The role of organizational justice as mediator in the relationship between Islamic work ethics and work engagement

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine organizational justice's role as a mediator in the association between Islamic work ethic and work engagement among Sharia Bank employees. The respondents were 86 employees of Sharia Bank in Jakarta. The hypothesis was examined through a mediation test that involved four steps, including three simple regression and multiple regression. The results showed that organizational justice meditates the relationship between Islamic work ethic and work engagement among Sharia Bank employees. Employees who strongly uphold Islamic work ethics will have a positive perception of organizational justice, which, in turn, leads to higher engagement with their work. These findings have implications on how organizations can enhance employees' work engagement by promoting employees' positive perception of organizational justice.

Introduction

Researchers are very interested in work engagement and how it affects organizational performance (Alvi & Abbasi, 2012). Moreover, others noted that work engagement is significant to research due to its potential to improve organizational performance and favorably impact employee, team, and organization outcomes (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Past research found that work engagement has a positive influence on achieving organization's goals (Abdulrahman et al., 2022) as it affects employees' performance, psychological wellbeing, work motivation, responsiveness to organizational change and lower turnover intention (Juyumaya, 2022; Aboramadan et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2023).

Research on work engagement has been ongoing for over two decades (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Baker and Albrecht (2018) use the definition of work engagement based on the research by Schaufeli et al. (2007) as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption". Vigor refers to a high level of energy and mental resilience at work. Dedication relates to being strongly involved in a job and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge. Meanwhile, absorption is characterized by total concentration and working happily, so they

do not feel the passage of time. Kahn (1990) defined employees' work engagement as a process by which members of an organization apply and communicate their physical, cognitive, and emotional selves in the performance of their work duties. Based on several definitions of work engagement, the researchers concluded that work engagement is the positive behavior of employees in an organization to improve company performance, which is characterized by passion, enthusiasm, and total concentration at work, despite various challenges.

Job demands-resources theory proposed that the model of employee engagement is developed by organizational and personal factors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Furthermore, according to this theory, work engagement facilitates the manifestation of job performance because of a combination of job characteristics such as job control, task variety, and personal resources such as abilities, traits, and values. Therefore, current researchers also involve personal aspects in their studies (Bakker et al., 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Researchers from Indonesia also explained that one crucial factor that must be considered when predicting work engagement is the personal element. Some personal variables such as efficacy, optimism, and organization-based self-esteem have been employed in several investigations (Mandala & Nurendra, 2020). Thus, this study aims to investigate the significance of the personal factor influencing work engagement that stems from individual values.

One of the variables that reflects the value of work for individuals is the concept of work ethic. This implies that ethics needs to be considered individually to increase organizational productivity. As industrial productivity has developed, many countries in both the East and the West have experienced unethical problems, such as the increasing growth of corruption, weak exploitation, and increasingly rampant immoral behavior (Ahmad & Owoyemi, 2012). Furthermore, the study of ethics in business arose due to many recent facts, such as reduced ethical standards in the business community (Yesil et al., 2012). In Pakistan, for example, unethical behavior has led to critical situations such as low efficiency, reduced income, and even bankruptcy in some companies, such as Enron, WorldCom, Arthur & Andersen, Pakistan Steels Miils, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), and Pakistan Railways (Marri et al., 2012). In Indonesia, past research found that work ethics have a favorable effect on employees' performance, with higher employees' work ethics being associated with higher performance (Christa, 2023).

Individual or personal ethics, including work ethics, are related to individuals' beliefs and religion. Religious thoughts and beliefs can be reflected in understanding ethics in business life (Yesil et al., 2012). This is also supported by Luthans (1998), who states that the role of religion will affect individuals' ethical understanding. For example, the Protestant work ethic (PWE) is considered to contribute to the economic success of Western society. Likewise, Islamic ethics was considered to contribute to the greatest period of the Islamic Empire during the eight to fourteenth centuries, as Islam is regarded as having the capacity to resolve ethical problems within the Muslim community (Rokhman & Hassan, 2012)

