

The Influence of Toxic Leadership on Work Engagement with Mental Well-Being as a Mediating Variable among Four-Star Hotel Employees in the Tangerang Area

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Toxic Leadership, Work Engagement, Mental Well-Being.

Received: 20, May

Revised: 15 June

Accepted: 10 July

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of toxic leadership on work engagement among four-star hotel employees in the Tangerang area, with mental well-being serving as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach with a causal associative design was employed, collecting primary data via online questionnaire from 64 non-managerial hotel staff respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4. The results indicate that toxic leadership has a significant negative effect on mental well-being ($\beta = -0.391$; $p = 0.007$). Mental well-being significantly and positively affects work engagement ($\beta = 0.458$; $p = 0.000$). Toxic leadership also has a significant negative direct effect on work engagement ($\beta = -0.253$; $p = 0.032$). Furthermore, mental well-being significantly mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and work engagement ($\beta = -0.179$; $p = 0.022$), confirming partial mediation. These findings underscore the critical role of psychological well-being as a transmitting mechanism through which toxic leadership undermines employee engagement in the hospitality sector.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry constitutes one of the most operationally demanding service sectors, where employee psychological conditions and work engagement are critical determinants of service quality. The rapid expansion of hotel businesses in the Tangerang area has intensified managerial pressures on human resource systems. According to data from the Banten Provincial Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2025), the number of star-rated accommodation establishments in the Banten region has grown substantially, yet this expansion has not consistently been accompanied by improvements in managerial quality that support employee well-being.

A growing concern in organizational behaviour research is toxic leadership – a destructive leadership pattern characterized by manipulative, authoritarian, and psychologically harmful behaviours toward subordinates (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). In hotel operations, where supervisor-subordinate interactions occur intensively throughout every shift, toxic leadership can generate significant psychological pressure on employees. Such conditions threaten both the mental well-being of hotel workers and their capacity to remain engaged in their roles.

Work engagement, defined as a positive, fulfilling psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2019), is particularly vital in hospitality where employee attitudes directly shape guest experience. However, mental well-being functions as a critical psychological bridge between leadership behaviour and engagement outcomes: when mental well-being is depleted by destructive leadership, the capacity for engagement is correspondingly diminished.

Although the relationship between toxic leadership and work engagement has been examined in healthcare settings (Cakiroglu & Unver, 2024) and higher education (Klahn Acuña & Male, 2024), empirical investigation within the Indonesian hospitality sector – particularly among four-star hotel employees in Tangerang – remains substantially limited. This research gap constitutes the primary motivation for the present study. Accordingly, this study pursues four objectives: (1) to examine the effect of toxic leadership on mental well-being; (2) to examine the effect of mental well-being on work engagement; (3) to examine the direct effect of toxic leadership on work engagement; and (4) to test the mediating role of mental well-being in the relationship between toxic leadership and work engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Demands-Resources Theory (JD-R)

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory, developed by Demerouti et al. (2001), classifies working conditions into two broad categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands are physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that require sustained effort and are associated with physiological and psychological costs. When demands chronically exceed resources, a health-impairment process is activated that depletes employees' psychological energy and undermines their well-being. In the present study, toxic leadership is conceptualized as a critical negative job demand that

systematically drains employees' psychological resources through this health-impairment pathway.

Conservation of Resources Theory (COR)

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, proposed by Hobfoll (1989), asserts that individuals are motivated to acquire, retain, and protect resources they value. When psychological resources are threatened or lost due to destructive leadership environments, employees experience stress and diminished well-being. Conversely, individuals with strong psychological resource reserves (i.e., high mental well-being) can invest those resources to generate positive behavioral outcomes such as greater work engagement. The integration of JD-R and COR theories provides a robust framework for explaining how toxic leadership undermines engagement through the depletion of mental well-being.

Toxic Leadership and Mental Well-Being (H1)

Toxic leadership represents a destructive behavioral pattern in which leaders prioritize personal interests over those of team members and the organization, employing intimidation, manipulation, and self-promotion (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Cakiroglu and Unver (2024) demonstrated that toxic leadership significantly and negatively predicts mental well-being among nurses, while Rasool et al. (2021) confirmed similar findings across organizational contexts. In hotel environments where supervisory oversight is constant, abusive and authoritarian leadership behaviors can systematically undermine employees' psychological welfare through the JD-R health-impairment process.

