



Article type:
Original Research

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Ethical Leadership and Organizational Culture as Predictors of Employee Performance: Organizational Commitment as a Mediator in East Java Companies

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Article history:

Received 17 Feb 2026
Revised 22 Mar 2026
Accepted 01 Apr 2026
Published online 01 May 2026

How to cite this article:

Retnowati, E., Kistyanto, A., & Wardoyo, D. T. W. (2026). Ethical Leadership and Organizational Culture as Predictors of Employee Performance: Organizational Commitment as a Mediator in East Java Companies. *International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture*, 13(5), Article e2026-1405. <https://doi.org/10.61838/ijbmc.v13i5.1405>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined the relationships between ethical leadership, organizational culture, organizational commitment, and employee performance, and tested the mediating role of organizational commitment.

Methods and Materials: This quantitative cross-sectional study included 244 employees from six companies in East Java, Indonesia, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire measuring ethical leadership, organizational culture, organizational commitment, and employee performance on a five-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling with SmartPLS. The measurement model was assessed using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, HTMT, VIF, and cross-loadings. Structural paths and mediation effects were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

Findings: The measurement model showed acceptable validity and reliability, with outer loadings >0.70, Cronbach's alpha = 0.917–0.943, composite reliability = 0.935–0.954, AVE = 0.706–0.776, and HTMT <0.90. Ethical leadership and organizational culture explained 55.2% of organizational commitment variance, while ethical leadership, organizational culture, and organizational commitment explained 52.0% of employee performance variance. Ethical leadership predicted organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.440$, $t = 8.401$, $p < 0.001$) and employee performance ($\beta = 0.221$, $t = 3.737$, $p < 0.001$). Organizational culture predicted organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.438$, $t = 8.794$, $p < 0.001$) and employee performance ($\beta = 0.296$, $t = 5.553$, $p < 0.001$). Organizational commitment predicted employee performance ($\beta = 0.332$, $t = 5.120$, $p < 0.001$) and partially mediated both relationships.

Conclusion: Ethical leadership and organizational culture were positively associated with employee performance directly and indirectly through organizational commitment.

Keywords: Leadership, Organizational Culture, Organizational Commitment, Personnel Management, Indonesia.

Introduction

Employee performance is one of the key factors in determining an organization's success. Various studies indicate that leadership and organizational culture play a significant role in shaping this performance. For example, research on family-owned businesses in Indonesia shows that leadership style influences employee performance (Lukito et al., 2025), and similar findings have also been reported in the public sector in Indonesia (Nurfadillah et al., 2025). Furthermore, studies in Malaysia and India indicate that organizational culture is positively associated with employee performance (Sharma et al., 2025; Vasudevan et al., 2025). However, these findings generally remain broad in scope regarding leadership styles and have not specifically addressed ethical leadership as a conceptually distinct construct. Therefore, it is important to clearly distinguish between leadership styles in general and ethical leadership as a form of leadership grounded in moral values.

Employees are a key element in the sustainability of an organization (Lukito et al., 2025), as company operations heavily rely on the contributions of human resources in carrying out various organizational functions (Basuki, 2023). Through their competence, creativity, and commitment, employees play a role in driving production processes, service delivery, and decision-making that impact the achievement of organizational goals (Rahayu & Ismail, 2024). From an organizational psychology perspective, employees are not merely viewed as labor but also as individuals with needs, motivations, values, and perceptions regarding the work environment (Olivia et al., 2025). Therefore, employee performance is influenced not only by structural factors but also by psychological and social factors in the workplace (Daeli et al., 2024), including ethical leadership, organizational culture, and organizational commitment.

