

## Virtuous Leadership and Performance: The Mediating Role of Work-Life Balance among IT Professionals in India

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### Abstract:

This exploration objects to scrutinize the cloak of “Virtuous leadership” (VL) on the IT sector “Employee performance” (EP). Besides, this swotting also core on the intervening influence of “Work life balance” (WLB) on the overhead relationship. The paper elected a quantifiable plot disbursing the convenience sampling proficiency by accruing the data via a structured questionnaire on 581 IT sector employees, currently professioned in various IT hubs of India. The data was poised from April 2025 until November 2025. The results of the current study provide empirical evidence that VL significantly increases EP in IT employees. Additionally, implications show that WLB strongly mediate the bond between VL and EP when taken in mileu. The conclusion of the current study effectively supported the favourable concerns of EP through VL, and WLB.

**Keywords:** Virtuous leadership (VL), Employee Performance (EP), Work-Life Balance (WLB), IT employees (ITE), Hybrid working (HW)

### 1. Introduction:

Value creation and economic transformation in developing economies are significantly influenced by digitalisation and ICT adoption (Poudel & Gopinath, 2025). Particularly in developing nations like India, ICT growth increases economic efficiency through knowledge spillovers, digital infrastructure, and innovation capacities (Aljneibi et al., 2024). The Indian IT and Business Process Management industry created over USD 250 billion in revenues and accounted for 7.5% of the national GDP (NASSCOM, 2024). Agile methodologies, digital collaboration tools, and hybrid work arrangements have changed organisational culture since the pandemic, increasing flexibility while raising performance standards (IBEF, 2025). In India's IT industry, hybrid work has evolved from a pandemic contingency to a structurally entrenched operating paradigm. The results of this transformation depend on the design of policies, management skills, and digital work environments (Bloom et al., 2024). Hybrid work has many advantages, such as flexibility, cost and access to talent asynchronously, but it also has challenges related to maintaining employees' performance, engagement and their work–life balance (Galanti et al., 2021; Kumari et al., 2025). Because culture and performance rely on how transitioning between work modes

is structured across time, hybrid work therefore necessitates a more comprehensive conceptualisation across modality, location, and temporality aspects (Lauring & Jonasson, 2025). According to research, supportive organisational policies that promote balance and psychological well-being, such flexible scheduling and hybrid work arrangements, have a beneficial impact on job satisfaction and productivity (Sofiani & Supriatna, 2021).

Leaders' behaviour towards their staff are seen to be crucial for both organisational and EP (Crossan et al. 2017). Studies demonstrate that strong principles including justice, morality, honesty, courage, persistence, and tolerance are desirable traits in leaders (Hendriks et al. 2020; Yuan et al. 2023). A rising body of scholarly study has focused on leadership styles based on moral, pro-social, or people-centered practices in response to today's leadership difficulties. This includes virtuous leadership (Wang and Hackett, 2020). The virtues of leadership style promote psychological safety, respect the personal space of employees, and grants resources to realize the equilibrium and involvement required to sustain Individual EP (Hendricks et al., 2020). According to Cameron (2011), virtuous leaders are those with high morals and values whose acts and behaviours demonstrate great ethics and integrity in their day-to-day job. According to empirical research, VL serve as role models whose actions create moral environments and impact followers via social learning as opposed to merely following rules (Wang & Hackett, 2022). Employees in Indian IT industries have shown a preference towards leaders that champ fairness, flexibility and moral integrity over those who firmly believe in performance-related management system (Bajpai et al., 2025). The Indian IT industry – that is quite a bit surprising given VL as a precondition to sustainable performance (Hariyani et al., 2025). In addition, the efficiency of leadership in hybrid work arrangements also has a substantial impact on EP directly and indirectly by way of psychosocial constructs, including WLB (Naqshbandi et al., 2024).

In the Indian IT industry, WLB is still a major problem since high job expectations and long work hours lead to stress and burnout, which compromises employee wellbeing (Kavyashree, 2025). WLB is a state of an individual being content with both their work and home life. Finding a happy medium between duties at work and activities that improve personal life is called WLB (Gragnano et al., 2020). WLB becomes a key component with regards to employee retention and over all the ability for success of knowledge-based industries such as IT where most work is project dependent and time-bound (Sheshadri et al., 2024). Research indicates that VL practices create favourable psychological states, particularly well-being, which in turn contribute to better attitudes and functioning at work (Özkan & Ardiç, 2025). Leaders with a reputation for empathy and caring may be more likely to recognize their employees' nonwork obligations, support flexible work hours, and promote the practice of boundary management (Steenkamp & Dhanesh, 2023; Cameron, 2011). Further, flexible work can enhance WLB, according to a synthesis of Indian IT research (Mahalakshmi & Aziz, 2024). However, there are still concerns about boundary blurring and unequal organisational support, which makes governance mechanisms such as manager training, workload norms, and role-based hybrid eligibility which is essential to sustainable hybridisation (Babu & Sahayam, 2025).