H1: Toxic leadership has a negative and significant effect on employee mental well-being.

Mental Well-Being and Work Engagement (H2)

Mental well-being encompasses an individual's psychological welfare, reflecting the capacity to manage stress, maintain psychological functioning, and perform work productively (Tennant et al., 2007). Employees with high mental well-being are better positioned to sustain the energy, dedication, and full involvement that characterize work engagement. Cakiroglu and Unver (2024) confirmed a significant positive relationship between mental well-being and work engagement in nursing contexts. Consistent with COR theory, employees with robust psychological resources invest them productively in their work roles. This relationship is also supported by Wardhana et al. (2024), who found that job satisfaction significantly and positively influences work engagement among Generation Z employees in Indonesia, suggesting that psychological fulfillment at work is a key driver of engagement across various organizational contexts.

H2: Mental well-being has a positive and significant effect on employee work engagement.

Toxic Leadership and Work Engagement (H3)

Beyond its indirect effects through mental well-being, toxic leadership can directly erode work engagement by destroying intrinsic motivation, generating emotional withdrawal, and eliminating employees' sense of organizational belonging. Lee et al. (2023) found that toxic leadership significantly reduces work

engagement, while Naeem and Khurram (2020) similarly established a direct negative relationship between the two constructs.

H3: Toxic leadership has a negative and significant direct effect on employee work engagement.

Mediating Role of Mental Well-Being (H4)

Mental well-being is theorized to mediate the pathway from toxic leadership to work engagement. Under JD-R theory, toxic leadership initiates a health-impairment process that depletes mental well-being, which in turn reduces the psychological resources available for work engagement. Cakiroglu and Unver (2024) empirically confirmed this mediation pathway in healthcare, and Tepper (2007) argued that the consequences of abusive supervision are transmitted through victims' psychological states before affecting behavioral outcomes.

H4: Mental well-being mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and work engagement.

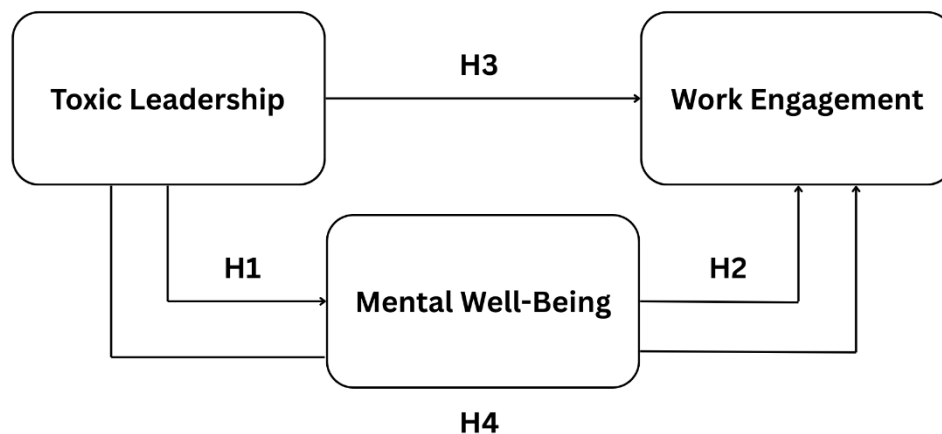


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal associative research design (Sugiyono, 2022). The target population comprised non-managerial employees of four-star hotels in the Tangerang area. Purposive sampling yielded a final sample of 64 respondents satisfying the following criteria: (1) employed in a four-star hotel in Tangerang, (2) holding PKWT (contract), permanent, or daily worker status, (3) positioned at staff/non-managerial level, and (4) possessing a minimum of three months' tenure.

Primary data were collected via an online questionnaire (Google Form) using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Toxic leadership (TL) was measured using five items (TL2, TL4, TL6, TL7, TL8) adapted from Cakiroglu and Unver (2024). Mental well-being (MWB) was measured using three items (MWB1, MWB3, MWB8) from the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (Tennant et al., 2007). Work engagement (WE) was assessed

using three items (WE1, WE4, WE7) from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2019).

Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) via SmartPLS 4. Analysis proceeded in two stages: (1) outer model evaluation, assessing convergent validity (outer loadings ≥ 0.50 ; AVE ≥ 0.50) and reliability (CR ≥ 0.70); and (2) inner model evaluation and hypothesis testing via bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) at a 5% significance level, including specific indirect effects for mediation testing.

RESEARCH RESULT

Respondent Characteristics

Of the 64 respondents, 53.1% were female and 46.9% male. The majority fell within the 20–30-year age bracket (64.1%), followed by 17–19 years (20.3%), 30–41 years (12.5%), and above 40 years (3.1%). Employment status was distributed across PKWT/contract workers (43.8%), daily workers (34.4%), and permanent employees (21.9%). Tenure was primarily 6–12 months (40.6%), followed by over one year (37.5%) and 3–6 months (21.9%).

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	30	46.9%
	Female	34	53.1%
Age	17-19 years	13	20.3%
	20-30 years	41	64.1%
	30-41 years	8	12.5%
	>40 years	2	3.1%
Employment Status	PKWT/Contract	28	43.8%
	Daily Worker	22	34.4%
	Permanent	14	21.9%
Tenure	3-6 months	14	21.9%
	6-12 months	26	40.6%
	>1 year	24	37.5%

Source: Primary Data (2026)

Measurement Model Assessment

Table 2 presents the outer model evaluation results.

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Toxic Leadership (TL)	0.762	0.836	0.507
Mental Well-Being (MWB)	0.574	0.770	0.532
Work Engagement (WE)	0.633	0.790	0.562

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2026)

As shown in Table 2, all constructs met the recommended thresholds, with AVE values exceeding 0.50 and Composite Reliability values above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). These results indicate that the measurement model possesses

satisfactory convergent validity and construct reliability. Although the Cronbach's Alpha value for the Mental Well-Being construct was 0.574, which falls below the conventional threshold of 0.70, this value is considered acceptable given that Cronbach's Alpha tends to underestimate reliability when the number of indicators is small (Hair et al., 2019). More importantly, the construct achieved a Composite Reliability (ρ_c) of 0.770, which surpasses the recommended threshold of 0.70, and an AVE of 0.532, which exceeds the minimum requirement of 0.50. As emphasized by Hair et al. (2019), Composite Reliability is regarded as a more appropriate and robust indicator of internal consistency than Cronbach's Alpha in PLS-SEM contexts, as it accounts for the actual factor loadings of each indicator rather than assuming equal contribution. Therefore, the Mental Well-Being construct is deemed to possess adequate reliability and convergent validity for further analysis.

Structural Model Assessment

Table 3. Structural Model Assessment

Variable	R ²	Q ²
Mental Well-Being (MWB)	0.153	0.139
Work Engagement (WE)	0.364	0.343

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2026)

The R² value for Mental Well-Being was 0.153, indicating that 15.3% of its variance is explained by Toxic Leadership. The R² value for Work Engagement was 0.364, indicating that 36.4% of its variance is explained by the proposed predictors.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Direct Effect Results

H	Hypothesis	Original Sample	T-Statistics	P-Value	Result
H1	TL → MWB	-0.391	2.705	0.007	Significant
H2	MWB → WE	0.458	3.819	0.000	Significant
H3	TL → WE	-0.253	2.143	0.032	Significant

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2026)

Table 5. Indirect Effect (Mediation Analysis)

H	Hypothesis	Original Sample	T-Statistics	P-Value	Result
H4	TL → MWB → WE	-0.179	2.295	0.022	Significant

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results (2026)

All four hypotheses are supported. H1 is confirmed: toxic leadership has a significant negative effect on mental well-being ($p = 0.007$). H2 is confirmed: mental well-being has a significant positive effect on work engagement ($p = 0.000$). H3 is confirmed: toxic leadership has a significant negative direct effect on work engagement ($p = 0.032$). H4 is confirmed: mental well-being significantly mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and work engagement ($p = 0.022$), with both direct and indirect effects remaining significant, confirming partial mediation.

