



## Harnessing ethical leadership and Islamic workplace spirituality to boost workplace engagement

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### ABSTRACT

The research was conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between ethical leadership, Islamic workplace spirituality, and employee engagement in pesantrens in Bandar Sribhawono. The research employed a quantitative approach, where data was collected through questionnaires distributed both offline and online to pesantren managers. The collected data was then analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software with regression analysis techniques. The findings indicate that ethical leadership significantly correlates with employee engagement in pesantrens. Islamic workplace spirituality also shows a positive relationship with employee engagement. Additionally, there is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and Islamic workplace spirituality. These findings provide insight that ethical and spiritual values play crucial roles in enhancing employee engagement in pesantrens, with implications for pesantren management and human resource development in this context.

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## INTRODUCTION

Pesantren plays a crucial role in shaping the character and personality of students through comprehensive religious education (Mujahid, 2021). In this process, pesantren administrators face various responsibilities and challenges in running these educational institutions. They are accountable for daily management, administration, finance, and maintenance of pesantren facilities, as well as overseeing both religious and general education curricula and the teaching-learning process. Challenges include limited financial resources, as many pesantrens rely on donations and contributions from the community, and constraints in facilities and infrastructure such as classrooms and dormitories. Maintaining teaching quality is also a challenge, particularly in recruiting competent teachers. Support from the local community is essential, both in material and moral forms, as pesantrens often serve as centers for religious and social activities within the local community. For further development, administrators can collaborate with government and

private institutions to receive assistance in various forms and leverage technology in teaching and pesantren management processes (Effendi, 2024). Despite facing these challenges, with community support and existing development potential, pesantren administrators can continue to enhance their quality and contribution to society.

Employee engagement, or the involvement of pesantren administrators, is critically important as it directly impacts the effectiveness and success of pesantrens overall. When administrators actively engage in the vision, mission, and values of the pesantren, they tend to demonstrate higher commitment in carrying out their duties. This not only enhances productivity and the quality of educational services and student development but also encourages them to contribute creative and innovative ideas that can improve pesantren management and the learning experience (Boccoli, 2023). High engagement also boosts the psychological well-being of administrators by creating a supportive and motivating work environment, and strengthens positive interpersonal relationships among staff and students (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2020). Furthermore, pesantrens with actively engaged administrators are likely to build a positive reputation in the community, increasing trust and attracting prospective students. By prioritizing employee engagement, pesantrens in Bandar Sribhawono can optimize the potential of their administrators and strengthen their role in educating and guiding young generations with strong religious and moral values.

Ethical leadership stands as a cornerstone in building sustainable and ethical organizations (Mishra & Aithal, 2023), critically influencing employee engagement by fostering a thriving organizational environment (Ashraf, 2024). It involves leading with integrity, fairness, and honesty, prioritizing moral principles and values while inspiring teams to do the same. By cultivating a culture of trust, transparency, and respect, ethical leaders create an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to contribute positively to organizational goals (Newman, 2019). This alignment with the organization's ethical framework enhances employee commitment and performance, while open communication and feedback ensure inclusivity and clarity, resolving conflicts and reinforcing team cohesion. Organizations led by ethical leaders often experience lower turnover rates and cultivate cohesive, engaged teams capable of driving sustainable success and innovation, thus highlighting the profound impact of ethical leadership on organizational success and employee engagement (McKenna & Jeske, 2020). Ethical leaders demonstrate integrity and fairness in decision-making, act as role models, and foster a workplace culture where ethical considerations are integral. They inspire employees to align their actions with organizational values, create a sense of belonging and value through respectful treatment, and boost morale and motivation by recognizing efforts and contributions. Open communication reduces conflicts and enhances team cohesion, while lower turnover rates contribute to stable, experienced teams. Ultimately, ethical leadership drives sustainable success and innovation by fostering a culture of trust and respect, enabling calculated risks and creative thinking, positioning the organization for long-term success.

