



Servant Leadership, Ethical Leadership, and Work Engagement: The Mediating Role of Meaningfulness at Work among Lawyers

Cut Datin Imanal Putri

Universitas Indonesia,
Indonesia

***Corresponding author:**

Cut Datin Imanal Putri,
Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia.
✉ cutdatinip@gmail.com

Article Info :

Article history:

Received: March 06th, 2026

Revised: April 14th, 2026

Accepted: April 17th, 2026

Keywords:

servant leadership; ethical leadership; work engagement; work meaningfulness; lawyer profession.

Abstract

Background: In the legal profession, lawyers often face high workloads, ethical pressures, and demanding client expectations, which can affect their psychological well-being and level of work engagement. Leadership plays a vital role in shaping employees' attitudes and experiences at work. Leadership styles such as servant leadership and ethical leadership are increasingly recognized for their potential to foster a supportive and value-driven work environment.

Objective: This study aims to examine the influence of two leadership styles, specifically servant leadership and ethical leadership, on work meaningfulness and work engagement among lawyers. Additionally, it also examines whether work meaningfulness mediates the relationships between these leadership styles and work engagement.

Methods: This research employed a quantitative, survey-based explanatory design. Data were collected from 262 lawyers who had worked in the same law firm for at least two years, primarily located in Java and Sumatra, Indonesia. To analyze the data, SEM with LISREL version 8.80 was used to examine both direct and indirect relationships among variables.

Results: The findings indicate that servant leadership has a significant positive effect on both work meaningfulness and work engagement. Work meaningfulness strongly influences work engagement and serves as a mediator between servant leadership and work engagement. In contrast, ethical leadership does not meaningfully impact work meaningfulness but does have a direct, positive effect on work engagement.

Conclusion: Servant leadership is more effective than ethical leadership in fostering meaningful work and sustained engagement among lawyers.

To cite this article: Cut Datin Imanal Putri. (2026). Servant Leadership, Ethical Leadership, and Work Engagement: The Mediating Role of Meaningfulness at Work among Lawyers. *Glosains: Jurnal Sains Global Indonesia*, 7(2), 545-557. <https://doi.org/10.59784/glosains.v7i2.687>

INTRODUCTION

Based on the estimated World Population in 2023 as shown in Figure 1 (CNBC, 2021), Indonesia is the 4th largest country after India, China, and the United States.

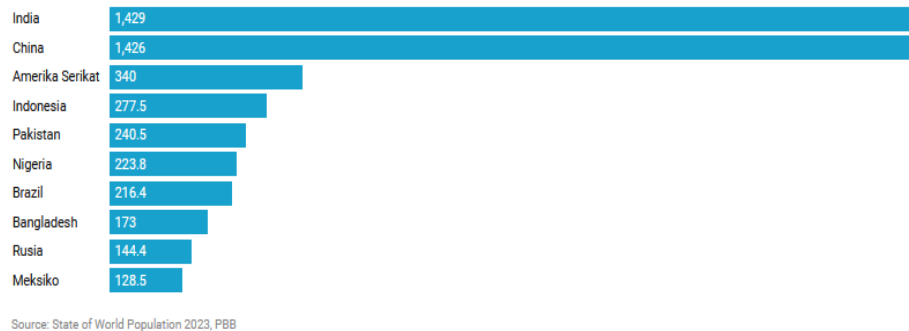


Figure 1. Estimated World Population
Source: CNBC Indonesia.

To date, there is no definitive ratio for the ideal number of lawyers per capita in Indonesia. If we use comparisons with other countries, such as the ratio in the United States (1 lawyer: 274 residents), the ratio in Malaysia (1 lawyer: 1,887 residents), or the ratio in Singapore (1 lawyer: 1,203 residents), these ratios may not necessarily be ideal. The Legal Aid Coordinator of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), Julius Ibrani, explains that the availability of lawyers for the Indonesian population in general is still far from the ideal standard – quoting Stephen P. Magee (2010) who states that there should be 1 lawyer for every 1,100 residents (HukumOnline, 2016). This is also in line with what was conveyed by Bobby R. Manalu – Secretary General of the Indonesian Advocates Association, regarding the number of lawyers currently in Indonesia is only around 35,000–50,000 (HukumOnline, 2023). When compared to the population of Indonesia, the ratio is still 1 to tens of thousands. Even in 2045, when Indonesia will be 100 years old, also known as Indonesia Emas, it is predicted to be at its peak of productivity, so the legal profession is expected to support business activities. Bobby R. Manalu also added that even though many law graduates have taken the Special Education for the Legal Profession (Pendidikan Khusus Profesi Advokat/PKPA), statistically, the number of lawyers in Indonesia is still minimal.

The public in general has high expectations of lawyers to aid people who are ignorant of the law, who are often treated arbitrarily by irresponsible parties. However, because quite a few senior lawyers have been involved in legal problems, this has somewhat affected the public's perception of the professionalism of lawyers in carrying out their profession. It is also understandable that this cannot be generalized; therefore, through this study, the researcher attempts to explore whether the leadership style factors Servant Leadership (SL) and Ethical Leadership (EL) applied by senior lawyers as team leaders in the daily lives of lawyers as team members have an influence on the meaningfulness and engagement felt by lawyers as team members toward the work they do, and ultimately influence their decision to continue pursuing a career as a lawyer.

SL is a concept first proposed by Robert K. Greenleaf (1979). SL has the primary goal of serving and meeting the needs of others optimally so that it can become the main motivation for leadership and help followers to strive and grow. This leadership theory emerged because many people in organizations, companies, and non-profit or non-commercial institutions sought to find a better way to integrate their work roles with their personal and spiritual growth (Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2020). SL is a management style that leads and serves in harmony. Leaders who put others before themselves are modest people who may establish trusting bonds with their followers and eventually inspire them to give their all at work.