The degree to which workers successfully contribute to organisational goals through productivity, quality, and efficiency is reflected in Employee performance (EP), a crucial concept in organisational study (Koopmans et al., 2011). Industrial and commercial psychologists have expressed interest in EP as a crucial metric; studies have found success in elucidating and forecasting behaviours (Koraus et al., 2020). Instead of focusing just on task completion, EP is increasingly seen as a dynamic and complex result influenced by organisational support systems, leadership behaviours, and individual-level psychological and capacity aspects (Mazzetti et al., 2022; Rai et al., 2024). Because it creates positive work environments, increases employee commitment, and improves individual performance outcomes, VL has become a significant determinant of EP in modern organisational research, especially within ethically driven and people-centric management frameworks (Ribeiro et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2025). Research in manufacturing organizations or similarly related work settings show that VL is positively concomitant with productivity and job performance (Avey et al., 2011; Hendriks et al., 2020).

Within the hybrid IT work domain, where boundaries between work and home life may become permeable due to digital connections to work (Thompson & Prottas, 2006), leadership has a profound influence on WLB through flexible working hours and respect for personal time, as established positive factors that relate high performance over time (Katili et al., 2021; Talukder et al., 2018). Regretfully, problems and solutions that are crucial to a

person's performance are frequently scattered across many domains and handled separately (Koraus et al., 2020). To surmount these challenges, the Indian IT sector now requires efficient, diligent, and dedicated workers who are prepared to go above and beyond their assigned duties and put up extra effort to achieve organisational goals in order to overcome these obstacles (Ansari and Upadhyay, 2021).

## **1.2 Research Gap**

The context of the Indian IT sector is ideal for the present study due to its size, dynamism and specific workforce issues. It not only boosts the economic growth but also sets a benchmark for professional work culture in the country as it is one of the largest contributors to GDP and exports. It is one of the top knowledge-based industry employs directly more than 5.4 million employees (NASSCOM, 2024). The current research examines the interaction among IT employees in hybrid work environment among various IT hubs of India, regarding Virtuous leadership (VL), employee performance (EP), and Work life balance (WLB). Particularly, this article analyzes the influence of VL on EP and explores the mediation of WLB between VL and EP. Research focusing on these variables aims to fill a key literature gap in hybrid working in India. Even though various existing literature studied the dynamics related to hybrid work globally, it does not provide much insight on what precisely could be the implications on VL, EP and WLB specific aspects within the country's specific socio-economic-organizational environment.

## **2. Theoretical foundation and Hypothesis Formulation:**

### **2.1 Theoretical foundation:**

This research is grounded on Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2008, 2012) "Self-Determination Theory" (SDT) which postulates that all humans have three evolved physiological needs that must be satisfied in order to facilitate optimal functioning: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to SDT, fulfilling these needs can lead to greater levels of intrinsic motivation, which relates to desirable outcomes such as more engagement, more well-being, and greater performance.

### **2.2 Virtuous leadership:**

The Latin word "Virtus," which means strength or brilliance, is the cradle of the term "virtuousness" Oraibi and Saeed (2021). It is the moral and intellectual integrity of a person's behaviour and character that always inspires him to carry out good deeds for the good of the organisation and himself (Karahana and Bulbul, 2022). Cameron (2011) specifies moral virtues that are part of VL in relation to decision-making, relationships and organizational practices such as fairness, honesty, humility, compassion, friendliness, civility, respect, care and justice. Recent research redefines VL as a values-driven strategy that fosters honesty, empathy, trust, and the well-being of the group within the framework of positive organisational scholarship (Hendriks et al., 2020). Whereas ethical leadership tends to focus on moral avoidance (Brown et al., 2005), VL represents an agentic ascendancy: it goes beyond avoiding harm; it benefits the well-being of others (Cameron & Winn, 2012). According to empirical research, VL serve as role models whose actions create moral environments and impact followers via social learning as opposed to merely following rules (Wang & Hackett, 2022).

### **2.3 Virtuous leadership & employee performance**

The crucial nature of EP is becoming increasingly ostensible in the era of globalisation and growing competition (Thin et al. 2021). Suprayitno and Wibowo (2020) defines performance as the result that a person achieves when he completes the tasks assigned to him; this is based on time, skill, experience, and earnestness. According to Darvishmotevali and Ali (2020), EP is a gauge of how well an employee can carry out his tasks and obligations. However, performance management entails more than simply monitoring employees; it also entails providing them with constructive feedback and assisting them in developing their abilities via training and development (Motalebi et al. 2022).

The findings of a research on Indian bank professionals by Tripathi (2024) showed a close liaison between EP and VL. Employees who trust their leader's virtuous character are happier, more engaged, and perform better, which can improve Indian banks' efficiency. Wang and Hackett (2016) found that moral and servant leadership behaviors had positive effects on task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors by facilitating followers to attribute trust upon them or to identify with them. In a similar vein, Ribeiro et al. (2025) found that emotional commitment rose in response to views of VL, which greatly improved EP. This finding supports the social exchange theory's contention that moral and ethical leadership practices inspire subordinates to put out equal effort. Panda and Singh (2025) discovered that Indian IT employees who rated their supervisors high on virtue experienced higher creativity and client satisfaction.

