' job performance and commitment (Panda et al., 2022; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). The employees also believe that the work engagement and KS are in line with employees' expectations and concern job performance and commitment to the organisation. It proves that ethical leadership, work engagement, and KS play important roles in addressing employees' performance.

## Conclusions

Ethical leadership is an instrument for employees and organisations. However, researchers and practitioners have traditionally mixed employees' work engagement and KS accuracy. The exchange of information and knowledge emerged because of the rapid development of information and technology, such as social media. Furthermore, work engagement and KS play an essential role in enhancing employees' performance and commitment to the organisation. The result provides substantial insights to encourage organisation leaders and workers to combine the work environment's emotional, economic, and social values. For instance, the employees' emotions and psychology are justified by their best effort and commitment to the organisation (Karim et al. 2023). Most importantly, the leader's concern for her or his personal life and ethical manner and decision-making process towards inviting the employees' participation are crucial in influencing the employees' decision-making process. Consequently, regarding the relationship between ethical leadership and commitment to the organisation, according to our findings, work engagement and KS play the ultimate role in employees' performance and the success of the organisation's performance. Consequently, to promote ethical conduct and clear ethical rules, the organisation's leaders should work with regard to ethical standards and values.

## Theoretical implications

This research makes significant contributions to the ethical leadership theory. Firstly, Kahn offers the premise that worker cognitive and emotional factors have a strong correlation to employees' performance. Hence, this study extended this concept to investigate the role of ethical leadership and employees' engagement in the workplace. The idea initially emphasises the employees' personal efforts in the workplace. The recent study also tried to extend the nature and scope of the work engagement, validating the correlation between the organisation leadership style and work role performance. Secondly, the results show that ethical leadership has a positive and significant role in enhancing work engagement and KS among employees; subsequently, work engagement also has a positive role in KS, and hence work role performance and commitment (Tripathi et al., 2021; Sugianingrat et al., 2019). Therefore, this makes an effective conscious strategy for communication and interaction involving design management, including ethical conduct, which will improve corporate image and performance (Limpo & Junaidi 2023). The private and public organisations may also benefit from using the right combination of social media tools and platforms to support information and KS. This can create a positive organisational image through engaged employees. Another unique contribution of this study is that corporate leaders and employees need to collaborate on their image to attract, engage, and retain talent for a longer period of time.

## Practical implications

From a practical and human resources standpoint, the first contribution of this study is that it highlights the importance of information and KS as a potential enabler of employees' effective communication to bridge the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' performance (Amberet al., 2022; Atapattu & Huybers, 2022). Hence, this study recommends information and KS as one of the potential pathways to improving employees' performance and commitment to the organisation. Private and public organisations also need to adopt a KS culture and create relevant formal and informal forums for KS among leaders and employees. It offers some advantages not only to employees but also to the organisation's performance. Firstly, it would give the employees opportunities to enhance their skills, leading to increased employee performance over time. Secondly, it would also help managers and employees to build work-related support systems and networks, facilitating their modification. Benefits of networking, feedback-seeking behaviours, and individual, social, and information exchange within and across region would also result. Thirdly, it could help prevent the problem of employee turnover and retain the unique knowledge they bring to the organisation. Finally, it might help employees and organisations derive knowledge from employees and embed it into a knowledge pool for greater use. By generating formal and informal KS forums and committing to a

knowledge-sharing culture, employees can encourage positive feelings of affective communication and commitment to their performance (Fait et al., 2023).

## Limitations and future research directions

There are some limitations to this study. Firstly, the data collected are based on cross-sectional data; hence, CMV may become a potential problem in the sample. To address this issue, this study applied Harman's single-factor test. A future study needs to adopt a longitudinal design for rigorous testing of the proposed model. Secondly, the current study used purposive sampling and only included employees of public organisations in Indonesia. Hence, the finding cannot be generalised. Therefore, future studies should use other regions and perspectives based on convenience sampling. Besides larger sample size, cross-cultural adaptation must be looked at because of the different countries and cultures that may be present. Future studies may also point to other research studies that highlight what future studies may be undertaken. It can also help practitioners and researchers examine the actions of employees' attitudes and awareness to elaborate on the impact of ethical leadership and other examined variables. This study also did not elaborate on employee-specific skills or offices. A future study may investigate the robustness of the proposed model across different categories (e.g., administration, banking, communication, education, transportation, etc.) with a more representative sample. Thirdly, this study examined only whether ethical leadership, work engagement, KS, and employees' job performance can successfully predict employees' commitment to the organisation. Future studies need to explore other potential drivers of affected employees' commitment and job performance.

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## Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

## Authors' contributions

S.S. conceived of the presented idea, developed the theory, writing and editing, and verified the analytical methods. R.R. contributed to the design and implementation of the research. S.S. conducted research methodology and check the final manuscript. J.J. conducted the problem formulation, data collection, and review of the literature. R.A.N. was responsible for the supervision, review, and editing of the final manuscript.

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## Data availability

Data sharing applies to this article as new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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