Ethical leadership refers to a leader's behavior grounded in moral principles such as honesty, fairness, integrity, and social responsibility. Treviño et al. (2003) define ethical leadership as leadership behavior consistent with moral principles and aimed at influencing followers ethically. Furthermore, Kalshoven et al. (2016) emphasize that ethical leadership is a distinct construct, not merely the ethical aspect of other leadership styles. Within the framework of social

learning theory, leaders serve as role models who influence employee behavior through observation and imitation. Meanwhile, from the perspective of social exchange theory, a leader's ethical behavior can foster positive reciprocal relationships, thereby enhancing employees' trust and commitment to the organization. Several studies indicate that ethical leadership is associated with organizational commitment (Abun, 2024; Al-Mualm 2023; Bahadori et al., 2021; Kalshoven et al., 2016; Neubert et al., 2013; Tamer 2021; Treviño et al., 2003). as well as employee performance (Abun, 2024; Marisya et al., 2023).

In addition to ethical leadership, organizational culture is also a critical factor shaping employee behavior and attitudes. Organizational culture can be understood as a system of values, norms, and beliefs that influence how individuals behave within the organization. Schein (2010) states that a strong organizational culture can create a cohesive and supportive work environment, thereby strengthening employee commitment. Within the framework of organizational identification theory, a culture aligned with individual values can enhance a sense of belonging, which ultimately strengthens employees' psychological attachment to the organization. This aligns with findings that organizational culture is associated with organizational commitment (Sarhana et al., 2019; Sarpong et al., 2021; Wijonarko et al., 2024). However, not all organizational cultures automatically enhance commitment, especially when there is a mismatch with individual values (Galanaki et al., 2024; Lok & Crawford, 2004). Additionally, organizational culture is also associated with employee performance (Shalahuddin, 2022; Sihombing, 2024), including through the role of organizational commitment as a psychological mechanism (Jameel, 2022; Rifandani et al., 2023; Sholihin et al., 2024).

Organizational commitment, in this context, serves as a psychological mechanism that bridges the relationship between contextual factors and performance. From a social exchange theory perspective, employees who perceive fair treatment and a supportive work environment tend to develop higher levels of commitment, which is then reflected in improved performance. A number of studies also indicate that organizational commitment can mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and performance

(Tamer, 2021), as well as between organizational culture and performance (Harjono et al., 2024). Thus, organizational commitment is not merely a result of organizational practices but also functions as a mechanism linking organizational values and behaviors to employee work outcomes.

Although various studies have examined the relationship between ethical leadership, organizational culture, organizational commitment, and employee performance, there remains room for development in the integration of these models, particularly within the context of organizations in Indonesia. Several studies have examined the mediating role of organizational commitment, but the simultaneous integration of ethical leadership and organizational culture as predictors within a single model remains relatively limited and has not been extensively tested across diverse companies within a single region. Furthermore, the theoretical mechanisms linking these variables are often not explained in an integrated manner within a single theory-based conceptual framework. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational culture with employee performance, considering the mediating role of organizational commitment within the context of six companies in East Java, Indonesia. Thus, this study seeks to analyze the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational culture with employee performance, as well as to test the mediating role of organizational commitment in this relationship in a more integrated and theory-based manner.

Methods and Materials

Study Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design to analyze the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational culture with employee performance, as well as to test the role of organizational commitment as a mediating variable. In this research model, ethical leadership and organizational culture are positioned as predictor variables, organizational commitment as the mediator, and employee performance as the dependent variable. The structural model includes direct relationships among the variables as well as indirect relationships through organizational commitment. Data analysis was

conducted using Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS).

The study population consisted of employees at six companies in six cities in East Java, Indonesia, spanning various fields such as administration, marketing and sales, projects, manufacturing, and warehousing. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with the following inclusion criteria: permanent or contract employees, having a minimum of one year of service, and willing to participate voluntarily. The sample comprised 244 respondents, consisting of 191 men (78.28%) and 53 women (21.72%), with ages ranging from 21 to 45 years. Respondents varied in educational background, income, length of service, and job position (assistant, supervisor, and manager). This sample size was deemed adequate for SEM-PLS analysis, although the use of purposive sampling potentially introduces selection bias and limits the generalizability of the findings.