Leadership behaviors employing autonomy, social support and meaning-inducing have long-term induced an increase of vigour, dedication and absorption which has resulted in high In-role performance (Wang et al., 2023; Rahmadani et al., 2020). Employees in Indian IT industries have shown a preference towards leaders that champion fairness, flexibility and moral integrity over those who firmly believe in performance-related management system (Bajpai et al., 2025). From the aforementioned literature, the following hypothesis is put forth-

**H1:** VL positively influences the EP of IT sector employees.

#### **2.4 Virtuous leadership & Work-Life Balance:**

Work-Life Balance (WLB) is a state of an individual being content with both their work and home life. Finding a happy medium between duties at work and activities that improve personal life is called WLB (Gragano et al., 2020). Greenhaus and Allen (2011) describe WLB as "the extent to which an individual is engaged in – and satisfied with – his or her various roles". WLB becomes a key component with regards to employee retention and overall the ability for success of knowledge-based industries such as information technology where most work is project dependent and time-bound (Sheshadri et al., 2024). According to Norling & Chopik (2020), working in a healthy and supportive environment leads to feeling less disturbed which assures better work-family conglomerate, high quality of life, ultimately resulting in better work output. Research indicates that VL practices create favourable psychological states, particularly well-being, which in turn contribute to better attitudes and functioning at work (Özkan & Ardiç, 2025). Leaders with a reputation for empathy and caring may be more likely to recognize their employees' nonwork obligations, support flexible work hours, and promote the practice of boundary management (Steenkamp & Dhanesh, 2023). According to studies on hybrid work resources, WLB is made possible when leaders encourage trust, independence, and adaptability—resources that let workers self-regulate limits and bounce back (Pensar & Rousi, 2023).

Organisational supports, particularly supervisor support, have small-to-moderate beneficial impacts on work-family outcomes at the systems level. This supports the notion that leadership is a useful channel that makes WLB programs applicable in day-to-day work (Blom et al., 2025). Managers across IT and other domains, gain better employee sentiments and reduced fatigue if they openly support and exhibit work life practices (Mori et al., 2022). Employees who perceive more VL report far greater levels of work-related well-being, and good work affect is substantially associated with improved WLB, according to the research (Hendriks et al., 2020).

Thus, this hypothesis is proposed-

**H2:** VL positively influences WLB of IT sector employees.

#### **2.5 Work-Life Balance and Employee Performance.**

It is becoming more widely accepted that EP is a sustainable result that is contingent upon the ability of individuals to manage the boundaries between their work and nonwork responsibilities. WLB has been empirically shown to improve performance, in part because it facilitates recuperation and lessens stress, both of which promote sustained effort and efficacy at work (Borgia et al., 2022; Darwin et al., 2025). When employees are in balance, they feel less strain and have more mental resources (energy, attention, emotional stability) to put into the continuous efforts involved in work tasks and creativity (Valery et al., 2023). While family-supportive supervisor behaviours strengthened some of this relationship, WLB predicted job performance both directly and indirectly

through job satisfaction in a large SME study. This highlights how supportive contexts help employees translate balance into higher performance (Susanto et al., 2022). Research conducted with construction professionals revealed that WLB significantly improved project performance, going beyond individual task outputs. These gains were further enhanced by positive co-worker relationships, indicating that social resources can transform WLB into quantifiable performance gains (Ahiabu et al., 2024). According to Putri & Sumarsono (2025), WLB greatly improves EP, suggesting that employees who successfully manage their personal and professional obligations are more productive and produce better work. Additionally, recent studies highlight the critical impact that WLB initiatives like remote work, flexible working hours, and supportive organisational policies have in boosting employee engagement and motivation, which in turn improves overall performance (Kasperczuk et al., 2025). According to Said et al. (2025), workers with higher WLB have reduced stress and burnout, which improves output and performance.

From the aforementioned literature, the following hypothesis is proposed-

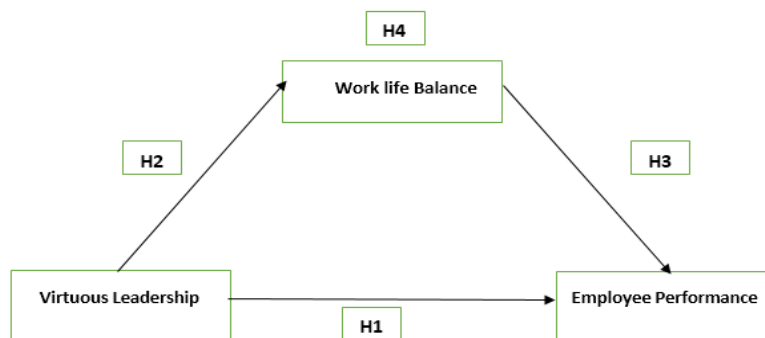
**H3:** WLB positively influences EP of IT sector employees.