Islamic workplace spirituality, with dimensions such as taqarrub (striving to draw closer to Allah), muraqabah (awareness of spiritual vulnerability), and istiqamah (steadfastness in the right path), can have a significant positive impact on employee engagement in the workplace (Pariyanti, Rosid, et al., 2022). Firstly, taqarrub helps employees feel a deeper connection to their work, viewing it as a form of worship and a means to draw closer to Allah. This can enhance intrinsic motivation and a sense of ownership over their work (Adawiyah, W. R., Purnomo, R., Pramuka, B. A., & Sholikhah, 2020). Secondly, muraqabah teaches employees to be more conscious of ethical and moral values in their actions, fostering a more ethical and integrity-driven work environment. This can strengthen relationships among employees and build stronger trust within teams. Thirdly, istiqamah promotes consistency in behavior and commitment to upheld values, helping employees stay focused on organizational goals and vision in the long term (Pariyanti, Adawiyah, et al., 2022). By implementing Islamic spirituality, organizations can create a more

meaningful work environment that supports personal growth among employees and enhances their overall engagement (Sholikhah et al., 2023).

Although numerous studies have examined the influence of ethical leadership and Islamic workplace spirituality on employee engagement, research that incorporates these three variables into a single model remains limited. Based on the findings from Open Knowledge Maps (OKM) on employee engagement in 2024, there is a clear need for more studies integrating these variables to deepen our understanding of their complex interrelationships. The OKM analysis indicates 15 clusters relevant to employee engagement, revealing that it is influenced by various factors such as organizational culture, leadership styles, working conditions, and employee motivation. However, there is a lack of in-depth research examining the roles of ethical leadership and Islamic workplace spirituality in employee engagement, especially within the context of pesantrens. This gap is significant considering pesantrens have unique characteristics that encompass strong spiritual and ethical values. Ethical leadership, focusing on moral principles and justice, and Islamic spirituality, emphasizing the relationship with Allah and the application of religious values in daily life, can play a crucial role in enhancing employee engagement in pesantren environments.

This study aims to identify factors that facilitate or hinder employee engagement in pesantrens, specifically focusing on exploring the factors that support or hinder the implementation of ethical leadership and Islamic spirituality in enhancing employee engagement. By achieving these objectives, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of management theory and practice in pesantrens, offering new insights into how employee engagement can be enhanced through approaches that emphasize ethical and spiritual values. The hypotheses in this study are as follows: H1: Ethical leadership is positively related to employee engagement. H2: Islamic workplace spirituality is positively related to employee engagement. H3: Ethical leadership is positively related to Islamic workplace spirituality. These hypotheses will guide the investigation into the relationships between ethical leadership, Islamic workplace spirituality, and employee engagement in pesantren settings.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Types of research

The approach employed in this study is quantitative research (Sugiyono, 2018), aimed at gathering and analyzing numerical data to obtain measurable and objective insights into the role of ethical leadership and Islamic spirituality in enhancing employee engagement in pesantrens. Through this method, the research will utilize a survey instrument specifically designed to measure key variables such as ethical leadership, Islamic spirituality, and the level of employee engagement.

### Population and Sample

According to (Hair et al., 2013), a population refers to a broad group of objects or subjects that share specific qualities and characteristics, which researchers study to draw conclusions. In this study, the population consists of all caretakers of pesantrens in Bandar Sribawono, East Lampung, totaling 42 respondents. The sample used in this research includes all caretakers in Bandar Sribawono, East Lampung, totaling 42 individuals. The sampling technique employed in this study is saturated sampling, where all members of the population are included as samples, specifically 42 caretakers of pesantrens in Bandar Sribawono, East Lampung. This approach aligns with the definition provided by Sugiyono (2018), where saturated sampling is used when all members of the population are selected as samples.

### Data collection technique

The data for this research was collected using a questionnaire consisting of a series of written questions administered to respondents, focusing on three research variables. Each variable was measured using a Likert scale, where respondents rated their agreement levels on a scale of five points: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Ethical leadership was measured using a 10-item questionnaire adapted from (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). An example item is: "My supervisor listens to what employees have to say." Islamic workplace spirituality was measured using a 13-item questionnaire adapted from (Adawiyah & Pramuka, 2017). An example item is: "My religion supplies me with wisdom in adapting to conditions in the workplace." Employee engagement was measured using a 9-item questionnaire adapted from (Schaufeli et al., 2006). An example item is: "I feel emotionally involved in my work."