An SL typically encourages the development of similar attitudes in the people around them, with the expectation that these individuals will internalize and adopt the same attitudes. Leaders who adopt SL display behaviors that highlight respect for employees' individual values and interests. They regard serving others, the organization, and the wider community as central leadership principles. Owing to this strong service orientation, SL is viewed as especially appropriate for the service industry (Eva et al., 2019). Therefore, examining the influence of SL is

especially relevant to be studied in the context of lawyers, who are professionally engaged in providing legal services.

EL directs their subordinates and followers according to moral principles, rather than depending exclusively on formal organizational regulations (Yang et al., 2016). *EL* is referred to as model behavior that aligns with accepted ethical norms and maintain ethical relationship with their followers. *EL* communicate these standards clearly, encourage and reward ethical conduct, and hold individuals accountable by disciplining unethical behavior. This approach relies on moral motivation, two-way communication, and consistent role modeling to foster an ethical environment. *EL* put their employees interests first, which makes them fair and trustworthy leaders for their employees. They show genuine care and provide strong support to those they lead. As a result, employees tend to reciprocate by increasing their effort and showing greater involvement in their work. Research in the private sector also indicate that *EL* is positively linked to higher level of *WE* (Engelbrecht et al., 2017).

EL highlights the moral dimension of leading others (Wang & Xu, 2019). It involves two main components, namely the moral person and the moral manager. As a moral person, *EL* uphold personal values like integrity, honesty, fairness, and concern for others or also known as altruism; while as a moral manager, *EL* take deliberate actions to encourage ethical conduct in the workplace, such as clearly conveying ethical expectations and recognizing employees who adhere to them, thereby fostering and promoting ethical behavior among team members and peers.

Brown et al. (2005) also draw on Blau's social exchange theory and Bandura's social learning theory to explain *EL*. Social exchange theory highlights how *EL* emerges and what outcomes it produces. Social learning theory suggests that people acquire norms of appropriate behavior by observing and experiencing the actions of others (Bandura, 2019). In learning such norms, individuals tend to focus on and model themselves after figures they view as credible and appealing. *EL*, therefore, serve as role models by upholding strong moral principles and demanding the same from others, which enhances their credibility and attractiveness. By doing so, they capture employees' attention and encourage them to emulate the leader's ethical conduct. Researchers suspect that senior lawyers as *team leaders*, when demonstrate *EL styles*, can shape the behavior of the lawyers they supervise.

Work meaningfulness refers to the extent to which work outcomes or goals are evaluated based on an individual's personal standards and reflect intrinsic interest in the tasks performed, especially when there is alignment between job role demands, personal values, and individual beliefs (Wang et al., 2018). Clarifying the significance of employees' roles is one of the strategic actions' organizations can consistently implement to maintain a balance between organizational objectives and employees' needs (the need for satisfaction through work). Cartwright & Holmes (2006) further explain that meaningful work forms the foundation for positive organizational insight and psychological well-being; and organizations must recognize and respond to employees' deeper needs to sustain motivation, engagement, and strong performance. Knowing how to create, experience, manage, and support meaningful work enables both individuals and organizations to reach optimum and lasting outcomes.

The idea of meaningfulness concerns on how individuals reflect on the purpose of their existence (Kaur & Mehta, 2023; Nurdiyansyah et al., 2024). Rather than being a pursuit of pleasure or an escape from discomfort, meaningfulness represents a deeper quest for significance that stands at the center of human life. Life offers people the chance to first grasp meaning for themselves and then help others do the same; this entire process involves creating and sharing meaning. Work serves as one avenue through which individuals can experience a sense of meaning in their lives or often referred to as *work meaningfulness*.

Hackman & Oldham (1976) recognize meaningfulness as a psychological condition that is considered important in the workplace, reflected in the extent to which a person invests themselves in their role and job duties within an organization. Meanwhile, the psychological state that is a variable of work meaningfulness itself refers to people who feel valuable, useful, worthwhile, and confident that they make a difference, and feel that they are not merely being exploited for their abilities and experience related to their work. Work meaningfulness refers to a positive mental state in which an individual feels that their work contributes in an important, valuable, and beneficial way toward accomplishing a meaningful goal.

Self-concept theory explains that employees are more likely to perceive their work as

meaningful when leaders clearly and accurately link their tasks to the objectives to be accomplished and demonstrate how those tasks contribute to achieving organizational goals. As a result, employees will perceive their work as meaningful because they recognize how it aligns with and reinforces the values of the company and the organization. In relation to this study, the researchers hypothesize that if lawyers feel that their work has meaning/impact, then they will continue to do their work as lawyers.

The term engagement emerged in the context of organizational business around 20 years ago. Engagement or involvement in the workplace is also referred to as WE, employee engagement (EE), or job engagement. Schaufeli defines WE as the feelings an individual has toward their work, and Shuck defines EE as the feelings an individual has toward the organization or company where they work. This study uses the term WE in accordance with the definition provided by Schaufeli. WE refers to an energetic and fulfilling mental state experienced while working, marked by three key elements: vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Leadership is considered one of the key influences on contributing to WE. Research conducted by Ruyle et al., (2009), Eichinger and De Meuse shows that the quality of the relationship between employees and their immediate supervisors is the most critical factor in fostering work engagement and retaining employees. Employees who have work meaningfulness tend to be more proactive, seeking out information and experiences that help them perform their tasks. This proactive drive contributes to stronger emotional and psychological connection to their jobs, known as WE. WE reflects a positive and fulfilling mental state related to work, indicated by enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption.