**2.6 Mediating role of work life balance between virtuous leadership and employee performance.**

According to empirical research, leadership behaviours have a major impact on WLB, which in turn influences employee attitudes and performance results (Talukder et al., 2018). According to recent research, employee-centric factors like well-being and WLB frequently influence the indirect links between leadership and performance (Inceoglu et al., 2018). By encouraging adaptability, independence, and encouraging work conditions, leadership plays a critical role in supporting WLB. VL and other positive leadership philosophies promote equity and trust, which helps workers better balance professional and personal obligations (Duarte et al., 2021). By fostering adaptable, trustworthy, and encouraging work environments, leadership plays a critical role in supporting WLB. According to Azila-Gbettor et al. (2024), positive leadership styles, such as VL, have been repeatedly associated with increased employee well-being, which serves as a conduit for better work results. Banerjee & Malik (2026) continue to report that leadership support for balance is a positive predictor of self-reported and supervisor-rated performance in IT and knowledge-oriented industries. Similar patterns can be seen in hybrid and remote work such that leader empathy reduces work–family conflict and increases intrinsic motivation. These aspects can be seen to interact rationally and intelligently, which helps performance (Choudhury et al., 2021). Meta-analytic reviews of the effects of job resources, such as leadership support, autonomy, and work acting through multiple mechanisms (e.g., well-being) continue to support this notion (Schaufeli, 2017). According to the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2011), resource gains in other life domains like WLB, motivation and vitality can build up toward maximizing outcomes. Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

**H4:** WLB positively mediates the relationship between VL and EP.

**2.7 Postulated Model:**



**Figure 1: Postulated Model**

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study looks at how VL and EP are related. Additionally, it attempts to comprehend how VL affects EP through WLB in Indian IT professionals operating in hybrid work environments. The study employs a single cross-sectional descriptive research design while taking the research questions into account.

#### 3.2 Respondents and instrument design

Respondents embrace IT professionals working for IT organisations (start-ups, mid-sized, and multinational corporations) from different technology clusters in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, Noida, Chennai, and Gurgaon make up the target demographic. We only included those IT workers who were reachable through professional networks (LinkedIn, organisational contacts, alumni associations) and organisations that consented to participate in our sampling frame. IT employees who operate on a hybrid paradigm, which consists of at least some remote work and some in-office were included in this study. A survey questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection. It comprises of four sections viz. (i) Demographic profile (ii) VL (iii) EP and (iv) WLB. Superior VL was calculated with a 18-item scale devised by Wang and Hackett (2016). The 4 item scale for measuring self-reported EP using respondents perception of their own performance was adapted from Yousef (2000). The 15 item scale for measuring WLB was adopted from Hayman (2005).

#### 3.3 Data Acquisition

The data set was compiled from IT professionals involved in hybrid working from Delhi NCR, India. Sample collection tenure is from April 2025 to November 2025. 581 personnels partaken in study. The response rate meets the required cut-off criteria (Baruch, 1999). **Table 1** portrays the personnels demographic abridgment.

**Table 1: Demographic Outline**

Demographic Outline of Respondent			
		Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	Male	387	66.6
	Female	194	33.4
<b>Age</b>	Up to 25 years	186	32.0
	25-35 Years	160	27.5
	35-45 Years	160	27.5
	Above 45 years	75	12.9
<b>Qualification</b>	Graduate	440	75.7
	Post Graduate	109	18.8
	Others	32	5.5
<b>Designation</b>	Operational	507	87.3
	Managerial	74	12.7
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>581</b>	<b>100</b>

4. Results:

4.1 Data Analysis:

The descriptive statistics of the variables have been completed first (Table 2). Appropriate statistics are used to investigate the measurement model's "convergent and divergent validity." A description of the model fit of the suggested structure and hypothesis testing concludes the investigation (Bentler and Bonett, 1980; Scott and Bruce, 1994). "Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling" (PLS-SEM) was the analytical method used.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis:

As shown in Table 2, "Descriptive Statistics" and Pearson correlation coefficients for Employee Performance (EP), Work life balance (WLB), and Virtuous Leadership (VL) are provided. EP has a mean of 3.179 and a "Standard deviation" of 0.761, signifying that employees rate their performance slightly higher on average, as well as relatively higher variation in the data than in the other variables. VL has a mean of 3.346 and a "Standard deviation" of 0.897 showing that the respondents show somewhat more positive responses to virtuous leadership but there is a lot of variation in the responses. WLB has a mean of 3.237 and a standard deviation of 0.843.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Descriptive Statistics				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	VL	WLB	EP
VL	3.346	0.897	1		
WLB	3.237	0.843	.634**	1	
EP	3.179	0.761	.334**	.455**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There was no multicollinearity problem since the VIF value for WLB and VL was less than 5 (Hair et al., 2010). Since the "Skewness and Kurtosis" values fall between -1 and +1 (Demir, 2022), it is presumed that the data is normally distributed and appropriate for parametric testing (Hair et al., 2010). As mentioned in below table, Cronbach's Alpha value is above 0.7 which indicate good reliability, and suggest excellent internal consistency (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1967). Also, the Durbin Watson statistic value was also found to be below 2, which suggests positive autocorrelation where errors tend to be clustered together (Ali, M. M., 1987).

