

Learning Spirituality from Leadership for Ikhlas Work as Spiritual Resources for Engagement and Performance in Public service

Chandra Hosen¹, Farah Mizafira Wasaraka², Deni Hermana³

¹Universitas Bunda Mulia, Jakarta Utara, Indonesia

²Universitas Trisakti, Jakarta Barat, Indonesia

³Universitas Banten, Serang, Indonesia

Email: chandrahosen8@gmail.com

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Abstract. This study aims to extend the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model by integrating Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory to examine the influence of Personal Spiritual Leadership (PSL) and Ikhlas Work (sincere/selfless work) as personal resources on work engagement and employee performance in the Indonesian public sector. Employing a multi-paradigmatic approach with an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the quantitative phase tested data from 430 Civil State Apparatus (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM-AMOS), followed by a qualitative phase comprising in-depth phenomenological interviews (8–12 informants) and critical observation. The results of the quantitative analysis indicate that PSL exerts a significantly strong positive influence on Ikhlas Work and work engagement. Ikhlas Work was also found to have a direct effect on performance. However, the direct effect of PSL on performance was found to be non-significant, confirming the presence of full mediation by work engagement. Overall, the model successfully explains the variance in performance on the basis of transcendental resource support that sustains engagement. The qualitative findings deepen these results by revealing a methodological-operational gap: macro-level dimensions such as the Qolb Competency in PSL are perceived as a "moral metaphor" due to political conflicts of interest, budgetary constraints, and rigid bureaucratic regulations in public institutions. The findings further expose the risk of workload exploitation (overwork) by management concealed through "ikhlas work" rhetoric. This study makes a significant contribution to culturally and spiritually inclusive human resource management by affirming work engagement as a psychological articulation bridge that converts transcendental energy into tangible productive performance.

Keywords: *Job Demands-Resources, Ikhlas Work, Personal Spiritual Leadership, Work Engagement, Public Sector Performance.*

A. INTRODUCTION

The exploration of various resources to support performance engagement within the JD-R model continues to be developed. The JD-R model provides a conceptual framework that enables directed exploration of personal, organizational, and environmental resources (Bakker, Demerouti, et al., 2023; Czakert & Berger, 2024; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The JD-R model explains the dual process essential for performance as well as the balance between job demands and resources (Bakker et al., 2004; Bakker, Demerouti, et al., 2023). Although the JD-R model has been globally validated, as evidenced (Koroglu & Ozmen, 2021), the current literature indicates that the JD-R model still has limitations in capturing intrinsic non-Western cultural and spiritual variables. This opens an opportunity to integrate more specific resources, such as spirituality, to create a more holistic framework for understanding the mechanisms of performance across various organizational sectors.

One such resource is Ikhlas Work. Ikhlas (sincerity/selflessness) constitutes one of the dimensions within the Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) framework (Al-Smadi et al., 2015 (Topcan et al., 2025)). Ikhlas represents a work orientation of selflessness, or what may be termed transcendental altruism, specifically, sincerity of intention without expectation of worldly

reward (Qasim et al., 2022). Its transcendental nature renders Ikhlas Work a construct with significant "blind spots" that require further exploration. In modern organizations, the value of ikhlas frequently undergoes a reduction in meaning due to the application of methodologies that are insufficiently aligned with the conceptual framework of ikhlas itself. The operationalization of ikhlas work faces considerable challenges, including those related to its measurement (Yousaf & Adil, 2024). The primary challenge lies in how to operationalize this theological concept into a spiritual resource construct that can be scientifically measured without forfeiting its original meaning.