Before being used in the main study, a pilot study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. This pilot study involved a number of respondents randomly selected from the same population as the main study. The results of the pilot study were analyzed to ensure that each item in the questionnaire was well understood by the respondents and accurately measured the intended constructs. Feedback from the respondents in the pilot study was also used to refine and improve the questionnaire before its use in the main study. The process of adapting the questionnaire from its original sources involved several stages. First, the original questionnaire was translated into Indonesian by an experienced translator to preserve its original meaning. Next, back-translation into English was performed by a different translator to check for translation consistency. The adapted questionnaire was then tested on a small group of respondents from the target population to ensure language clarity and avoid ambiguity. Based on the pre-testing results, revisions were made to clarify any unclear parts. Finally, the questionnaire was validated using statistical analysis to ensure its validity and reliability in the research context. This systematic adaptation process ensures that the questionnaire accurately measures the variables and is well understood by respondents within the Indonesian cultural context.

### Data analysis technique

Following the collection of questionnaire data, which underwent validity and reliability testing, the author proceeded with classical assumption tests including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests. Subsequently, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted, followed by hypothesis testing using t-tests and F-tests, and finally, the coefficient of determination was calculated.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The respondents consisted of 42 individuals who were given questionnaires. Overall, validity and reliability of the data were tested in this analysis to evaluate whether the instruments met the criteria. Here are the results of the validity and reliability testing conducted in this study:

**Table 1 . Validity and Reliability Test Results**

| Variable           | Instrument | Validity | Realibility |
|--------------------|------------|----------|-------------|
| Ethical leadership | EL1        | 0.82     | 0.68        |
|                    | EL2        | 0.76     |             |
|                    | EL3        | 0.79     |             |
|                    | EL4        | 0.83     |             |
|                    | EL5        | 0.75     |             |
|                    | EL6        | 0.80     |             |
|                    | EL7        | 0.77     |             |
|                    | EL8        | 0.81     |             |
|                    | EL9        | 0.84     |             |
|                    | EL10       | 0.78     |             |

|                                |       |      |      |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|------|
|                                | IWS1  | 0.85 |      |
|                                | IWS2  | 0.87 |      |
|                                | IWS3  | 0.81 |      |
|                                | IWS4  | 0.83 |      |
|                                | IWS5  | 0.86 |      |
| Islamic workplace spirituality | IWS6  | 0.82 | 0.72 |
|                                | IWS7  | 0.80 |      |
|                                | IWS8  | 0.79 |      |
|                                | IWS9  | 0.88 |      |
|                                | IWS10 | 0.84 |      |
|                                | IWS11 | 0.89 |      |
|                                | IWS12 | 0.76 |      |
|                                | IWS13 | 0.78 |      |
| Employee engagement            | EE1   | 0.75 | 0.61 |
|                                | EE2   | 0.72 |      |
|                                | EE3   | 0.78 |      |
|                                | EE4   | 0.71 |      |
|                                | EE5   | 0.74 |      |
|                                | EE6   | 0.77 |      |
|                                | EE7   | 0.70 |      |
|                                | EE8   | 0.79 |      |
|                                | EE9   | 0.81 |      |

Source: Processed primary data (2024)

The instruments in the table show validity levels exceeding 0.3 and reliability exceeding 0.6. Ethical Leadership exhibits validity between 0.75-0.84 and reliability between 0.68-0.84. Islamic Workplace Spirituality shows validity between 0.76-0.89 and reliability between 0.72-0.88. Employee Engagement displays validity between 0.71-0.81 with an average reliability of approximately 0.74. These results indicate that all instruments are sufficiently valid and reliable for use in the study.

In the subsequent stage, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to assess the normal distribution of residuals. A significance threshold of 0.05 indicates normality. In this study, the obtained significance value was 0.06 ( $0.06 > 0.05$ ), confirming normal distribution of the data. Furthermore, a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test was performed to detect multicollinearity. VIF values  $\leq 10$  and tolerance values  $\geq 0.1$  suggest absence of multicollinearity. For Ethical Leadership (X1) and Islamic Workplace Spirituality (X2), identical VIF values of 1.005 and tolerance values of 0.995 were observed, indicating no multicollinearity between these variables. The standard threshold for multicollinearity (tolerance  $< 0.1$  or VIF  $> 10$ ) was not exceeded for these variables. Finally, the Heteroscedasticity Test indicated that residuals did not exhibit a discernible pattern, with points evenly distributed above and below the Y axis, confirming the absence of heteroscedasticity in the model.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and correlations

| Variable                             | Mean | SD   | EL   | IWS  | EE |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|----|
| Ethical leadership (EL)              | 4.20 | 0.65 |      |      |    |
| Islamic workplace spirituality (IWS) | 3.80 | 0.70 | 0.45 |      |    |
| Employee engagement (EE)             | 4.50 | 0.60 | 0.60 | 0.75 |    |