Table 3: Nature of Data, Internal Consistency & Multicollinearity

Variable N=581	Cronbach's alpha	Collinearity Statistics		Durbin-Watson
		Tolerance	VIF	
WLB	0.945	.566	1.558	1.879
EP	0.812	NA	NA	
VL	0.952	.582	1	

4.3 Evaluation of "Measurement model":

Several goodness-of-fit indices were calculated by SmartPLS to assess whether the measurement model is acceptable. Table 4.9 gives a summary of the fit for both the saturated and estimated models. The "Standardised Root Mean Square Residual" (SRMR) for the saturated (0.038) and estimated (0.049) models is both under the suggested cut-off value of 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), signifying an acceptable model fit. Values of the dissimilarity measured ULS and DG for the saturated model were 1.593 and 0.481, and for the estimated model, 2.611 and 0.482, respectively. These values are well within the accepted ranges of residual differences between

the empirical covariance matrix and the model-specified matrix (Hair et al., 2019). The Chi-square values were 1,515.169 for the saturated model and 1,508.922 for the estimated model. Given that chi-square values may be sensitive to sample size, the close juxtaposition of such values in the two models suggests robustness of the measurement model specification. The “Normed Fit Index” (NFI) for both models was 0.906, above the 0.90 suggested cut-off point and indicating good incremental fit (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). Overall, this set of indicators collectively suggests the model is robust and excellently represents the relationships among the variables under study.

**Table 4: Measurement Model Fit Summary**

Fit Indices	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	Recommended Threshold	Interpretation
SRMR (Standardised Root Mean Square Residual)	0.038	0.049	≤ 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)	Acceptable fit
d_ ULS (Squared Euclidean Distance)	1.593	2.611	Lower values = better fit	Acceptable
d_ G (Geodesic Distance)	0.481	0.482	Lower values = better fit	Acceptable
Chi-square	1,515.169	1,508.922	Lower values = better fit; sensitive to N	Acceptable
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.906	0.906	≥ 0.90 (Bentler & Bonett, 1980)	Good fit

**Interpretation:** Both saturated and estimated models fit well, with SRMR values below 0.08 and NFIs above 0.90. The measurement model's robustness is confirmed by acceptable discrepancy measures (d\_ ULS and d\_ G) and consistent chi-square statistics across models.

Considering all of these indices, the measurement model fits the data well. The excellent SRMR, NFI, and RMSEA values also indicate that the model is well-specified and the observed variables adequately represent the latent constructs. This gives some reassurance that we are safe to move on to the structural model evaluations.

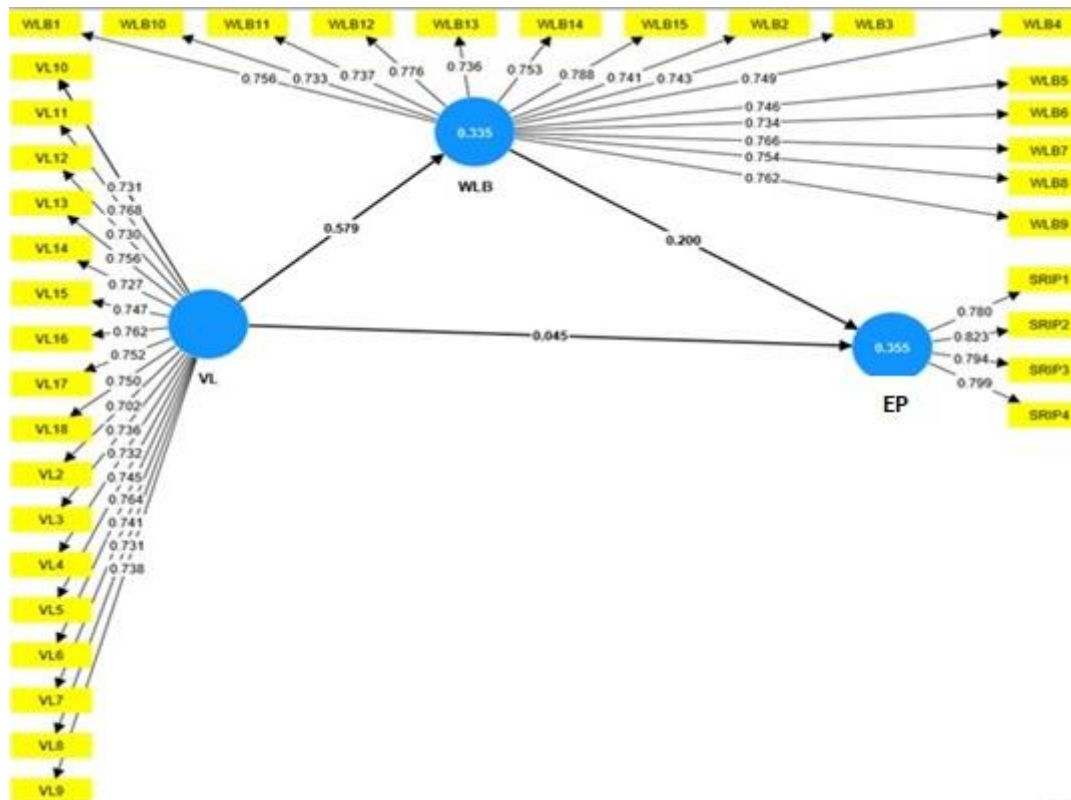
**Table 4 and Table 5** pageants the suppositions of CFA (Gaskin and Lim, 2017). It presents the factor loadings, standard errors (S.E.), and t-values for the constructs: Virtuous leadership (VL), Employee Performance (EP), and Work life balance (WLB).