This research gap becomes particularly relevant in countries with a collective-religious culture such as Indonesia, where spiritual values frequently serve as the primary driver rather than external incentives (Baguna et al., 2024; Iqbal et al., 2020; Liem, 2019; Rakhmani & Utomo, 2023). Spirituality provides the "Meaning of Work," including in public service contexts (Rochmawati et al., 2018). Traditional JD-R models tend to overlook transcendental aspects as personal resources. There is an urgent need to demonstrate how ikhlas work, as a spiritual resource, functions as a catalyst for engagement and performance (Bickerton & Miner, 2021; Tabor et al., 2020). Moreover, the existence of ikhlas work does not stand in isolation; it is influenced by aspects of the individual's chronosystem, including religious emphasis and the maturation of a logical, non-opportunistic spiritual orientation (Yousaf et al., 2025). Understanding the antecedent factors is critical for validating the position of ikhlas work within modern workplace dynamics.

The formation of ikhlas is itself influenced by various factors, including spiritual intention, namely religiosity (Sulaiman et al., 2022). (Yousaf et al., 2025) explain that the formation of ikhlas is rooted in aspects of the individual's chronosystem through religious emphasis. Ikhlas is the outcome of a synergy between the foundations of religious upbringing, the maturation of intrinsic spiritual orientation, and the individual's capacity to articulate their beliefs logically and non-opportunistically across various life contexts. Exploration of the factors that antecede ikhlas work requires further understanding, commensurate with the significance of ikhlas work as a spiritual resource in the workplace. The interaction between employees and leaders who possess high spirituality may constitute a social-cognitive mechanism that fosters the formation of ikhlas.

The concept of spiritual leadership outside the Western context is highly diverse (Azzuhri et al., 2024). Spiritual leadership is a form of leadership that brings worldly dimensions into the spiritual or divine dimension (Karim et al., 2022). Although leadership constructs and organizational practices possess the potential to be adopted into specific cultures, such as in Indonesia, consistent with Wang et al. (2019), studies on the relationship between spiritual leadership and employee performance remain scarce, as noted by (Junaidi, 2026). In the context of a country recognized for its high level of spirituality, an examination of the position of spiritual leadership and the concept of spiritual leadership in the workplace within a culture such as Indonesia's is greatly needed.

This study aims to address this gap by offering three principal contributions. First, theoretically, this research extends the JD-R model by proposing "Spirituality (Ikhlas Work)" as a new element within the personal resources category. Second, the study integrates the Islamic work ethic dimension with modern organizational psychology to explain the mechanism of the Meaning of Work, particularly in the public service sector where the value of public dedication is strongly emphasized. Third, the study offers a distinct perspective: ikhlas work, as a static theological concept, can be operationalized as a strategic resource that is logically integrable into organizations through a chronosystem approach. Fourth, the study elucidates the position of organizational resources such as spiritual leadership as a resource to support the development of employees' ikhlas work through a social-cognitive mechanism. The

integration of SCT and COR within the extended JD-R model yields a more comprehensive explanatory account. SCT explains how the value of ikhlas is formed through cognitive processes and social learning, while COR explains why individuals are able to sustain such behavior through the accumulation of psychological resources.

This study aims to examine the influence of spiritual leadership on ikhlas work and employee performance. Furthermore, it seeks to analyze the effect of ikhlas work on employee performance, both directly and indirectly through employee engagement. In addition, this study investigates the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between ikhlas work and employee performance.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

1. Spiritual Leadership and Employee Ikhlas Work

Spiritual leadership comprises the values, attitudes, and behaviors capable of facilitating a sense of spiritual survival among employees through a sense of calling and membership (Yang et al., 2019). The dimensions of spiritual leadership include vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love (Fry, 2003; Chiu et al., 2019; Yousaf et al., 2025). This form of leadership focuses on touching the heart and soul, rather than merely the physical body and rational mind (Sheikh et al., 2019).

According to SCT, individual behavior, including ikhlas work, is the result of reciprocal interaction among personal, environmental, and behavioral factors (Bandura, 1978). Within organizational life, the values, beliefs, and behaviors that constitute a leader's spirituality will be observed, interpreted, and internalized by employees in the form of ikhlas work behavior. Spiritual leadership promotes ikhlas (Junaidi, 2026). The integrity, compassion, service orientation, sincerity, and meaning-centered orientation demonstrated by leaders become objects of emulation for employees, thereby shaping ikhlas work. Through social learning mechanisms, employees not only imitate the behavior of spiritual leaders but also develop new cognitive schemas regarding the purpose of work based on sincerity. Spiritual leaders act as role models who provide a safe environment and intrinsic support, so that employees feel not alienated but rather energized in their work (Abualigah & Badar, 2025).