WE is defined as enthusiasm, commitment, and willingness to invest oneself and exert effort wisely to help achieve the goals of superiors or organizations in order to succeed or achieve. Organizational effectiveness extends beyond simply retaining a stable workforce; it requires employees to perform their assigned duties consistently and to demonstrate a willingness to engage in additional tasks and activities outside their formal roles when circumstances necessitate it. The above understanding is in line with the concept of employee commitment, which is characterized by stable employees who make a significant contribution to the organization as a whole and are reliable through a strong willingness to carry out concrete activities related to the tasks assigned to them. This is expected to have a significant impact on organizational effectiveness in any way.

In addition, Harter et al. (2002) explains that employee engagement reflects a deeper level of involvement and enthusiasm from employees than simply applying the terms "job satisfaction" or "organizational commitment". When an organization is considered to have employees who are willing to engage and able to influence organizational performance, it can be understood that employers who maximize employee engagement are able to increase their business opportunities and are better at achieving success, thereby creating an organization that delivers sustainable high performance (sustainability). Employee engagement, specifically by inspiring leaders, managers who respect and recognize employees, interesting work (which employees know how to do and complete their tasks), and organizations that show genuine responsibility to their employees and communities, will motivate employees in doing their work and have implications for the enthusiasm, participation, and confidence of these employees. In relation to this study, the researcher suspects that lawyers who feel connected to their work will continue to do their work as lawyers.

Previous studies have shown that SL significantly influences work engagement (WE) through the mediating role of meaningfulness (Khan et al., 2021). Similarly, work meaningfulness has been found to mediate the relationship between EL and WE (Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2020). The researchers also noted previous experimental research by Yajun Song, Jing Lan, Guanghuai Zeng, and Yean Wang, which found that SL has a bigger effect than EL in jobs that do not require much innovation; however, EL has a greater impact than SL in jobs that require innovation (Song et al., 2023). Therefore, the researchers hypothesize that the leadership style factors (SL and EL) applied by team leaders ultimately influence the decision of lawyers as team members to continue pursuing their profession as lawyers. This understanding can serve as guidance for human resources managers, particularly in law firms, to provide direction not only to team leaders but also to be implemented by professional lawyers organizations to maintain a steady supply of lawyers.

This study examines whether leadership styles (SL and EL) have direct effects on WE and indirect effects through work meaningfulness among lawyers. This study uses the SEM method, a statistical technique that allows simultaneous testing of multiple and hierarchical relationship among variables (Sugiarto, 2017). The data analysis used in this study is conducted using Lisrel 8.80 software to evaluate and predict the structural relationship in the proposed model. This study examines the variables of SL, EL, work meaningfulness, and WE. Accordingly, the primary aim of this study is to provide empirical evidence on the differential effects of servant leadership and ethical leadership on work meaningfulness and work engagement among Indonesian lawyers, and to determine whether work meaningfulness significantly mediates these relationships. By doing so, this study contributes to the growing literature on leadership in professional service contexts, extends the application of Social Exchange Theory and Self-Concept Theory to the legal profession, and offers practical guidance for law firm management on the leadership approaches most conducive to sustaining lawyer engagement and retention.

METHOD

The Influence of Servant Leadership Style on Commitment and Meaningfulness of Work for Lawyers

In designing this research model, the researcher based it on an understanding of leadership types in accordance with applicable norms/ethics or empathy shown by leaders towards their employees, which not only influences the meaning of a job but also influences employee engagement in that job. Therefore, in this study, the researcher aims to examine the influence of each independent variable, namely SL and EL, on the dependent variable of WE, and work meaningfulness as a mediating variable, using several research models, namely:

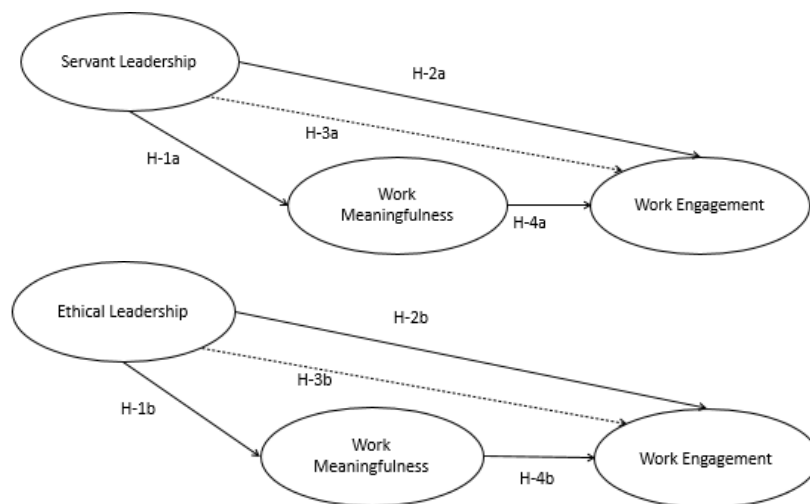


Figure 2. Research Model

Data processing based on the research model in Figure 1 uses collected data (data-driven research). This aims to obtain information and further analyze it to gain understanding or interpretation of the available data. In this study, the researchers propose the following hypotheses.