**Table 5: Factor Loadings of Study Variables**

Construct	Items	Factor Loading
EP	EP1- EP4	0.780- 0.823
VL	VL1–VL18	0.702 – 0.768
WLB	WLB1–WLB15	0.733 – 0.788

These values support the conclusion that all items contribute appropriately to the construct, although there are minimal differences among the individual indicators. The extensive nature of the measured construct enhances the assessment's reliability and suggests that the leadership behaviours evaluated are adequately captured by it. It should be noted that all items exceeded the 0.70 threshold, indicating the importance of each item in representing the latent construct. The factor loadings for exceeding the recommended value of .70 are strong, resulting in a high level of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2021).

Figure 2 “Confirmatory factor analysis”



4.4 Evaluation of reliability and validity of construct:

Table 6 empirically countersigns the model endorsing convergent and discriminant validity midst the constructs (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 6: Reliability and validity of construct

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Interpretation
VL	0.952	0.957	0.552	Highly reliable, valid
WLB	0.945	0.951	0.565	Highly reliable, valid
EP	0.812	0.876	0.639	Reliable and valid

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  level.

Reliability is the degree to which items of measurement are useful in reflecting their corresponding constructs. All constructs surpassed the criterion (0.70) for Cronbach's Alpha and obtained a satisfactory internal reliability (Nunnally, 1978). EP ( $\alpha = 0.812$ ), VL ( $\alpha = 0.952$ ), and WLB ( $\alpha = 0.945$ ) demonstrated high reliability. The CR values were also greater than 0.70, vacillating from 0.876 to 0.957, signifying sturdy construct reliability. Convergent validity indicates the proportion of variance that items forming a construct have in common. This is

assessed with the AVE, which is found to be acceptable if coefficients exceed 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All the constructs also have AVE worth greater than the identified standard limit; AVE values of the constructs included EP (0.639), VL (0.552), and WLB (0.565). This suggests that over 50% of the variance in items was accounted for by their intended constructs, establishing convergent validity.

Discriminant validity is that constructs are not the same in nature, or should not be measured together. Both the "Fornell–Larcker" criteria and the "Heterotrait-Monotrait" (HTMT) ratio were used to assess this. The square root of each construct's AVEs should be greater than its correlations with other constructs, per the "Fornell–Larcker" criteria in order to demonstrate an acceptable level of discriminant validity. The values obtained support discriminant validity. Discriminant validity is said to exist if the square root of the AVE of any construct is more than the correlations it shares with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The square root of the AVE for EP is 0.799, which indicates values well above the correlations between EP and VL (0.264) and WLB (0.358). Similarly, the square root of the AVE of VL is 0.743, which is greater than the correlations of VL with EP (0.264) and WLB (0.579). The square root of the AVE of WLB, finally, equals 0.752, exceeding its correlations with EP (0.358), VL (0.579), and WE (0.270). Additionally, all HTMT values were below the liberal threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), indicating that the constructs' discriminant validity was supported. The HTMT approach introduced by Henseler et al. (2015) is a stricter criterion than the "Fornell–Larcker" test. It assesses discriminant validity by probing the ratio between construct correlations to within-construct correlations. Values of less than 0.85 (strict criterion) or less than 0.90 (liberal criterion) are usually considered as an indicator for acceptable discriminant validity. The HTMT values for VL and EP are 0.295, which are far from the cut-off. The correlation between WLB and EP was 0.405, and WLB with VL was 0.606. All of these values are much lower than the critical value of 0.85, further supporting the conclusion that the constructs are empirically distinct.

4.5 Hypothesis Testing:

Table 7 Hypothesis testing summary

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Conclusion
VL→ EP	.462***	NA	Hypothesis H1 Accepted
VL→ WLB	.579***	NA	Hypothesis H2 Accepted
WLB→ EP	.200***	NA	Hypothesis H3 Accepted
VL→ WLB→ EP	.045***	.335***	Hypothesis H4 Accepted

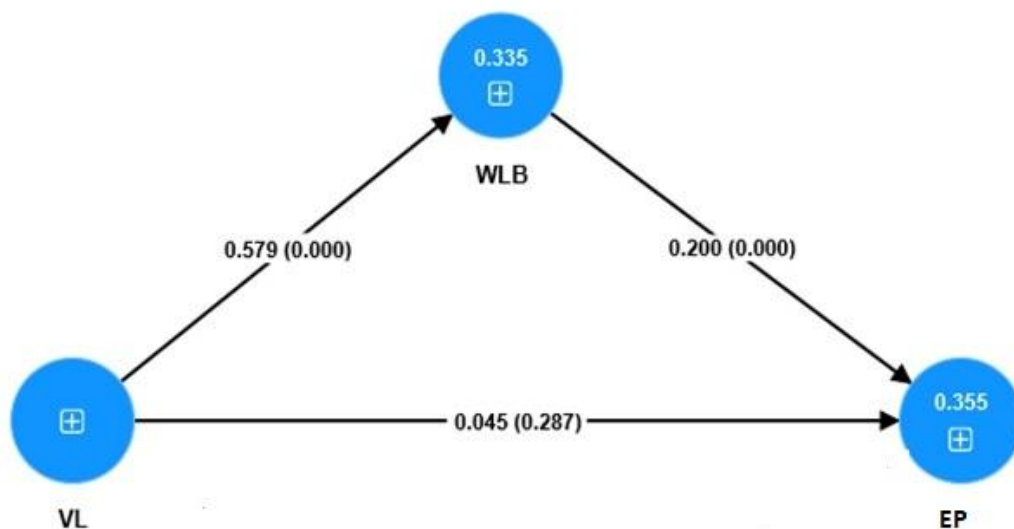
Legends: VL-Virtuous Leadership; WLB-Work life Balance; EP-Employee Performance