From a different perspective, spiritual leadership functions as a resource gain (Sheikh et al., 2019) that generates and strengthens the accumulation of psychological resource caravans, such as ikhlas work, consistent with (Gong & Kanwal, 2025) and (Abualigah & Badar, 2025). Ikhlas work is formed through an environment rich in resources that cultivate sincerity. Spiritual leaders facilitate processes of meaning-making in work, support, appreciation, trust, psychological safety, and moral guidance as resources (Juan (Chiu et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2023). The accumulation of these resources forms resource caravans that enhance employees' psychological capacity, enabling them to work more sincerely. Ikhlas work is further strengthened through a cycle of continuous resource acquisition.

Ha1: Spiritual leadership has a positive influence on ikhlas work.

Spiritual leadership can directly influence employee performance (Chiu et al., 2023; (Chiu et al., 2023; Gong & Kanwal, 2025; Junaidi, 2026; Zhu et al., 2023). Spiritual leadership influences ikhlas work through the internalization of spiritual values and the enrichment of employees' psychological resources, enabling them to work sincerely, responsibly, and oriented toward higher contribution rather than mere self-interest. Ikhlas work ultimately drives high performance. Spiritual leadership, as an organizational resource, sustains organizational structure and drives employee performance (Tabor et al., 2020).

Ha2: Ikhlas work mediates the influence of spiritual leadership on performance.

2. Ikhlas Work and Performance

In the landscape of spirituality-based management, performance is not solely initiated by technical competence or material incentives; rather, it is deeply rooted in the transcendental dimension known as intention (*niyyah*) (Awa'ishah, 1997). In the Islamic paradigm, *niyyah* represents an absolute moral and spiritual orientation that directs all inner and physical activities toward the pleasure of Allah SWT (Awa'ishah, 1997). The highest manifestation of the rectitude of intention is sincerity (*ikhlas*), which constitutes a fundamental dimension of the Islamic Work Ethic (IWE), deriving directly from the Qur'an and Sunnah (Ali, 2008; Nauman et al., 2023). As an ethical compass, IWE inspires Muslim employees to fulfill their professional responsibilities with high integrity and accountable conduct (Alqhaiwi et al., 2024). *Ikhlas* work entails a recalibration of inner quality, redirecting work orientation from mere fulfillment of short-term material targets toward long-term beneficial investment (Nauman et al., 2023).

The influence of *ikhlas* on performance operates through a moral-spiritual transformation reflected in professional organizational behavior. *Ikhlas* stimulates the emergence of *itqān* behavior—diligence, precision, and meticulousness in work—born from the full awareness that working constitutes part of an act of worship. Psychologically, employees who internalize the value of *ikhlas* possess greater emotional stability and performance consistency. When employees are oriented toward divine values, their work motivation becomes less susceptible to fluctuations in human appreciation or the dynamics of office politics. Employees who embody *ikhlas* tend not to work half-heartedly, thereby producing robust integrity and exhibiting stable determination, which in turn exponentially enhances the quality of the work process itself (Nauman et al., 2023; Zia et al., 2024).

There is a strong linkage between the dimensions of the Islamic work ethic and organizational effectiveness. *Ikhlas* as a dimension of IWE has been demonstrated to be a critical determinant in shaping a superior performance posture. *Ikhlas* in the workplace acts as an internal stimulus capable of directly and significantly boosting employee performance (Aman-Ullah & Mehmood, 2023; Badar et al., 2023; Mohammad et al., 2018; Sodiq et al., 2024). (Boman et al., 2024) affirm that *ikhlas* work is a key factor in achieving optimal individual-level performance. *Ikhlas* encourages the recalibration of moral orientation, enhancement of process quality, upholding of integrity in action, and the creation of psychological stability in employees, the ultimate manifestation of which is a productivity oriented toward worship.