Inspired by the role of Protestant work ethics in the West, this research aims to examine how the concept of Islamic work ethics affects work engagement among employees in Indonesia. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of The Republic of Indonesia, data in 2022 (retrieved October 29, 2023), Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population, with 87% of its population identifying as Muslim. Based on that, the Indonesian government is currently actively promoting Islamic finance. Thus, in 2002, Bank Indonesia, the central bank of the Republic of Indonesia, prepared a blueprint for developing Sharia banks in Indonesia and supported it by opening Sharia bank branches and units. Moreover, Bank Indonesia has formulated a grand strategy for Islamic banking development, such as a comprehensive strategy of market development covering bank image, developing various products, improving services, etc. In order to achieve this grand strategy, it is important to have human resources with adequate hard and soft competencies. Hard competencies are

understood as technical competencies needed by employees to be able to execute their tasks, such as the ability to operate computers and programs. In comparison, soft competencies are an employee's internal capacity that determines their performance, such as communication skills, self-confidence, teamwork abilities, and others (Spector, 2021). As a new phenomenon in Indonesian banking, Sharia Bank needs support to establish its sustainability and its employees' hard and soft competencies, including values that reflect on their work ethics to enhance their performance.

Islamic work ethics is defined as a set of moral principles that distinguish what is right and wrong in Islam (Farid et al., 2019; Rokhman & Hassan, 2012). Marri et al. (2012) defined Islamic work ethics as an orientation towards work through a virtuous approach to human life. This ethic is based on the Qur'an as a guide for Muslims in all aspects of life. Based on these definitions, the researcher concludes that Islamic work ethics is a set of moral principles in the world of work that are capable of distinguishing between right and wrong and are based on the Qur'an and Hadith as a guide for human life. Since the Qur'an encourages people to be involved in and committed to their work and forbids unethical behavior and unproductive behavior like begging, laziness, and wasting time, Muslim employees are likely to be satisfied with their jobs and commit to their organization and little or no intention for leaving their organization (Marri et al., 2012). Past research found that permanent staff members at an Islamic institution in Yogyakarta have higher passion and dedication to their work when they adhere to an Islamic work ethic, as they believe that Muslims should be internally motivated to work as hard as they can, due to the belief that their effort is as important as their worship (Mandala & Nurendra, 2020). This is consistent with the idea of work engagement, which holds that motivated workers exhibit vigor, devotion, and absorption,

Based on the previous research on how Islamic work ethics influence work engagement, this study advances the previous ones by adding other factors that might influence employees' work engagement in Sharia Bank. Some researchers suggest that, aside from personal aspects, organizational factors might influence employee work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The results of research conducted by Moliner et al. (2008), as cited in Strom et al. (2013) found that one of the antecedents of work engagement is organizational justice. Organizational justice is defined as a subjective perception of justice in organizations that is reflected in various aspects of employee work life, such as perceptions of fairness in the distribution of resources and decision-making (Mubashar et al., 2022). According to Folger and Cropanzano (1998) and Herr et al. (2018) organizational justice is related to the company's condition, leading individuals to believe that employees are treated fairly which includes procedural justice, which refers to the perceive of fairness about the mechanisms used to allocate outcomes; distributive justice, which refers to fairness regarding outcome distributions, and interactional justice that deals with fairness regarding interpersonal treatment. Further, some researchers define organizational justice as justice that directs employees' perceptions of fair treatment received from an organization and their behavioral reactions to that perception. Based on the description and previous research about organizational justice, it can be concluded that organizational justice is an employee's perception of justice based on the organization's treatment of the employees (Al Halbusi et al., 2020; Alvi & Abbasi, 2012; Hameed et al., 2019; Jehanzeb & Mohanty, 2019).

According to Schminke et al. (2005), organizational justice is closely related to ethics. The study of ethics focuses on individuals and how individuals' perceptions influence organizations. Meanwhile, research on justice also pays attention to situations that affect perceptions of the organization. Rokhman and Hassan (2012) found a positive correlation between Islamic work ethics and organizational justice. Employees who perceive their organization treats them unfairly or unjustly will look for opportunities to improve their welfare and take unethical actions to balance the injustice done to them by the organization (Rokhman & Hassan, 2012). Another research found that there is a strong relationship between perceptions of fair treatment in general and ethics. The results indicate that unethical

behavior decreases when employees believe the company treats employees fairly (Zeng & Ye, 2016).