Source: Processed primary data (2024)

Table 3 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations among Ethical Leadership (EL), Islamic Workplace Spirituality (IWS), and Employee Engagement (EE). Ethical Leadership has a mean of 4.20 (SD = 0.65), indicating a high level of adherence to ethical leadership. Islamic Workplace Spirituality has a mean of 3.80 (SD = 0.70), showing moderate variability in perceptions of Islamic spirituality in the workplace. Employee Engagement has a mean of 4.50 (SD = 0.60), indicating a high level of employee engagement. Correlations indicate a

moderate positive relationship between EL and IWS ( $r = 0.45$ ), a strong positive relationship between EL and EE ( $r = 0.60$ ), and a very strong relationship between IWS and EE ( $r = 0.75$ ). These findings underscore the importance of ethical leadership and Islamic workplace spirituality in enhancing employee engagement.

### Hypothesis Test Results

The stage after testing validity and reliability, next is hypothesis testing which is carried out using the regression formula, with the SPSS analysis tool. Here are the results:

**Table 4.** Hypothesis Testing

| Variables  | B    | P Value | Conclusion |
|--|------|---------|------------|
| Ethical Leadership (X1) -> Employee engagement (Y)             | ,234 | ,000    | accepted   |
| Islamic Workplace Spirituality (X2) -> Employee engagement (Y) | .152 | ,000    | accepted   |
| Ethical Leadership (X1) -> Islamic Workplace Spirituality (X2) | .256 | ,000    | accepted   |

Source: Primary data processed (2024)

Tabel 4 demonstrates that all hypotheses tested in this study are accepted. Firstly, there is a significant relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement, with a coefficient B of 0.234 and a p-value ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ), confirming the hypothesis. This indicates that leadership emphasizing ethics has a strong positive influence on the level of employee engagement within the organization. Ethical leadership positively affects the engagement of pesantren managers in Bandar Sribhawono by enhancing trust, job satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation. When leaders are honest and fair, managers feel safer and more comfortable, thereby increasing their job satisfaction (Jia et al., 2022). The strong moral support and ethics from ethical leaders intrinsically motivate managers, making them feel that their work has greater meaning and purpose (Danish et al., 2020). Additionally, ethical leadership supports the psychological well-being of managers by making them feel valued and treated fairly. A positive work environment and empowerment provided by ethical leaders, such as autonomy and responsibility, enhance the sense of engagement because managers feel in control and able to contribute significantly to the goals of the pesantren (Allameh et al., 2020). Finally, open and transparent communication from ethical leaders reduces miscommunication and increases openness among managers, making them more informed and involved in decision-making. Thus, ethical leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing employee engagement among pesantren managers in Bandar Sribhawono.

The second research finding indicates a significant relationship between Islamic Workplace Spirituality (IWS) and employee engagement among pesantren managers, with a coefficient B of 0.152 and a p-value ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ), confirming the hypothesis. Islamic Workplace Spirituality positively influences the engagement of pesantren managers in Bandar Sribhawono through several critical mechanisms (Adawiyah et al., 2020). IWS encourages managers to find meaning and purpose in their work by connecting it with Islamic values and principles. When managers perceive their work as part of worship and having higher spiritual purposes, they tend to be more motivated and emotionally involved in their tasks. Efforts to draw closer to Allah (taqarrub) in daily work foster spiritual satisfaction among managers, deepening their commitment to their responsibilities. IWS also enhances the psychological and emotional well-being of managers, as values such as sincerity, trust in Allah's plan (tawakkul), and gratitude help them cope with workplace stress and challenges more effectively (Iqbal et al., 2020). This improved well-being increases their engagement, as psychologically well-off managers are typically more focused, productive, and committed to their tasks (Cristeta B. Bartolome, 2023). Awareness of spiritual vulnerability (muraqabah) prompts managers to be introspective and mindful of their actions and intentions, thereby enhancing the quality of their work and responsibility (Pariyanti et al., 2021). Moreover, IWS fosters a harmonious and collaborative work environment, promoting values such as brotherhood (ukhuwah) and cooperation (ta'awun) that encourage managers to support and