Several studies have acknowledged that leadership styles have the capacity to generate positive outcomes for individuals, teams, and organizations (Thao & Kang, 2020). Leadership styles shape organizational performance by fostering follower development and well-being, primarily through the fulfillment of their underlying needs. This aspect of SL behavior emphasizes that leaders should prioritize their followers and respond to the needs of others as well as the surrounding environment (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). It reflects Robert K. Greenleaf (1979) view that leadership stems from a deliberate decision to serve before choosing to lead. SL requires self-awareness in order to effectively address followers' essential psychological needs, which are regarded as fundamental and follows the self-determination theory (SDT) developed by (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Work becomes more meaningful as employees develop higher skill levels, experience a clearer sense of task identity, or perceive greater task significance. Moreover, autonomy and feedback allow employees to take greater responsibility and gain deeper understanding of their work, which in turn increases their sense of work meaningfulness

(Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Therefore, the researchers propose the following hypothesis:

H-1a: *Servant leadership* has a positive influence on *work meaningfulness*

WE reflects a positive, work-related motivational state characterized by high level of enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, 2012). In this regard, WE is a condition in which employees are deeply involved and fully absorbed in their work. SL as an employee-oriented leadership approach is likely to enhance employee engagement because it can convince employees that needs and well-being are prioritized. Social exchange theory (SET) forms the basis of the argument for linking SL with WE.

SL emphasizes serving employees as the primary means of influencing them. In contrast to transactional and transformational leaders who focus chiefly on organizational objectives, servant leaders place employee's needs and goals at the forefront. Grounded in this orientation, they actively create and broaden learning opportunities that enable employees to develop and progress. In practice, by involving employees in decision-making, seeking and valuing employee input, and supporting employees in difficult times (van Dierendonck, 2011), SL support employees in striving toward goal achievement by helping them develop and express their full potential. Employees, in turn, come to view servant leaders as exemplary figures, which fosters greater enthusiasm and dedication toward their tasks. This leadership style strengthens employee's confidence in performing work that supports their personal and professional growth, thereby enhancing their overall work engagement. Accordingly, servant leadership can be understood to promote higher employee engagement by reinforcing employee's beliefs in their ability to accomplish work-related goals. Therefore, the researchers propose the following hypothesis:

H-2a: *Servant leadership* has a positive relationship with *work engagement*

Leaders have the capacity to enhance work meaningfulness. SL, in particular, cultivate an other-oriented and community-building mindset that is transmitted to their followers, encouraging them to shift attention away from self-interest toward concern for others. Moreover, the leadership-driven emphasis on serving the broader community fosters cohesion among organizational members, which in turn promotes higher levels of WE. Contributing to the community and building connections with others enhances work meaningfulness, as meaningfulness is inherently a motivational construct, which can ultimately strengthen employee WE. Therefore, the researchers propose the following hypothesis:

H-3a: Work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between *servant leadership* and *work engagement*

EL is commonly viewed as comprising two main aspects, namely moral persons and moral managers (Brown & Treviño, 2006). As moral persons, EL demonstrate a personal adherence to ethical virtues, including integrity, honesty, fairness, and altruism. As a moral manager, EL actively foster ethical conduct by articulating ethical expectations and reinforcing appropriate behavior among employees. In general, EL rely on normative guidance to encourage morally motivated actions from employees, even in the absence of formal organizational mandates (Yang et al., 2016). Meaningful work is often understood as an ethical issue that requires moral stewardship within organizations; therefore, as noted earlier, EL serves as a significant source of work meaningfulness (Wang & Xu, 2019).

EL represent a "value-driven" leadership approach that shapes employees' belief system and self-views, thereby enhancing the meaningfulness they derive from their work. Ethical leaders exemplify moral conduct and act as ethical role models for their subordinates (Demirtas et al., 2017). EL use communication to motivate followers to act in morally responsible ways and emphasize the significance of their work in contributing to socially responsible objectives (Wang & Xu, 2019). In addition, by serving as role models and recognizing ethical behavior, they establish clear moral standards and values for their employees. EL also foster a sense of identity by integrating their principles and beliefs into employees' self-concepts, thereby enhancing perceptions of work meaningfulness. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H-1b: Ethical leadership has a positive effect on work meaningfulness

Blau's SET helps explain how EL influences WE. Blau's theory suggests that when leaders treat employees with respect and integrity, employees develop a sense of obligation to return this positive treatment through constructive attitudes and behaviors. Fairness, caring, and trustworthiness support the establishment of relationships between parties (leaders and

employees), thereby encouraging increased WE. Overall, EL rely on moral principles to guide their employees, motivating them through ethical conduct rather than through formal organizational directives (Yang et al., 2016). Therefore, the researchers propose the following hypothesis:

H-2b: Ethical leadership has a positive effect on work engagement

Based on substitute leadership theory (Kerr & Jermier, 1978), work meaningfulness may also moderate the relationship between EL and WE. Substitute leadership theory posits that specific elements, including job characteristics, can reduce or even substitute for a leader's capacity to shape employees' attitudes and behaviors (Bottomley et al., 2016). Work meaningfulness has been identified as a "necessary prerequisite" for WE. When employees experience meaningfulness in their work, they are more cognitively present and willing to invest themselves in their tasks (Demirtas et al., 2017). Moreover, the absence of meaningfulness is thought to lead to feelings of "alienation" and "disengagement" from work. Accordingly, work meaningfulness is expected to significantly moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement, leading to the following proposed hypothesis:

H-3b: Work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement

Previous studies indicates that work meaningfulness is positively associated with WE. In addition, leadership that foster unity among organizational members can strengthen work engagement within it, ultimately exerting a favorable influence on employees WE. Therefore, the researchers propose the following hypothesis:

H-4a and H-4b: Work meaningfulness has a positive effect on work engagement.