The previous research that has been explained gives three conclusions. First, Mandala & Nurendra (2020), found that Islamic work ethic affects employee work engagement. Second, the research revealed that Islamic work ethics influence organizational Justice (Rokhman & Hassan, 2012). Third, organizational justice influences work engagement (Strom et al., 2013). These conclusions direct researchers to examine the role of organizational justice as a mediator in the relationship between Islamic work ethics and work engagement. The researchers assumed that employees with strong Islamic work ethics would emphasize justice and welfare in the field of work; in this situation, the employees' feelings about justice will emerge, and employees will generate positive reactions to their work, that is, work engagement. In addition, employees with work attitudes such as Islamic work ethic have their own internal motivation to create high morale and dedication. Thus, we expected that higher Islamic work ethics would be associated with higher positive perceptions of organizational justice, which, in turn, would relate to higher work engagement. We hypothesized that:

Hypothesis: Organizational Justice mediates the relationship between Islamic work ethics and work engagement

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 86 (54,4% female, 20-45 years old) employees working in Sharia banks with the following characteristics: (1) are Muslim, (2) have status as employees in Sharia Bank, (3) have at least one year of service as they already have sufficient experience in justice and adequately engage with their work. See Table 1.

This research was conducted using a representative sample. In this study, researchers used a non-probability sampling technique. This technique was chosen because only some in the population have the same opportunity to become a research sample. Sampling was done by convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a technique that considers respondents' availability and willingness to become research subjects. The selection of respondents must also pay attention to the characteristics of the respondents determined in this study.

Table 1
Respondent distribution, Mean and Standard Deviation Research Variable

Aspect		N	%	Mean			Standard Deviation		
				IWE	OJ	WE	IWE	OJ	WE
Gender	Male	46	54.40	79.63	75.28	67.89	7.710	13.084	8.252
	Female	40	45.6	78.55	73.45	65.55	7.785	11.318	8.910
	Total	86	100	79.13	74.43	66,8	7.718	12.258	8.594
Ages	20-25	24	26.7	77.79	71.42	63.96	7.934	11.34	9.332
	26-30	42	49.0	78.38	75.57	67.05	7.473	12.146	8.497
	31-35	15	18.4	81.6	75.78	70.53	8.365	13.845	7.150
	36-40	4	4.6	84	75.25	66.25	3.916	16.07	7.632
	41-45	1	1.2	86	74	71.00	-	-	-
	Total	86	100	79.13	74.43	66,8	7.718	12.258	8.594
Working Period	1-5	71	81.5	79.08	73.27	65.94	8.174	12.887	8.851
	6-10	10	12.5	78.6	80.5	71.80	5.296	7.502	6.909
	11-15	3	3.6	78.67	78	68.33	6.110	1.000	4.041
	16-20	2	2.4	84	80	70.00	2.828	8.485	1.414
	Total	86	100	79.13	74.43	66.8	7.718	12.258	8.594

Notes: IWE = Islamic Work Ethics, OJ=Organizational Justice, WE=Work Engagement

Instruments

All instruments in this research used back-translated methods. Firstly, the instruments were translated into Bahasa Indonesia by the researcher. Secondly, the items in Bahasa were translated back into English by a professional translator (Ozolins et al., 2020). The result of back translation confirmed that those have similar meanings according to expert judgment and researchers.

Work Engagement

Work engagement was measured via the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale - Short-form (UWES-SF), which consists of 17 items. UWES was developed to cover three dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. This scale has internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), which ranges between 0.80 and 0.90. In this research, UWES was modified into 19 items by splitting two items (i.e., items number 2,4) into two items each as those used the terminology 'and', which potentially led to bias (Azwar, 2012). Item number 2: "*I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose*", was split into two items: 2a. "*I find the work that I do full of meaning*" and 2b. "*I find the work that I do full of purpose*". Item number 4: "At my job, "*I feel strong and vigorous"* was split into two items: 4a. "*At my job, I feel strong*" and 4b. "*At my job, I feel vigorous*". In this *scale*, respondents chose one of five alternative responses namely: "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", and "always". The Cronbach alpha of 19 items is 0.90, which is the same as the original scale with 17 items.

Islamic Work Ethic

Islamic work ethic was measured through the Islamic Work Ethic Scale developed by Ali, (1988). This scale covers three key factors: personal ethics, work intention/ethics, and trusteeship. This scale consists of 17 items and has been widely used in some Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, UNI Emirates Arab, and Kuwait. The instrument has good internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$). The researcher modified the original scale by splitting five items (i.e., item number 3,4,7,10.12) into two items each as those used the word 'and', which potentially led to bias (Azwar, 2012). Therefore, the total number of items that were used was 21. This 21-item scale has $\alpha = 0.876$, which is higher than the Cronbach Alpha of the original scale. This instrument used five answer choices, namely: "strongly disagree", "no disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", and "strongly agree". Examples of items: "*good work benefits both oneself and others",* and *"justice and generosity in the workplace are necessary conditions for society's welfare*".