Data collection was conducted using a closed-ended questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) based on previous studies. The constructs of ethical leadership, organizational culture, organizational commitment, and employee performance were adapted from relevant literature. Although conceptually multidimensional, in the SEM-PLS analysis each construct was treated as a first-order latent variable with reflective indicators. Employee performance was measured as an individual's perception of overall work performance. Data were collected both online and offline to increase the response rate, while maintaining respondent confidentiality and anonymity. All participants provided consent before completing the questionnaire, and incomplete data were excluded from the analysis. However, since all data were self-reported and collected at a single point in time, there is a potential for common method bias, which is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS software through two evaluation stages: the measurement model and the structural model. Convergent validity was assessed using factor loadings (>0.70) and Average Variance Extracted (>0.50), while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the HTMT criterion (<0.90). The structural model was analyzed using R^2 values, effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2), as well as path

significance testing via bootstrapping with 5,000 resamplings at a significance level of 0.05. Mediation tests were conducted through indirect effect analysis, in which organizational commitment was declared a partial mediator if the direct path remained significant after the mediator was included in the model. However, this study did not include control variables such as age, tenure, and position, which could potentially influence the relationships between variables and constitute a limitation in the interpretation of the results.

Findings and Results

The findings of this study are based on data from 244 respondents analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, which includes descriptive statistics, measurement model evaluation (outer model), and structural model evaluation (inner model).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Ethical Leadership, Organizational Culture, Organizational Commitment, and Employee Performance

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
EK	244	7.00	35.00	27.34	7.13
BO	244	6.00	30.00	23.49	6.29
KO	244	6.00	30.00	23.52	6.25
KR	244	8.00	30.00	23.34	5.54

Information: EK (Leadership Ethics), BO (Organizational culture), KO (Organizational Commitment), KR (Employee performance)

All variables were measured using a 1–5 Likert scale with a different number of items for each construct, resulting in varying total score ranges (e.g., EK: 7–35; BO, KO, KR: 6–30). Mean values that are relatively close to the maximum indicate a fairly high level of respondents' perceptions regarding each construct; however, this

interpretation is descriptive and does not indicate the significance or strength of the relationships between variables. There are no longer any inconsistencies in variable coding; all narratives use the same codes as the tables (EK, BO, KO, KR).