Each variable in this study will be measured using a 6-point Likert scale, as follows:

Table 1. Likert Scale

Number	Rating Scale
1	Strongly Disagree (SD)
2	Disagree (D)
3	Somewhat Disagree (SD)
4	Somewhat Agree (SA)
5	Agree (A)
6	Strongly Agree (SA)

In addition to making it easier for respondents to provide assessments and to help avoid "Central Tendency Bias," the 6-point Likert scale tends to produce high reliability values, so its use in this study is expected to provide accurate results. The deliberate choice to exclude a neutral midpoint (as would exist in a 5-point or 7-point scale) compels respondents to take a directional position on each item, which is particularly appropriate in this study given the professional nature of the respondents experienced lawyers who, by virtue of their training in evidence evaluation, are well-equipped to form considered judgments rather than defaulting to ambivalent responses. The researchers used questionnaires including:

1. The Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ), using 7 statement indicators (Liden et al., 2015).
2. The Ethical Leadership Survey (ELS), using 10 statement indicators (Brown et al., 2005).
3. The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) consists of 3 dimensions, namely positive meaning, meaning-making through work, and greater good motivations, using 10 statement indicators (Steger et al., 2012).
4. The *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES) consists of 3 dimensions, namely *vigor*, *dedication*, and *absorption*, using 16 statement indicators of the Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

The demographics of the respondents used in this study were all professional workers who worked as lawyers as referred to in Law No. 18 of 2003 concerning Advocates, who had worked at the same law firm for at least 2 consecutive years, and the majority were spread across Java and Sumatra. The majority of respondents were male, with the largest age range being 25-35 years old, accounting for 60.7% of the 262 respondents, and with 2-5 years of work experience, accounting for 43.6% of the 262 respondents.

Following confirmatory factor analysis and model fit evaluation, the structural model was estimated to test each hypothesis. A one-tailed significance criterion was applied with t-values \geq

1.645, consistent with the directional nature of all proposed hypotheses. Both direct effects (Table 1) and indirect mediation effects (Table 2) are reported, with the path diagram presented in Figure 3.

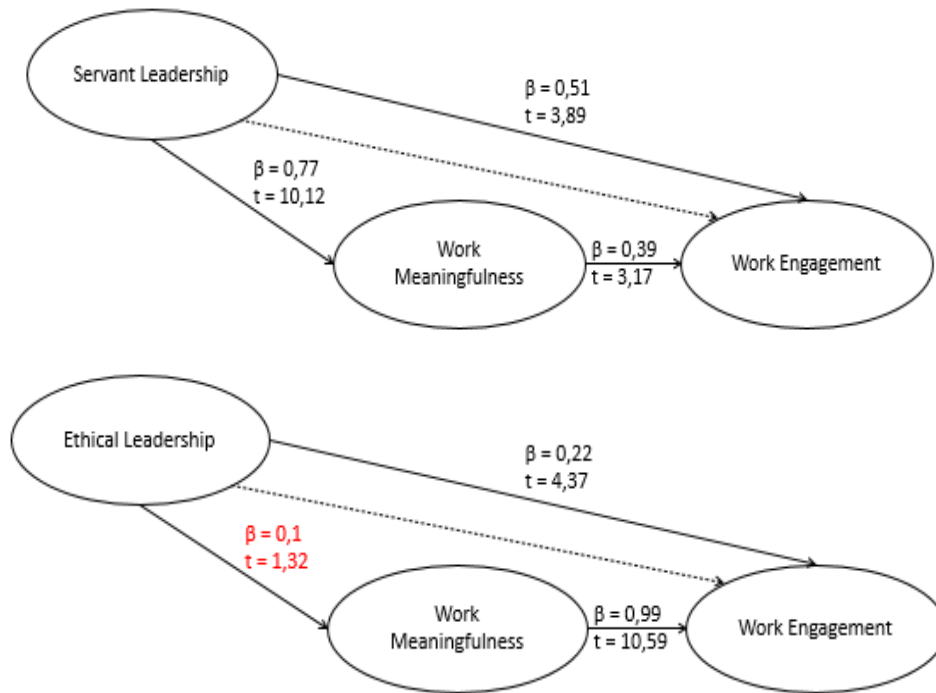


Figure 3. Path Diagram of the Research Model
Source: Researcher's Data Processing Results

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 2. Direct Effect Test

No.	Path	Coefficient	t-values	Conclusion
H-1a	SL > WM	0.77	10.12	Significant Positive
H-2a	SL > WE	0.51	3.89	Significant Positive
H-4a	WM > WE	0.39	3.17	Significant Positive
H-1b	EL > WM	0.1	1.32	Not Significant
H-2b	EL > WE	0.22	4.37	Significant Positive
H-4b	WM > WE	0.99	10.59	Significant Positive

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis Results

This study has two hypotheses mediated by *work meaningfulness* (hypothesis 3a and hypothesis 3b). To determine whether this mediating relationship significantly influences the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, see the following:

Table 3. Indirect Effect Test

No	Path	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Conclusion
H-3a	SL > WM > WE	0.3003	0.8103	Significant
H-3b	EL > WM > WE	0.099	0.319	Not significant

Source: Researcher's Data Processing Results

Based on the data analysis conducted on all statement indicators, the researcher obtained the following hypothesis testing results:

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results

H	Hypothesis Statement	Conclusion
1a	SL has a positive influence on work meaningfulness.	Hypothesis accepted
2a	SL has a positive influence on WE.	Hypothesis accepted
3a	Work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between SL and WE.	Hypothesis accepted
4a	Work meaningfulness has a positive effect on WE.	Hypothesis accepted
1b	EL has a positive influence on work meaningfulness	Hypothesis rejected
2b	EL has a positive influence on WE	Hypothesis accepted
3b	Work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between EL and WE.	Hypothesis rejected
4b	Work meaningfulness has a positive effect on WE	Hypothesis accepted

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis Results

This study examined the effect of the independent variables, namely leadership styles (SL and EL), on dependent variables, namely work engagement and work meaningfulness as mediating variables. This study was inspired by previous studies which stated that:

1. SL mediated by meaningfulness has a significant effect on WE for employees (Khan et al., 2021).
2. Work meaningfulness plays an important role in public organizations because, in addition to functioning as a mediator, work meaningfulness also functions as a moderator of the (Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2020).