Organizational Justice

Organizational Justice was measured through organizational justice developed by Niehoof & Moorman (1993), which consists of 20 items that measure three dimensions of organizational justice: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. We modified it by splitting three items into two items each, as those used the word 'and', which potentially led to bias (Azwar, 2012), so there were 23 items in total. The scale has a coefficient of Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 for the distributive justice dimension, 0.87 for the procedural justice dimension, and 0.90 for the dimension of interactional justice. This instrument has five choice answers, which are: "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree", and "strongly agree". Examples of items were: "*job decisions are made by the general manager in an unbiased manner* "; "*I feel that my job responsibilities are fair* ".

Data analysis

The statistical analysis technique used in this study was regression analysis. The hypothesis was tested using the mediator testing method formulated by Baron & Kenny (1986). This method was chosen because it is still used by many researchers. This article was cited

31433 times in APA PsycNet (PsycNet, 2024). In addition, as Baron and Kenny's method could not facilitate the significance of mediating effect testing, it suggested the usage of the Sobel test (Widhiarso & Retnowati, 2012). According to Baron & Kenny (1986), variables become mediators if they fulfill four assumptions: first, if the independent variable affects the dependent variables. Second, if the independent variable affects the mediator variables; third, if mediator variables affect dependent variables; and fourth, if dependent and mediator variables affect independent variables. Data were analyzed through statistical packages for social science (SPSS) version 17.0 for Windows.
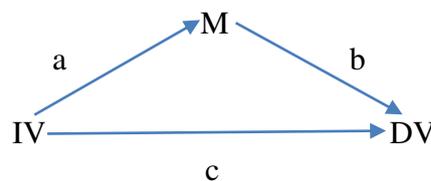
Results

Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted through four steps, as mentioned by Baron & Kenny (1986):
1. The influence of Islamic work ethics on work engagement
2. The influence of Islamic work ethics on organizational justice, which is suspected as a mediator
3. The influence of organizational justice, which is suspected as a mediator on work engagement
4. The influence of Islamic work ethics on work engagement through organizational justice

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a variable is confirmed as a mediator variable if the coefficient of direct influence of independent variables (IV) on dependent variables (DV) is insignificant or smaller than the coefficient of the influence of independent variables (IV) on dependent variables (DV) after the introduction of mediators (M). Baron and Kenny describe the conceptualization of the mediator model as explained in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The conceptualization of the mediator model

Source: Baron & Kenny (1986)

Table 2
The result of data analysis using simple regression and multiple regression.

Variable	Organizational Justice			Work Engagement			
	R	R2	B	R	R2	β	p
Islamic Work Ethic (IV)	0.337**a	0.114**a	0.337**a	0.353**a	0.125**a	0.353**a	
	Path a			Path c			
Organizational Justice (M)				0.555**a	0.308**a	0.555**a	
				Path b			
Islamic Work Ethic *				0.583**b	0.339**b	0.187	0.052
Organizational Justice (IV*M)						0.492**b	0.000

** = p < .01; * = p < .05; a = simple regression analysis; b = multi regression analysis

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the direct effect of Islamic work ethic on work engagement (β = 0.353; p<.01) becomes insignificant compared to the effect of Islamic work

ethics on work engagement after the introduction of organizational justice (β=0.187; *p*>.05), it's mean that organizational justice confirmed as a full mediator for the association between Islamic work ethic and work engagement.

In the next step, the researcher conducted the Sobel test, introduced by Sobel (1982). This method was proposed for assessing the significance of indirect effect. In the application of the Sobel test, Abu-Bader and Jones (2021) explain that to conduct the Sobel test, we should determine a and b as unstandardized regression coefficients and their standard errors (S_a and S_b). The Sobel test is using the Z formula (Abu-Bader & Jones, 2021). The unstandardized regression coefficient in this research is described in Figure 2.