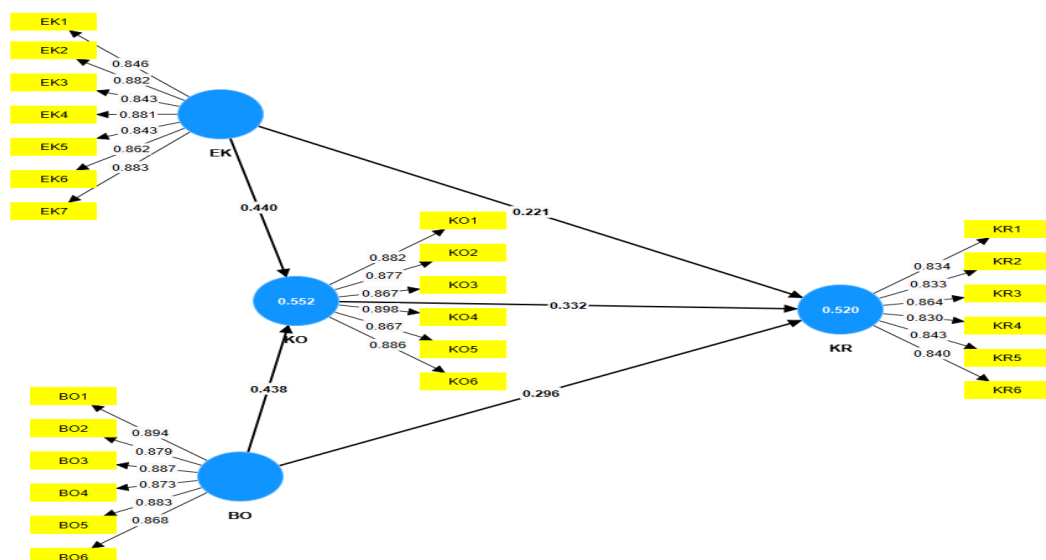


Figure 1

PLS-SEM Measurement Model with Reflective Indicators

Table 2*Indicator Outer Loadings for the Reflective Measurement Model*

	BO	EK	KO	KR
B01	0.894			
B02	0.879			
B03	0.887			
B04	0.873			
B05	0.883			
B06	0.868			
EK1		0.846		
EK2		0.882		
EK3		0.843		
EK4		0.881		
EK5		0.843		
EK6		0.862		
EK7		0.883		
KO1			0.882	
KO2			0.877	
KO3			0.867	
KO4			0.898	
KO5			0.867	
KO6			0.886	
KR1				0.834
KR2				0.833
KR3				0.864
KR4				0.830
KR5				0.843
KR6				0.840

All indicators have outer loadings above 0.70, indicating that the indicators make a strong contribution to reflecting their respective latent constructs. Although the loading values are relatively high and homogeneous, this may indicate possible wording similarities among

items. Therefore, the interpretation of these results must be done carefully and ideally supported by conceptual explanations of the items, although in this study all items were retained because they met the statistical criteria.

Table 3*Construct Reliability Based on Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability*

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
BO	0.942	0.943	0.954
EK	0.943	0.944	0.953
KO	0.941	0.942	0.953
KR	0.917	0.918	0.935

All constructs had Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (rho_a and rho_c) values above 0.70,

indicating that the constructs possess good internal consistency and are reliable for use in further analysis.

Table 4*Convergent Validity Based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE)*

	Average variance extracted
BO	0.776
EK	0.745
KO	0.773
KR	0.706

The Average Variance Extracted values for all constructs are above 0.50, indicating that more than 50% of the variance in the indicators can be explained by their

respective latent constructs. Thus, convergent validity is established.

Table 5

Discriminant Validity Based on the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	BO	EK	KO	KR
BO				
EK	0.458			
KO	0.666	0.668		
KR	0.645	0.598	0.705	

The HTMT values for all construct pairs are below 0.90, indicating that the constructs can be empirically distinguished; however, conceptually, there is a potential for overlap between Ethical Leadership (EL), Organizational Culture, and Organizational Commitment in the context of organizational behavior; thus, the

possibility of overlap still needs to be considered, although the cross-loading results indicate that each indicator has the highest loading on the construct it measures, thereby supporting the fulfillment of discriminant validity.

Table 6

Indicator-Level Collinearity Statistics Based on VIF Values

	VIF		VIF
BO1	3.488	KO1	3.183
BO2	3.290	KO2	3.019
BO3	3.509	KO3	2.894
BO4	3.110	KO4	3.604
BO5	3.286	KO5	2.945
BO6	2.862	KO6	3.376
EK1	2.742	KR1	2.348
EK2	3.344	KR2	2.391
EK3	2.595	KR3	2.758
EK4	3.330	KR4	2.313
EK5	2.639	KR5	2.411
EK6	2.960	KR6	2.383
EK7	3.351		

All VIF values for the indicators are below 5, indicating that there are no serious multicollinearity issues. It should be noted that in a reflective model, the indicators are indeed expected to be correlated with one another because they reflect the same construct.

Therefore, low VIF values do not imply that the indicators operate independently; rather, they indicate that the correlations among the indicators remain within acceptable limits and do not interfere with the model estimates.

Table 7

Cross-Loading Matrix for Discriminant Validity Assessment

	BO	EK	KO	KR
BO1	0.894	0.403	0.565	0.567
BO2	0.879	0.378	0.541	0.489
BO3	0.887	0.347	0.557	0.548
BO4	0.873	0.387	0.547	0.503
BO5	0.883	0.353	0.545	0.516
BO6	0.868	0.421	0.565	0.546
EK1	0.324	0.846	0.516	0.402