\*\*\*Denotes p<0.001

This study conducts a path analysis of the relationships between Virtuous Leadership, Employee Performance, and Work life balance. The results support strongly all of the tested hypotheses (Table 7). H1 hypothesized that VL would directly impact EP. As can be seen, there is a direct effect of VL on EP (0.462\*\*\*) emphasizing the prominence of VL in enhancing the way employees work and the value they deliver to the organization. This result supports H1. Hypothesis H2 considered that VL would have a positive effect on WLB. As can be seen, there is a direct effect of VL on WLB (0.579\*\*\*) which indicates that virtuous leadership enhances WLB. This indicates that leaders who can demonstrate ethical, empathic and integrity driven behavior around them lead to positive work-life balance in their employees. This relationship emphasizes the importance of leadership to cultivate an organizational culture and behaviors that support individual well-being, work-life balance and comprehensive employee development. This result supports H2. Hypothesis H3 tested that WLB would have a positive effect on EP.. As can be seen, there is a direct effect of WLB on EP (0.200\*\*\*) which indicates that WLB enhances EP. These results support H3, showing that employees who can successfully manage their work–personal lives tend to have more outcomes relating to effectiveness, commitment, and satisfaction in the job. According to Hypothesis H4, WLB positively and significantly mediates the interaction of VL and EP. The analysis shows a strong and full mediation effect of WLB (0.335\*\*\*) on the relation between VL and EP

supporting H4. This suggests that VL affects EP by promoting WLB. The study results indicate a compelling instance of complete mediation. The supplementary path analysis indicates a positive and substantial direct association between VL and EP ( $\beta = 0.462, p < 0.001$ ). Nonetheless, when WLB is incorporated into the model as mediator, the direct relationship (VL  $\rightarrow$  SRIP) becomes statistically insignificant ( $\beta = 0.045, p = 0.261$ ). When leaders demonstrate ethical conduct, empathy, and integrity it fosters an organizational climate that puts a priority on employee health and WLB. Staff who are afforded greater equilibrium between work and personal roles are less likely to feel stressed and miserable – and therefore will be more productive overall. This is consistent with prior research indicating that leadership practices that foster employee well-being indirectly influence performance outcomes.

Figure 3: Structural Model



\*Denotes  $p < 0.001$

### 5. Discussion

The current probe has three critical variables: VL, EP and WLB. Our goal is to form a nested association between VL, EP and WLB among IT employees of India working in hybrid work environment. While VL is an independent variable, EP is dependent in the union of VL and EP. When it comes to the union of VL and WLB, VL is an independent variable whereas WLB is dependent. When it comes to the union between WLB and EP, WLB is an independent variable whereas EP is dependent. Additionally, the study tried to control how VL affected EP both directly and through WLB mediation. The study's conclusions support the proposed connections between VL, EP, and WLB, providing insightful information on employee dynamics and organisational behaviour. First, VL has a major direct impact on EP, demonstrating that leaders' treatment of their employees is viewed as critical for both organisational and EP. This confirms by Tripathi (2024), who claimed that employees who trust their leader's virtuous character are happier, more engaged, and perform better, which can improve Indian banks' efficiency. Moreover, Ribeiro et al. (2025) underlined that if leaders demonstrate notable virtues in the workplace, they may create an emotionally unswerving staff that is driven to stay with the same company and strive for greater levels of EP.

Second, this study demonstrates a positive linkage between VL and WLB, which shows that leaders who operate with empathy and integrity on a regular basis provide the setting for employees to negotiate their own work-life

challenges without fear of retaliation or condemnation. By establishing flexible work schedules, respecting personal privacy rights, and acting in a balanced manner, ethical leaders may show that workers can successfully combine their personal and professional obligations. This verdict is consistent with basic assumptions of “Positive organizational scholarship”, that a key factor in promoting wellbeing is leadership and other multi-dimensional components of the employee (Cameron, 2011). According to research, leaders may help employees achieve a more peaceful work-family balance and lessen work-family conflict by offering resources like autonomy, scheduling control, or emotional support (Kossek et al., 2023). Additionally, the research's conclusions offer compelling proof that WLB and EP in Indian IT industries have a substantial and favourable association. This result indicates that employees who are able to reconcile the work/non-work conflict have better performance, also in demanding hybrid working conditions. WLB has been empirically shown to improve performance, in part because it facilitates recuperation and lessens stress, both of which promote sustained effort and efficacy at work (Borgia et al., 2022; Darwin et al., 2025). When employees are in balance, they feel less strain and have more mental resources (energy, attention, emotional stability) to put into the continuous efforts involved in work tasks and creativity (Valery et al., 2023).