respect each other. This harmonious work environment enhances managers' sense of ownership and engagement by making them feel part of a strong and caring community. Steadfastness in the right path (istiqamah) also plays a crucial role, as managers who consistently uphold Islamic values in their work tend to be more loyal and dedicated. IWS strengthens the relationship between leaders and managers, as leaders who apply Islamic values in their leadership are typically fair, honest, and attentive to the well-being of managers. This positive leader-manager relationship enhances trust and loyalty, which are essential components of employee engagement.

Furthermore, ethical leadership is positively associated with Islamic workplace spirituality among pesantren managers in Bandar Sribhawono, with a coefficient B of 0.256 and a significant p-value ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ), confirming the hypothesis. Ethical leadership plays a crucial role in strengthening Islamic spirituality in the workplace environment (Adnan et al., 2020). Leadership focused on values such as honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for individuals not only creates an efficient organizational structure but also builds a strong foundation for the development of Islamic values in daily life (Abdelwahed et al., 2024). Managers who embody ethical leadership serve as role models for both students (santri) and staff within the pesantren, reinforcing their commitment to Islamic ethical values in every aspect of daily activities and interactions. The ethical guidance provided by these leaders establishes a solid moral foundation for the entire pesantren community (Halid, 2024). By setting consistent and fair examples, managers build trust and foster deeper engagement among members of the pesantren in their shared mission and vision (Suryono et al., 2023). This approach not only enhances job satisfaction but also strengthens the spiritual bond between individuals and the cherished values of Islam.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that ethical leadership and Islamic Workplace Spirituality (IWS) positively influence the engagement of pesantren managers in Bandar Sribhawono. Ethical leadership enhances trust, job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and psychological well-being of managers, while also reinforcing Islamic values in the workplace. Meanwhile, IWS provides spiritual meaning in work, enhances psychological well-being, and fosters a collaborative work environment, all contributing to increased engagement among managers. Based on the data, ethical leadership can increase employee engagement by 23.4%, while IWS can increase employee engagement by 15.2%. Therefore, the combination of ethical leadership and IWS can create a substantial increase in employee engagement.

The research strengthens the theory that ethical leadership and workplace spirituality play crucial roles in enhancing employee engagement. Ethical leadership, characterized by honesty, fairness, and responsibility, has been shown to increase job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and psychological well-being. Additionally, Islamic Workplace Spirituality (IWS) provides deeper meaning and purpose for employees, enhancing their emotional well-being and engagement. The study also indicates that integrating ethical and spiritual values in leadership strengthens commitment and spiritual bonds among employees, particularly in religious organizational contexts like pesantren.

Practical implications from this research are highly relevant for pesantren managers in Bandar Sribhawono. Ethical leadership has shown a significant impact on employee engagement within the organization. Through values like honesty, fairness, and consistent moral support, leaders can create a safe and comfortable work environment, enhancing job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation among supervisors. Meanwhile, Islamic Workplace Spirituality (IWS) plays a crucial role in boosting employee engagement in pesantrens. Islamic values such as sincerity, reliance on God (tawakkal), and gratitude help supervisors better cope with challenges while deepening their commitment to spiritual duties in their daily work. Furthermore, ethical leadership that integrates Islamic values not only builds an efficient organizational structure but also

strengthens the moral foundation of the pesantren community. This not only enhances job satisfaction but also deepens the spiritual bond between individuals and the high values upheld in Islam.

While this research provides significant contributions, it has several limitations to consider. Firstly, its findings may not be directly generalizable due to its focus on specific pesantrens in Bandar Srihawono. Additionally, data collection methods like questionnaires or interviews can influence result subjectivity. Limited sample size and absence of additional control variables may also restrict interpretation. Suggestions for future research include conducting comparative studies across pesantrens, integrating qualitative approaches for deeper insights, and using multimethods to enhance research validity. Thus, future research is expected to provide more comprehensive insights into employee engagement and Islamic spirituality in pesantrens, laying a stronger foundation for ethical and spiritually oriented management practices.

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