EK2	0.470	0.882	0.553	0.526
EK3	0.330	0.843	0.538	0.498
EK4	0.374	0.881	0.541	0.477
EK5	0.372	0.843	0.573	0.470
EK6	0.374	0.862	0.545	0.510
EK7	0.366	0.883	0.535	0.480
KO1	0.538	0.596	0.882	0.573
KO2	0.575	0.561	0.877	0.625
KO3	0.552	0.541	0.867	0.581
KO4	0.581	0.524	0.898	0.610
KO5	0.527	0.558	0.867	0.521
KO6	0.540	0.542	0.886	0.549
KR1	0.481	0.460	0.558	0.834
KR2	0.467	0.450	0.525	0.833
KR3	0.510	0.516	0.531	0.864
KR4	0.516	0.447	0.520	0.830
KR5	0.515	0.479	0.592	0.843
KR6	0.537	0.462	0.584	0.840

All indicators have the largest loading value on the construct being measured compared to other constructs, according to the cross loading findings. Therefore, the

Table 8

Explained Variance of Endogenous Constructs Based on R² and Adjusted R²

	R-square	R-square adjusted
KO	0.552	0.548
KR	0.520	0.514

The R² value indicates that 55.2% of the variation in Organizational Commitment [Katili & Sakir](#) is explained by Ethical Leadership (EL) and Organizational Culture [Katili & Sakir](#), and 52.0% of the variation in Employee Performance (EP) is explained by EL, OC, and OC, with

Table 9

Effect Sizes of Structural Paths Based on f² Values

	BO	EK	KO	KR
BO			0.347	0.110
EK			0.351	0.061
KO				0.103
KR				

The f² value indicates that BO and EK have a moderate effect on KO, while BO, EK, and KO have a small effect on KR; however, f² measures only the magnitude of the

Table 10

Predictive Relevance of the Structural Model Based on Q²predict

	Q ² predict	RMSE	MAE
KO	0.543	0.681	0.526
KR	0.458	0.741	0.588

The Q²predict values for KO (0.543) and KR (0.458) indicate that the model has adequate predictive

measurement model is pronounced valid and the discriminant validity requirements have been met.

moderate categories, where the small difference between R² and adjusted R² indicates the absence of excessive complexity bias, but cannot be used as a basis for concluding that overfitting did not occur.

effect and not its significance, so the significance of the relationship is still determined through the t-test and the p-value.

capability. However, the interpretation of “good” should be made with caution because it was not compared to a

benchmark model (e.g., a linear model). Therefore, these results only indicate that the model has predictive relevance, not absolute superiority.

Table 11

Bootstrapping Results for Direct, Indirect, and Mediation Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
BO -> KO	0.438	0.442	0.050	8.794	0.000
BO -> KR	0.296	0.303	0.053	5.553	0.000
EK -> KO	0.440	0.438	0.052	8.401	0.000
EK -> KR	0.221	0.220	0.059	3.737	0.000
KO -> KR	0.332	0.330	0.065	5.120	0.000
BO -> KO -> KR	0.145	0.146	0.036	4.078	0.000
EK -> KO -> KR	0.146	0.145	0.035	4.219	0.000

All direct paths showed a positive and significant effect ($p < 0.05$), and the indirect path via organizational commitment [Katili & Sakir](#) was also significant; thus, it can be concluded that organizational commitment [Katili & Sakir](#) acts as a partial mediator rather than a full mediator. However, for the sake of reporting accuracy, the mediation analysis should also include confidence intervals from bootstrapping results (e.g., 95% CI), which have not been presented in this report.

The research data were collected from six different companies. Therefore, there is a possibility of clustering effects at the firm level. This analysis treats all respondents as independent observations, which may introduce potential bias in the standard error. This constitutes a limitation of the study and should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that ethical leadership and organizational culture have a positive relationship with employee performance, both directly and indirectly through organizational commitment as a mediating variable. These findings align with previous research showing a relationship between ethical leadership and positive employee attitudes, such as emotional commitment and job satisfaction ([Qing et al., 2020](#)), as well as findings that organizational culture and organizational commitment are associated with improved employee performance ([Utami & Bandiastuti, 2023](#)). However, it is important to emphasize that the

results of this study are associative based on cross-sectional survey data, and thus cannot be directly interpreted as a causal relationship.