Ha3: *Ikhlas* work has a positive association with performance.

3. Engagement as Mediator of the Positive Influence of Spiritual Leadership and Ikhlas Work on Performance

Spiritual leadership promotes the integration of non-material values, such as altruistic love, moral integrity, and transcendental vision, into the work ecosystem. These values create a conducive psychological climate in which employees feel happy, secure, and possess strong interpersonal connectivity in the workplace. Interaction with transcendental or sacred aspects functions as a spiritual resource for the individual, capable of escalating both work involvement and performance (Bickerton, 2013). At the functional level, the possession of these spiritual resources manifests as resilience, self-control, adaptive capacity, and the positive influence of employees on their work environment (Bickerton, 2013). Within the architecture of organizations, the availability of these macro-resources is represented and channeled through spiritual leadership behavior (Bickerton et al., 2021). Spiritual leaders elevate work engagement—identifiable as an inner performance, through the fulfillment of employees' spiritual well-being, particularly the dimensions of calling and membership (Fry, 2016; Samul,

2024; Sheikh et al., 2019). Employee engagement acts as a psychological catalyst that translates the leader's transcendental vision into concrete work (Abualigah & Badar, 2025; Obuobisa-darko et al., 2026). When the element of employees' calling is fulfilled, this spiritual energy is transformed into robust psychological capital (W. Wu & Lee, 2020). Consequently, employees consciously invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional capacities fully in active participation in each of their professional responsibilities (W. Wu & Lee, 2020). High engagement yields superior performance excellence in reality (Fry, 2016; Samul, 2024) (Sheikh et al., 2019) as well as the resilience to maintain optimal performance even in the midst of complex, volatile, and chaotic public institutional environments (Fry, 2016; Samul, 2024) (Sheikh et al., 2019). Work engagement converts the abstract spiritual values injected by the leader into concrete actions and measurable performance outcomes (Abualigah & Badar, 2025; Obuobisa-darko et al., 2026).

Ha4: Engagement mediates the positive influence of spiritual leadership on performance.

Personal spiritual resources are positioned as internal macro-resources that drive work engagement (Bickerton et al., 2014). The fluctuation of these resources is dynamic; their accumulation triggers a gain spiral, while their depletion triggers a loss spiral that determines the stability of performance (Bickerton & Miner, 2023). A spiritually-based cognitive orientation strengthens employees' perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and perceptions of control over their environment, which form the basis of internal motivational triggers (Bickerton et al., 2015). The synergy of personal factors (optimism, self-consciousness) and psychological conditions (vigor, absorption) converts spiritual energy and cognitive direction into optimal intrinsic motivation (Bakker, Xanthopoulou, et al., 2023); Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004); (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019; Chua & Ayoko, 2019; Goodboy et al., 2020). The internalization of this spiritual meaning triggers work engagement, which acts as a transmission channel converting non-material energy into productive performance. Ikhlas as a spiritual value shapes psychological conditions (engagement), which subsequently facilitates superior work behavior. The Islamic axiological foundation provides grounds to reaffirm that workplace spirituality must be oriented toward the enhancement of holistic human flourishing, not merely the optimization of corporate profitability.

H5: Engagement mediates the positive influence of ikhlas work on performance.

C. METHOD

This study employs a multi-paradigmatic approach with an explanatory sequential design. In the Quantitative Phase (First Stage), a deductive approach was used to test and verify hypotheses regarding causal relationships among variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In the Qualitative Phase, a case study design was employed to explore, deepen, and explain the statistical findings of the first phase through phenomenological and organizational ethnographic perspectives.