Figure 2
The unstandardized regression coefficient
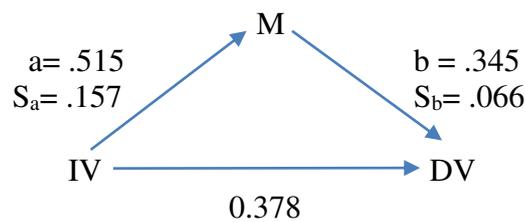
Furthermore, a Sobel test is carried out with the aim of finding out whether the function of this mediator has proven significant by using the Sobel test calculator contained in the link https://quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm, or use the formula:

$$z\text{-value} = a*b/\text{SQRT}\ (b^2*s_a^2 + b^2*s_b^2)$$

The Sobel test result confirmed that organizational justice significantly mediates the relationship between Islamic work ethic and work engagement (Z = 2.778, *p* < .001).

Discussion

This study examined the mediating role of organizational justice in the relationship between Islamic work ethic and work engagement among sharia bank employees. This research showed a significant association between 1) Islamic work ethic and work engagement, 2) Islamic work ethic and organizational Justice, 3) organizational Justice and work engagement, and 4) Islamic work ethic and organizational justice and work engagement. The result also confirmed that organizational justice mediates the relationship between Islamic work ethic and work engagement. The mediating process was fully mediating as the direct effect of Islamic work ethic on work engagement became insignificant when organizational justice was involved.

This result supports the previous research that found Islamic work ethics influence employees' positive workplace attitudes. A study conducted among accounting found that employees who develop Islamic work ethics feel more satisfied with their jobs (Amilin et al., 2018). Moreover, Spector (2021) found that employees with a strong Islamic work ethic showed a strong work attitude, commitment, and low intention to leave the company as they believed in the values of being grateful for what they gained, thus further strengthening their bond with the work. This research also demonstrated that employees with strong Islamic work ethics have strong work engagement. Employees with Islamic work ethics put the job as a priority leading to increased dedication, passion, and a willingness to learn from their experiences.

This result also showed that Islamic work ethic was associated with organizational justice. Employees with strong Islamic work ethics build the perception of strong organizational justice. This indicates that employees who have gratitude as part of their Islamic work ethic, will positively perceive organizational justice and will accept what the

organization supports as fair treatment. This finding is relevant to the research result conducted by (Amilin et al., 2018) that found that Islamic work ethic was associated with perceived organizational justice. Moreover, Raza et al. (2022) found that employees with Islamic work ethics view positive about their organization and intend to show positive behaviors in their workplace. They believe that Islam teaches helpful behaviors and would reward them in this world and the hereafter for their good behaviors.

We also found support for the role of organizational justice as a mediator in the relationship between Islamic work ethic and work engagement. Employees with strong Islamic work ethics will have a more positive view of organizational justice and the more employees feel that they were treated fairly by the organization, the more they engage with their work. Employees with strong Islamic work ethics will understand that Islam prioritizes justice and mutual prosperity and view work as a tool to develop the meaning of work and self-respect, and organization rewards every contribution they have made. Thus, when they perceive being treated fairly, they will improve positive feelings and trust, which in turn, leads to support for the decisions and policies provided by the organization.

From this study, it is also understood that the role of organizational justice is a full mediator in the association between Islamic work ethics and work engagement, and it explains that the existence of organizational justice strengthens the influence of Islamic work ethics on work engagement. This indicates that employees who hold Islamic work ethics would have positive feelings about their organizational justice; these positive feelings would lead to strong work engagement. Meanwhile, those who perceive a lack of organizational justice while maintaining Islamic work standards will still engage in their work. However, the development of work engagement will not be prolonged, and whatever work engagement does arise, may quickly diminish.

This research has implications on how management or organizations may enhance employees' work engagement by promoting positive perceptions about organizational justice through fair treatment in their interaction, decision-making procedure, and distribution of resources. Management could build justice in their management system including in hiring people, reward systems, conflict management, layoffs, and performance appraisals (Cropanzano et al., 2007). This research also has limitations. First, it is related to the limitation of the number of respondents, which limits the generalization of the result. Future research needs to increase the number of respondents recruited from many Sharia bank companies or advance this research by involving those from conventional banks and non-banking companies. Second, it is related to the data analysis technique. Future research could advance the research by using more sophisticated methods and data, such as LISREL or AMOS to test the model.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that organizational justice mediates the relationship between Islamic work ethics and employees' work engagement. This study strengthens existing literature by confirming that a higher Islamic work ethic is associated with employees' perceptions of organizational justice, which, in turn, leads to employees' work engagement. This research also provides insights into how organizations might enhance employees' work engagement by managing their interaction, decision making, and distribution of resources which are integrated into their management system to promote a positive perception of organizational justice.

Declarations

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