These findings can be understood within the framework of organizational behavior theory, which emphasizes that individuals' perceptions of the work environment are related to work attitudes and behaviors ([Fan et al., 2025](#); [O'Neill et al., 2016](#)). In this context, ethical leadership and organizational culture can be viewed as contextual factors associated with how employees evaluate the organization and their roles within it. However, psychological mechanisms such as intrinsic motivation, interpersonal trust, or emotional regulation which are frequently used to explain these relationships in the literature ([Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2009](#); [Çelik et al., 2015](#), [Meyla et al., 2022](#); [Ariedzanata et al., 2025](#); [Sinaga 2025](#)) were not directly measured in this study. Therefore, explanations regarding processes such as increased psychological safety, reduced work anxiety, or the optimization of cognitive resources should be understood as potential theoretical interpretations, not as empirically proven findings in this study.

Organizational culture in this study also showed a positive relationship with employee performance, consistent with the view that culture functions as a shared system of meaning that helps individuals understand organizational norms and expectations ([Cahyono, 2008](#); [Utami & Bandiastuti, 2023](#)). The literature indicates that clarity of norms can be associated with reduced role ambiguity and internal

conflict (Firdaus, 2025). However, as with ethical leadership, mechanisms such as reduced cognitive load or increased work focus were not directly measured in this study, so their interpretation remains hypothetical. Furthermore, although the collectivistic context of Indonesian society is often associated with values of togetherness and loyalty (Katili & Sakir, 2024), this study does not empirically measure these cultural dimensions; thus, the role of the collectivistic context can only be viewed as an interpretive backdrop, not as a tested variable.

The results of the mediation analysis indicate that organizational commitment acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational culture with employee performance. This suggests that, in addition to organizational commitment, there are other potential pathways that may explain this relationship. Thus, organizational commitment is not the sole mechanism linking these variables. The theoretical explanation of commitment as a form of emotional attachment and individual identification with the organization (Tewuh et al., 2025; Lestari & Sasmita, 2025; Azizah et al., 2025) remains relevant, but the underlying processes of value internalization and social identification were not directly measured in this study, so they must be interpreted with caution.

Additionally, it is important to consider the possibility of alternative explanations for the observed relationships. For instance, high-performing employees may tend to have higher commitment levels and evaluate leadership and organizational culture more positively. In other words, the direction of the relationships observed in this study cannot be fully confirmed. Furthermore, the use of self-report data at a single measurement point also opens the possibility of common method bias, which can artificially strengthen the relationships between variables. Therefore, the strength of the relationships found must be interpreted with caution.

Theoretically, these findings support the view that organizational variables such as ethical leadership and organizational culture are related to employee performance through the process of individual perception and evaluation of the work environment (Afsar & Shahjehan 2018; Janićijević, 2013; Townsend 2022). However, the claim that these variables operate through the process of value internalization or specific psychological mechanisms should be treated as a

theoretical interpretation, not as a direct empirical conclusion of this study.

Thus, this study contributes to strengthening the empirical evidence regarding the relationship between ethical leadership, organizational culture, organizational commitment, and employee performance, while also emphasizing the importance of caution in interpreting these relationships, particularly given the limitations of the research design, potential biases, and the fact that the underlying psychological mechanisms linking the variables have not yet been measured.

Based on the research findings, ethical leadership and organizational culture show a significant association with employee performance and a positive association with organizational commitment, which in turn is also associated with employee performance. Furthermore, organizational commitment was found to act as a partial mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational culture and employee performance, as evidenced by the continued significance of both direct and indirect pathways. These findings indicate a relationship between ethical leadership, organizational culture, organizational commitment, and employee performance within an organizational context; however, they cannot be interpreted as a causal relationship. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution. This study also has limitations, including the use of a cross-sectional design, purposive sampling, and self-report data from the same source, which may introduce common method bias and limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research is advised to consider other variables such as job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and psychological well-being, as well as to use a longitudinal design or a multi-source approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their gratitude and appreciation to all participants.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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