DISCUSSION

Effect of Toxic Leadership on Mental Well-Being

The confirmation of H1 ($\beta = -0.391$; $p = 0.007$) demonstrates that toxic leadership substantially and negatively affects mental well-being in the four-star hotel context. This finding aligns with Cakiroglu and Unver (2024) and Rasool et al. (2021), and is theoretically grounded in JD-R theory's health-impairment process. Hotel employees subjected to abusive supervision, public criticism, and arbitrary treatment experience chronic depletion of psychological energy that progressively erodes their mental welfare. The hotel industry context amplifies this effect, given that constant guest-facing service requirements leave employees with limited recovery time between shifts.

Effect of Mental Well-Being on Work Engagement

The confirmation of H2 ($\beta = 0.458$; $p = 0.000$; $f^2 = 0.279$) establishes mental well-being as a robust positive predictor of work engagement, consistent with COR theory. Employees with strong psychological resources invest them productively in their work roles, manifesting as greater vigor, dedication, and absorption. The moderate-to-large effect size underscores the practical significance of mental well-being investment in the hospitality sector, where engaged employees directly translate to superior guest satisfaction.

Effect of Toxic Leadership on Work Engagement

The direct negative effect of toxic leadership on work engagement (H3: $\beta = -0.253$; $p = 0.032$) corroborates Lee et al. (2023) and Naeem and Khurram (2020). Toxic leadership directly diminishes employees' intrinsic motivation and triggers emotional disengagement — a pattern increasingly recognized as quiet quitting in service industries. Hotel supervisors who employ intimidation or favoritism undermine the sense of purpose and organizational commitment that sustain engagement. This finding is further corroborated by Margareta et al. (2026), who demonstrated using SmartPLS in an Indonesian organizational context that diminished job satisfaction significantly increases employees' turnover intention, reinforcing the notion that psychological resource depletion — triggered in the present study by toxic leadership — ultimately undermines employees' willingness to remain engaged with their organization.

Mediating Role of Mental Well-Being

The partial mediation confirmed for H4 ($\beta = -0.179$; $p = 0.022$) reveals that toxic leadership depletes work engagement through dual pathways: immediate motivational erosion (direct effect) and gradual psychological resource depletion transmitted through mental well-being (indirect effect). This finding extends Cakiroglu and Unver's (2024) model to the Indonesian hospitality sector and reinforces Tepper's (2007) argument that the consequences of abusive supervision are mediated by victims' psychological states. The partial — rather than full — mediation indicates that toxic leadership's damage to engagement is only partially recoverable through mental well-being improvement, making upstream mitigation of toxic leadership behaviors essential.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the influence of toxic leadership on work engagement among four-star hotel employees in Tangerang, with mental well-being as a mediating variable. All four hypotheses were supported: toxic leadership negatively affects mental well-being (H1) and work engagement (H3), mental well-being positively affects work engagement (H2), and mental well-being partially mediates the toxic leadership-work engagement relationship (H4). These findings validate the integrated application of JD-R Theory and COR Theory in explaining how toxic leadership undermines hotel employee engagement through psychological resource depletion.

Based on these findings, hotel management is advised to: (1) implement 360-degree leadership evaluation systems to detect and address toxic leadership behaviors early; (2) establish Employee Assistance Programs to support and monitor employee mental health; and (3) invest in positive leadership development training – particularly servant and transformational leadership – for frontline supervisors. Prospective investors and hotel operators should recognize toxic leadership as a structural risk factor that erodes the human capital foundations necessary for service excellence.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, the sample of 64 respondents, while adequate for SEM-PLS, limits the generalizability of findings. Second, the R^2 for mental well-being (15.3%) indicates substantial unexplained variance, suggesting that additional antecedents – such as work-life balance, compensation systems, or organizational culture – warrant investigation. Third, the cross-sectional design captures a single point in time and may not reflect dynamic changes in leadership behaviour or engagement across hotel seasons. Future research should expand the sample across the broader Jabodetabek region, employ longitudinal designs to capture temporal dynamics, and explore moderating variables such as social support or organizational resilience in the toxic leadership-well-being-engagement pathway.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express sincere gratitude to Dr. Oloan Situmorang, M.M., as thesis supervisor, for his invaluable guidance throughout the research process. The authors also extend appreciation to the management and employees of the four-star hotels in Tangerang who participated as respondents in this study.

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