The population consists of the Civil State Apparatus (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) within the Indonesian government. Based on (Hair et al., 2019), the determined sample size was 430, in accordance with (Hair et al., 2019) guideline of 5 to 10 times the number of indicators. The inclusion criteria required government employees at both the central and regional levels with a minimum of one year of service tenure. Sampling employed Quota Sampling, in which the sample was stratified based on geographical regional representation: Western Indonesia, Central Indonesia, and Eastern Indonesia (represented by ASN/PPK in West Papua). Subsequently, Convenience Sampling was applied: once the regional quotas were fulfilled, data collection in the field technically employed convenience sampling for the efficiency of questionnaire distribution.

This study measures four main constructs using instruments that have undergone validity and reliability testing and have been declared acceptable based on Goodness of Fit (GOF) criteria:

Table 1, Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Dimensions / Indicators	Measurement Reference
Personal Spiritual Leadership (PSL)	Vision (4 items), Hope/Faith (4 items), Altruistic Love (5 items), and Qolb Competency (4 items).	Developed from the Spiritual Leadership Questionnaire (Fry, 2003, 2008) and adapted to the Indonesian context with the addition of the Qolb dimension (Azzuhri et al., 2024).
Ikhlas Work	Measurement developed by combining classical Islamic theology (textual analysis of Al-Ghazali's works), confirmed through a purposive Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with religious scholars and Muslim practitioners.	Developed based on Yousaf & Adil (2024) and reinforced by classical text analysis.
Work Engagement	Measured using the industry-standard short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9).	Schaufeli & Bakker (2004); Schaufeli et al. (2006); Bakker & Demerouti (2014).
Public Service Performance	1. In-Role Performance (IRP – 5 items). 2. Extra-Role Performance (ERP – 5 items).	IRP adopted from Tu et al. (2021); ERP adopted from Lee et al. (2009).

The qualitative phase was designed to obtain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of ikhlas work and performance from an Islamic perspective. Data collection comprised in-depth interviews with 8–12 employees selected using a combined purposive and snowball sampling technique, as well as observation to examine public service practices, habits, and discourse regarding the concept of "ikhlas" in the organizational work environment. Informants were purposively selected based on mapping from the quantitative phase to explore extreme variations, including unique cases such as employees with high performance but low levels of ikhlas. Qualitative exploration focused on employees' subjective spiritual experiences (such as feelings of barakah, sakīnah, and murāqabah), the psychological dilemma between spiritual idealism and economic necessity, and the potential for manipulative misuse of ikhlas rhetoric by management to obscure excessive workload exploitation (overwork).

Data obtained from both phases were not analyzed in isolation but were integrated at the final stage of analysis in accordance with Creswell (2014) through: (1) a joint display, juxtaposing quantitative statistical figures (path coefficients/p-values) alongside relevant qualitative interview transcript excerpts; (2) case narrative construction, developing comparative inter-case stories of employees to explain why the quantitative relationships occurred or did not occur; and (3) model development based on the interaction among ikhlas work, work engagement, and performance following the consolidation of both datasets.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Quantitative Phase

The results of the CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) test:

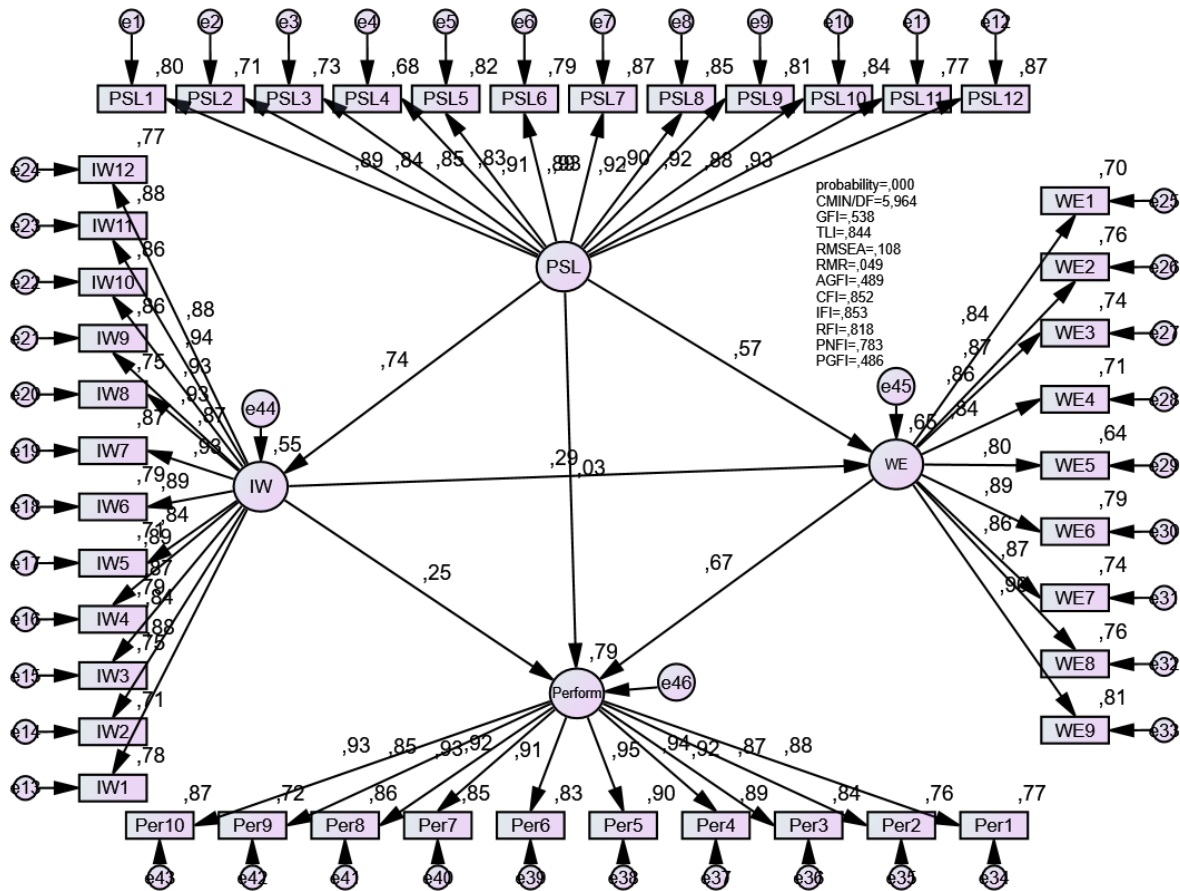


Figure 2 The results of the CFA Test

The test results indicate that all manifest indicators exhibit standardized loading factor values that are very strong and far exceed the critical threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). The Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC or R^2) values for each indicator range from 0.64 to 0.93. This demonstrates that the measurement error variance of each indicator is very low, and that the indicators possess a very high degree of reliability in reflecting their respective latent constructs.

Tests of convergent validity yielded highly satisfactory results. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all latent variables range from 0.725 to 0.767, significantly exceeding the minimum psychometric threshold of 0.50. This finding confirms that more than 72% of the variance of the empirical indicators is successfully captured by the primary construct. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability (CR) indices recorded exceptionally strong values (highly reliable), ranging from 0.959 to 0.973. As all CR values are well above the required threshold of 0.70, it can be concluded that this measurement model possesses high internal consistency and is free from critical measurement biases.

The measurement model results are presented in Table 2 as follows:

Table 1. AVE, Composite Reliability, and Discriminant Validity Test Results

Variables	AVE	Composite Reliability	1	2	3	
Personal Spiritual Leadership	0.795	0.986	0.891			
Ikhlaas work	0.794	0.974	0.425	0.891		
Engagement	0.738	0.962	0.389	0.596	0.859	
Performance	0.828	0.982	0.350	0.599	0.605	0.910

The results of the causal relationship tests for direct and indirect variables are presented in Table 3:

Table 3. Results of Direct and Indirect Causal Relationship Tests

Path		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Standardized Regression Weight	Conclusion	
Direct Influence								
IW	<--	PSL	1,251	0.072	17,423	***	0.74	supported
WE	<--	PSL	0.831	0.076	10,962	***	0.568	supported
WE	<--	IW	0.25	0.042	5,989	***	0.288	supported
Perform	<--	PSL	0.038	0.062	0.603	0.546	0.027	unsupported
Perform	<--	IW	0.208	0.033	6,336	***	0.252	supported
Perform	<--	WE	0.639	0.048	13,179	***	0.67	supported
Indirect Influence								
Variable	Path	Variable	Path	Variable	Estimate	Z Score	P-Value	Conclusion
WE	<--	IW	<--	PSL	0.213	5.952	0.000	supported
Perform	<--	WE	<--	PSL	0.472	8.444	0.000	supported
Perform	<--	IW	<--	PSL	0.236	6.303	0.000	supported
Perform	<--	WE	<--	IW	0.193	5.433	0.000	supported

As indicated in the table, Personal Spiritual Leadership (PSL) exerts a very strong and dominant positive influence on Ikhlas Work (beta = 0.74, Standardized Regression Weight). This confirms the presence of spiritual leadership as a resource that drives employees' personal sincerity in the workplace through social-cognitive processes and the creation of an environment that nurtures resource caravans. PSL directly and significantly influences employee work engagement in a positive direction (beta = 0.57). Work engagement constitutes the strongest predictor directly influencing the improvement of employee performance (beta = 0.67). Ikhlas work is recorded as having a direct, positive, and significant effect on employee performance (beta = 0.25). The influence of Ikhlas Work on Work Engagement (beta = 0.29) affirms its role as a personal resource for engagement. However, the direct influence of PSL on performance (beta = 0.028) is non-significant. The variance in performance is explained by the exogenous variables in this study at 79%.

The non-significant direct effect from PSL to Performance, combined with the strong effect of PSL on WE (beta = 0.57) and WE on Performance (beta = 0.67), indicates the phenomenon of Full Mediation. Spiritual leaders do not mechanically improve employees' physical productivity; rather, they must first escalate employees' emotional and inner engagement (Work Engagement), which then converts this energy into optimal performance outcomes (Performance Excellence).

However, improvement was required in the Model Fit Indices, as the majority of GOF values were at marginal to poor fit. Improvements were made based on Modification Indices (MI) by correlating error variables (e) with high MI values within the same construct. The revised results show that the CMIN/DF value improved to 2.921, RMSEA was reduced to 0.063, and GFI, TLI, and CFI were raised above the 0.90 threshold.

2. Qualitative Phase

Knowledge of ikhlas derives from the Qur'an and Hadith. However, understanding how ikhlas is translated into working life proves difficult to practice. Comprehension of ikhlas is also influenced by social interaction with leaders who possess an orientation toward the hereafter (akhirat). Understanding of ikhlas work also emerges as a product of social processes involving spiritual guides such as kyai or ustadz. Nevertheless, this role is one of meaning construction rather than technical work instruction. Spiritual guidance functions as a moral and theological framework that is subsequently internalized and independently translated by the individual into the work context.

ASN employees indicated that there is no official organizational guidance on how ikhlas work is to be implemented in the workplace. This meaning is present in informal discourse, not in the performance management system. ASN-3 critically stated: "Institutions often mention ikhlas work, but they never explain its meaning. There is no guidance, no discussion. So, ikhlas is a personal matter." This absence of formal guidance creates two consequences. First, ikhlas becomes an autonomous personal resource. Second, it creates space for the potential misuse of ikhlas rhetoric without structural accountability. Ikhlas is not an indicator of performance appraisal because it risks damaging its spiritual meaning; it must remain within the realm of ethics and worship, not administration. Ikhlas grows from an awareness of theological motives in work—reflection upon the spiritual purpose of work. Informants understood ikhlas as a niyyah (intention) orientation that signifies a theological consciousness linking work to a vertical relationship with Allah SWT.