Furthermore, the model is formed based on leadership types in accordance with the empathy shown by leaders towards their subordinates/employees (SL) or applicable norms/ethics (EL), which not only influence the meaning of a job (work meaningfulness) but also influence employee engagement with the job (WE). This study obtained significant results from lawyers who are team members and have team leaders who apply a servant leadership style, which positively influences the meaningfulness of work (work meaningfulness) and WE felt by lawyers as team members, so that the research model changes to the following:

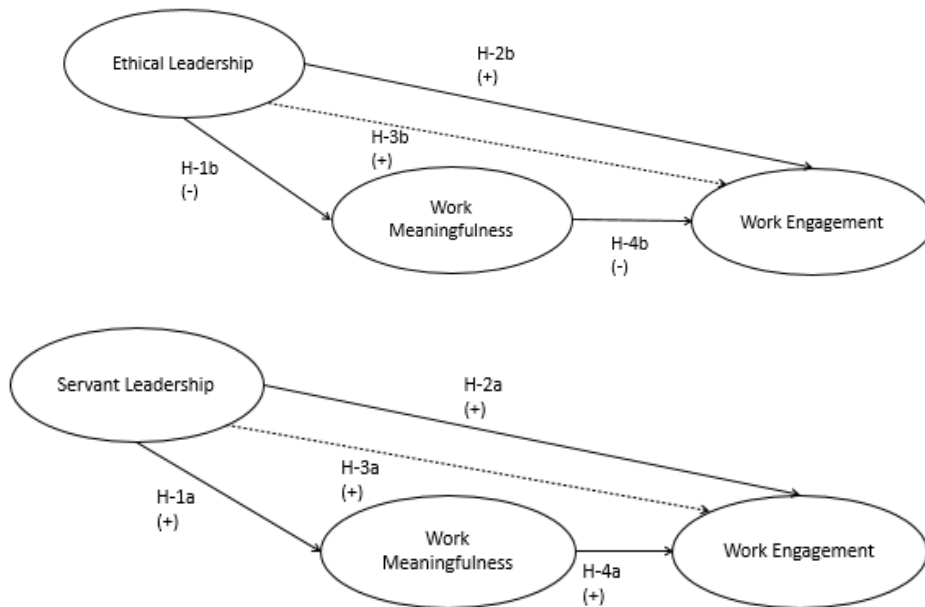


Figure 4. Research Model (after data processing)
Source: Researcher's Data Processing Results

Discussion

Servant Leadership and Work Meaningfulness (H-1a Accepted)

The strong positive effect of SL on work meaningfulness ($\beta = 0.77, t = 10.12$) is among the most robust findings in this study and aligns with established literature. Khan et al. (2021) similarly found that SL significantly enhances meaningfulness in employee populations through the mechanism of need satisfaction. Chiniara and Bentein (2016) demonstrated that servant leaders by satisfying followers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness generate

intrinsic motivation that translates into a deeper sense of purpose. In the legal context specifically, this finding is theoretically significant: lawyers who perceive their team leaders as genuinely invested in their development and well-being are more likely to experience advocacy work as intrinsically meaningful not merely as a professional obligation which is critical for sustaining commitment in a high-pressure, ethically demanding profession.

Servant Leadership and Work Engagement (H-2a Accepted)

SL also directly enhanced WE ($\beta = 0.51$, $t = 3.89$), consistent with Social Exchange Theory (SET; Blau, 1964): when leaders prioritize employees' needs and development, employees reciprocate with greater engagement and commitment. This finding replicates Khan et al. (2021) meta-analytic results and is particularly meaningful in the legal profession, where team leaders as senior lawyers model professional behavior that junior lawyers observe, internalize, and emulate (Bandura's Social Learning Theory). The legal context also amplifies the salience of SET dynamics: unlike hierarchical corporate settings, law firm relationships often involve direct mentorship, shared client responsibility, and reputational interdependence, making reciprocal exchange processes especially influential.

Work Meaningfulness as Mediator of SL-WE (H-3a Accepted)

The indirect effect of SL on WE through work meaningfulness (indirect effect = 0.3003, total effect = 0.8103) indicates that meaningfulness partially mediates this relationship SL exerts both direct effects on engagement and indirect effects through the psychological mechanism of meaningful work. This pattern is consistent with Khan et al. (2021), who found that work meaningfulness partially mediates SL's effect on WE. The substantial total effect (0.8103) underscores that servant leadership operates through multiple pathways simultaneously: it directly inspires engagement through behavioral modeling and need fulfillment, while also cultivating the deeper psychological sense of purpose that sustains engagement over time.

Ethical Leadership and Work Meaningfulness (H-1b Rejected)

In contrast to SL, EL did not significantly affect work meaningfulness ($\beta = 0.10$, $t = 1.32$), which is below the critical threshold of 1.645. This finding diverges from Mostafa and Abed El-Motalib (2020), who found EL to positively influence meaningfulness in a public sector context. The divergence may reflect a profession-specific dynamic: lawyers already operate under a deeply institutionalized ethical code (the Advocate Law No. 18/2003 and professional codes of the Indonesian Advocates Association). In this environment, EL's emphasis on moral norms may be perceived as merely reinforcing existing professional obligations rather than elevating the intrinsic meaningfulness of advocacy work. Put differently, ethical leadership may represent a baseline expectation rather than a distinctive source of meaning in a profession where ethical conduct is already professionally mandated.