Finally, WLB fully mediates the link between VL and EP. A significant indirect impact ( $\beta = 0.116, p < 0.001$ ) was found in the mediation research, suggesting that the performance outcomes linked to VL are mostly caused by the improvement of WLB rather than by a direct mechanism. According to several research, effective leaders foster an environment that prioritises justice, compassion, and moral consciousness, which aids individuals in striking a healthy balance between their personal and professional life. This equilibrium subsequently reduces stress, increases vitality, and strengthens the mental and emotional skills necessary for peak performance. This implies that the main way that the benefits of VL are experienced, is through WLB. Leadership is witnessed as an essential work resource that affects performance via mediators like well-being and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). According to worldwide data, ethical and servant leaders also contribute to WLB, which in turn increases workplace productivity and lowers turnover (Freire & Bettencourt, 2020; Wong et al., 2020).

## **6. Implications of the study**

### **6.1 Theoretical Implications**

In terms of theoretical angle, the fallouts of this investigation bolster the premise that VL is positively allied with EP. It offers empirical evidence in the context of Indian IT sector employees lacking researcher’s thoughtfulness. Since the literature on this relation is limited, may perhaps be well thought-out as a root for further studies. Further, this study, which extends “Self-Determination Theory”, also links VL to EP under the framework of WLB in a way so that employees through WLB can contribute in making VL-EP relationship stronger. Most of the previous studies focused on institutional theory to establish the relation amid VL and EP. This study, by using “Self-Determination Theory” tried to prove the aforementioned relationship.

### **6.2 Practical Implications**

Furthermore, the practical view highlights a zone (VL) that is still being considered, particularly in emerging nations like ours, and calls for a bigger collective level of consideration from establishments, particularly IT sector personnel, and additional concomitant parties. Establishments can include ethical leadership in appraisals into their core culture. These results can be used by upper management to match organisational objectives with leadership style. Rather than short-term productivity improvements, investing in WLB programs and moral leadership can result in long-term performance. Organisations must actively support flexible work schedules, unambiguous boundary-setting standards, and equitable task sharing since WLB serves as a mediator. Flexible work schedules, "no-meeting" zones, and mental health days are examples of policies that might assist staff in successfully juggling personal and professional obligations.

### **7. Limits & upcoming research advices**

Even while the literature examining the connection between VL and EP is expanding, there are still a number of gaps. Future studies might examine the following topics, such as how organisational kinds and cultural differences may affect the link between VL and EP. Employee perceptions of VL initiatives and whether or not they result in higher EP may vary depending on cultural norms. Since most research is cross-sectional, it is challenging to determine causality. Further information on the long-term effects of VL advancements on EP may be obtained through longitudinal research. Future research should also examine how VL affect EP, given the rising acceptance of hybrid employment, especially in those sectors where in-person presence is restricted. Furthermore, the statistics were compiled solely from IT professionals working in hybrid mode in different IT hubs of India only. A diversified sample from several provinces and nations may help generalise the consequences. All-inclusive accessible literature may not have been attained. The current study used "self-administered" VL, EP, and WLB questionnaires to gauge employee attitudes. Employees may report socially acceptable responses, which might result in self-serving bias. Additionally, the sample magnitude & procedure may disturb interpretation. Hence, impending probes must substantiate the consequences. This probe studied the mediating effect of WLB only, amid VL besides EP. Future research might consider further mediating and moderating variables such as psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, work engagement etc. This study relied only on primary data obtained through close ended questions, future research must follow mix method approach having qualitative data as well.

### **8. Conclusion**

With a focus on the mediating function of WLB, the current study investigated the link between EP and VL among IT professionals working in a hybrid work environment. The results offer compelling proof that VL, which is defined by honesty, compassion, justice, and moral behaviour, significantly improves EP. Building trust, creating psychological safety, and promoting employee engagement are all crucial in the changing hybrid work environment, and leaders that exhibit these principles are better at doing so.

Crucially, the study shows that WLB is an important mediating factor in this connection. VL immediately improves performance, but its effects are amplified when workers have a good WLB. Maintaining WLB becomes more difficult and crucial in hybrid work environments, where the lines between work and home are frequently blurred. Higher levels of dedication, productivity, and general performance are more likely to be displayed by workers who can successfully manage their obligations without experiencing undue stress or burnout.

The findings also show that traditional leadership techniques must change in mixed work situations. In order to prioritise employee well-being in addition to performance results, leaders must move beyond task-oriented management and adopt a more comprehensive, people-centric approach. Businesses are better positioned to achieve long-term success and sustained performance when they simultaneously establish supportive WLB policies and invest in the development of moral leaders.

The study concludes by highlighting how crucial it is to combine well-being programs with moral leadership practices in hybrid work settings. In addition to having a direct impact on EP, VL also indirectly improves it by fostering a better WLB. As a result, companies in the IT industry need to implement a dual-focused approach that fosters both employee wellbeing and leadership excellence. In the long run, this strategy will lead to a more resilient, engaged, and contented workforce in addition to enhancing individual and organisational performance.

### **Declarations**

Each author affirms that they have no competing interests. We used human subjects in our study. While answering questions from the questionnaire, participants orally gave their informed consent.

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