Ethical Leadership and Work Engagement (H-2b Accepted)

Despite its non-significant effect on meaningfulness, EL directly enhanced WE ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 4.37$). This result aligns with Engelbrecht, Heine, and Mahembe (2017), who found EL positively linked to WE in a private sector context through trust- and integrity-based mechanisms. The finding that EL boosts engagement without improving meaningfulness suggests that ethical leadership operates through a compliance-based engagement pathway: lawyers may increase their work involvement when they perceive their team leaders as fair, trustworthy, and morally consistent not because their work feels more purposeful, but because an ethical organizational climate reduces the friction and moral dissonance that would otherwise impede full engagement. This pathway is distinct from SL's meaningfulness-driven engagement mechanism, and together they reveal that SL and EL engage lawyers through fundamentally different psychological processes a theoretically significant contribution of this study. The non-significant mediation of work meaningfulness between EL and WE (H-3b: indirect effect = 0.099, not significant) further confirms that EL's engagement effect bypasses the meaningfulness pathway entirely, consistent with Song et al. (2023) finding that SL outperforms EL in contexts with limited innovation requirements such as routine advocacy work where intrinsic meaning matters more than normative compliance.

The findings derived from the research model (Figure 4), substantiate several theoretical propositions such as: (1) The theory affirm the view that *servant leadership* encourages organizational members to realize their fullest potential (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). (2) The theory affirm that employees experience greater work meaningfulness when their roles involve higher levels of skill variety, and/or task identity, and/or task significance. Additionally, autonomy and feedback help employees develop greater responsibility and a deeper understanding of their work, which further enhances their *work meaningfulness* (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). (3) The theory affirm that in contrast to transactional and transformational leaders who emphasize organizational objectives, *SL* place primary emphasis on the goals and development of employees. *SL* actively foster expanded learning opportunities to support employees' growth and continual learning (Liden et al., 2008). (4) The theory affirm how leaders can play a role in enhancing *work meaningfulness* (Rosso et al., 2010).

Therefore, based on the above, lawyers who are *team members* and have *team leaders* who apply a *servant leadership* style feel a high sense of meaning and attachment to their work as lawyers. Therefore, *servant leadership* is likely the appropriate leadership style for lawyers who are *team leaders* to apply to lawyers who are *team members*, so that the lawyers who are *team members* will continue to choose a career as a lawyer and not choose to move to another type of work.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how servant leadership (SL) and ethical leadership (EL) shape work meaningfulness and work engagement (WE) among Indonesian lawyers, with work meaningfulness tested as a mediating variable. The findings reveal that SL is the more influential leadership style for this professional group: it significantly enhances both work meaningfulness ($\beta = 0.77$) and work engagement ($\beta = 0.51$), with meaningfulness serving as a significant partial mediator of the SL-WE relationship (indirect effect = 0.3003). Lawyers who perceive their team leaders as genuinely servant-oriented experience their advocacy work as intrinsically purposeful and are more deeply engaged in their professional roles. In contrast, EL exerts a direct positive effect on work engagement ($\beta = 0.22$) but does not significantly influence work meaningfulness, and work meaningfulness does not mediate the EL-WE relationship. This suggests that ethical leadership promotes engagement through a different mechanism trust and normative compliance rather than through the cultivation of intrinsic meaning. The differential pattern of effects indicates that SL and EL engage lawyers through distinct psychological pathways, and that law firm managers should prioritize servant leadership as the primary approach for fostering meaningful, sustainably engaged professional teams. Although this study examined variables that have been frequently studied in populations such as employees or non-professionals, when examined in a professional community, it produced different results. This led to the conclusion that further research on these variables should be conducted by adding other variables thought to be relevant (such as work culture or compensation), with studies specific to individual professions, to produce more accurate results that can be used as a reference for human resource management in those professions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author expresses heartfelt gratitude to the individuals and institutions who have supported the successful completion of this research. Special thanks to the Universitas Indonesia for providing the necessary resources and facilities. The author also appreciates the valuable feedback and guidance received from the academic advisors and colleagues throughout the research process. Additionally, sincere thanks to all participants for their time and cooperation, which made this study possible.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Cut Datin Imanal Putri is the sole author of this study. She was responsible for the entire research process, including the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, and writing of the manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (2019). *Review : Shall the Twain Ever Meet ? Reviewed Work (s): Social Foundations of Thought and Action : A Social Cognitive Theory . by Albert Bandura Review by : Spencer E . Cahill Published by : American Sociological Association Stable URL : https://www.jst. 16(1), 12–13.*
- Bottomley, P., Mostafa, A. M. S., Gould-Williams, J. S., & León-Cázares, F. (2016). The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Organizational Citizenship Behaviours: The Contingent Role of Public Service Motivation. *British Journal of Management, 27(2)*, 390–405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12108>
- Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *Leadership Quarterly, 17(6)*, 595–616. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.004>
- Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. (2005). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 97(2)*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2005.03.002>
- Cartwright, S., & Holmes, N. (2006). The meaning of work: The challenge of regaining employee engagement and reducing cynicism. *Human Resource Management Review, 16(2)*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2006.03.012>
- Chiniara, M., & Bentein, K. (2016). Linking servant leadership to individual performance: Differentiating the mediating role of autonomy, competence and relatedness need satisfaction. *The leadership quarterly, 27(1)*, 124-141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.08.004>
- CNBC. (2021). *PBB Ramal India Negara Terpadat Dunia, Indonesia Nomor Berapa*. <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/research/20230421061010-128-431531/pbb-ramal-india-negara-terpadat-dunia-indonesia-nomor-berapa#:~:text=Sementara Indonesia tetap di peringkat,State of World Population 2023>.
- Demirtas, O., Hannah, S. T., Gok, K., Arslan, A., & Capar, N. (2017). The Moderated Influence of Ethical Leadership, Via Meaningful Work, on Followers' Engagement, Organizational Identification, and Envy. *Journal of Business Ethics, 145(1)*, 183–199. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2907-7>
- Engelbrecht, A. S., Heine, G., & Mahembe, B. (2017). Integrity, ethical leadership, trust and work engagement. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 38(3)*, 368–379. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-11-2015-0237>
- Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., van Dierendonck, D., & Liden, R. C. (2019). Servant Leadership: A systematic review and call for future research. *Leadership Quarterly, 30(1)*, 111–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004>
- Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work: test of a theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 16(2)*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(76\)90016-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(76)90016-7)
- Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87(2)*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.2.268>
- HukumOnline. (2016). *Rasio Jumlah Pengacara dan Penduduk di Empat Provinsi*.
- HukumOnline. (2023). *Jumlah Lawyer Masih Minim, Patut Menjadi Pilihan Karier Sarjana Hukum*. www.hukumonline.com.
- Kaur, H., & Mehta, P. (2023). Direct and mediating effects of work engagement on organisational commitment: a conceptual framework. *International Journal of Business Excellence, 30(1)*. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBEX.2023.130784>
- Kerr, S., & Jermier, J. M. (1978). Substitutes for leadership: Their meaning and measurement. *Organizational Behavior & Human Performance*.
- Khan, M. M., Mubarik, M. S., Ahmed, S. S., Islam, T., Khan, E., Rehman, A., & Sohail, F. (2021). My meaning is my engagement: exploring the mediating role of meaning between servant leadership and work engagement. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 42(6)*, 926–941. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-08-2020-0320>
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Meuser, J. D., Hu, J., Wu, J., & Liao, C. (2015). Servant leadership: Validation of a short form of the SL-28. *Leadership Quarterly, 26(2)*, 254–269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.12.002>

- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multidimensional measure and multi-level assessment. *Leadership Quarterly*, 19(2), 161–177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.01.006>
- Mostafa, A. M. S., & Abed El-Motalib, E. A. (2020). Ethical Leadership, Work Meaningfulness, and Work Engagement in the Public Sector. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 40(1), 112–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X18790628>
- Nurdiyansyah, E. D., Harjadi, D., & Karmela, L. (2024). The Influence of Meaningful Work and Work Environment on Organizational Commitment Through Work Engagement as a Moderator Variable in the Kuningan Regency Regional Apparatus. *Journal of Social Research*, 3(5).
- Ortiz-Gómez, M., Ariza-Montes, A., & Molina-Sánchez, H. (2020). Servant leadership in a social religious organization: An analysis of work engagement, authenticity, and spirituality at work. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(22), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17228542>
- Robert K. Greenleaf. (1979). Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness. *Business Horizons*, 22(3). [https://doi.org/10.1016/0007-6813\(79\)90092-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0007-6813(79)90092-2)
- Rosso, B. D., Dekas, K. H., & Wrzesniewski, A. (2010). On the meaning of work: A theoretical integration and review. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30(C), 91–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2010.09.001>
- Ruyle, K. E., Eichinger, R. W., & De Meuse, K. P. (2009). *FYI for talent engagement: Drivers of best practice for managers and business leaders*. Lominger International a Korn Ferry Company.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2002). *An overview of Self-determination Theory: An organismic-dialectical perspective*.
- Schaufeli, W. B. (2012). Work engagement: what do we know and where do we go? *Romanian Journal of Applied Psychology*, 14(1), 3.10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000002301006>
- Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The Measurement of Engagement and Burnout: *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3, 71–92.
- Song, Y., Lan, J., Zheng, G., & Wang, Y. (2023). Innovation of Social Workers Under Different Leadership Styles: An Experimental Vignette Study. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 33(7), 754–767. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315221131319>
- Steger, M. F., Dik, B. J., & Duffy, R. D. (2012). Measuring Meaningful Work: The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI). *Journal of Career Assessment*, 20(3), 322–337. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072711436160>
- Sugiarto. (2017). *Metodologi Penelitian Bisnis*. ANDI.
- Thao, N. P. H., & Kang, S. W. (2020). When Servant Leaders Inspire Followers to Become Organizational Citizens? Empirical Evidence From Vietnam. *SAGE Open*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019900184>
- van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 1228–1261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310380462>
- van Dierendonck, D., & Patterson, K. (2015). Compassionate Love as a Cornerstone of Servant Leadership: An Integration of Previous Theorizing and Research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 7(27), 2008–2010. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s>
- Wang, Z., & Xu, H. (2019). When and for Whom Ethical Leadership is More Effective in Eliciting Work Meaningfulness and Positive Attitudes: The Moderating Roles of Core Self-Evaluation and Perceived Organizational Support. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 156(4), 919–940. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3563-x>
- Wang, Z., Xu, H., & Liu, Y. (2018). How Does Ethical Leadership Trickle Down? Test of an Integrative Dual-Process Model. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 153(3). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3361-x>
- Yang, C., Ding, C. G., & Lo, K. W. (2016). Ethical leadership and multidimensional organizational citizenship behaviors: The mediating effects of self-efficacy, respect, and leader–member exchange. *Group and Organization Management*, 41(3), 343–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601115594973>