Interaction with leaders who have a high spiritual orientation constitutes one of the important processes in shaping the understanding and meaning of ikhlas in the workplace, including its realization in the form of performance as a public servant. Leaders with an orientation toward transcendental meaning—such as ikhlas, closeness to God, or purity of heart (al-Iffa)—serve as role models in this process. When a leader demonstrates the qualities of authentic personal spiritual leadership—for example, aligning words with deeds (walking the walk), exhibiting al-Iffa (humility and freedom from greed), and practicing al-'Adala (justice)—such behavior acts as a powerful environmental stimulus for subordinates.

There is a cognitive process experienced by subordinates during interaction with their leader: the process of retention (remembering) and motor reproduction of these transcendental values. The altruistic love demonstrated by the leader's character inspires subordinates to replicate similar behavior toward other colleagues and in their work. Subordinates become more psychologically engaged and come to perceive their work as part of an act of worship. Even during organizational crises or periods of pressure, subordinates observe their leader remaining calm, wise (al-Hikmah), and composed owing to a strong transcendental hope/faith. This observation strengthens subordinates' cognitive structures. They conclude that a spiritual foundation (such as ikhlas work or inner tranquility) is effective in reducing work stress. Through vicarious reinforcement, subordinates are motivated to adopt the same spiritual-based coping mechanisms.

Spiritual leaders who are paternalistic and protective provide social persuasion in the form of moral support, inner validation, and wise guidance as resources to support employees' engagement with their work. The leader's clear vision, imbued with transcendental meaning, transforms subordinates' mindsets: work tasks are no longer perceived as burdensome anxieties but as an amanah (trust) or ibadah (worship). This cognitive-perceptual shift reduces anxiety (physiological state) and automatically elevates subordinates' self-efficacy to achieve challenging work targets.

The internalization of values through interaction with leaders acts as a mechanism of surveillance over ikhlas behavior and employees' engagement with their work. Subordinates'

transcendental consciousness shifts the basis for working and engagement from the avoidance of sanctions toward a desire to maintain integrity before God (synchronizing with the work engagement and ikhlas work mediation). The ethical behavior of subordinates will reinforce the leader's faith in their team, which subsequently motivates the leader to provide greater space for the actualization of goodness (*ihsan*).

3. Data Integration

Consistent with the explanatory sequential design, quantitative and qualitative data were not analyzed in isolation but were integrated using a joint display technique. This step juxtaposes statistical parameters (beta path coefficients) alongside essential themes from in-depth interview transcripts and field observations.

Table 2 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Phat	Coefficient	
PSL -> IW	0.74 (S)	Social Learning & Transcendental Role Modeling: The leader's behavior reflecting al-Iffa (humility) and al-'Adala (justice) acts as an environmental stimulus. A cognitive process occurs in subordinates (retention and motor reproduction) whereby the leader's integrity is internalized as an ikhlas work schema.
PSL -> WE	0.57 (S)	Social Persuasion and Physiological Conditioning (Psychological Safety): The altruistic love of the spiritual leader provides inner validation and reduces anxiety (physiological state). The leader's transcendental vision transforms subordinates' mindsets from viewing tasks as a burden to viewing them as an amanah/ibadah.
PSL -> Perform	0.03 (TS)	Structural Resistance and Bureaucratic Complexity: The abstract values of spiritual leadership (Qolb Competency) are trapped as a "moral metaphor" that is alien to daily practical operations. The direct relationship is impeded by political conflicts of interest, budget pressures, and the rigid bureaucratic laws of public institutions.
IW -> Perform	0.25 (S)	Manifestation of the Niyah-Based Itqān Work Ethic: The rectitude of intention (niyyah) triggers diligence, precision, and meticulousness in work (itqān) because there is an awareness that working constitutes an act of worship. Work motivation is not susceptible to fluctuations in human appreciation or office political dynamics.
IW -> WE	0.29	Autonomy of Transcendental Personal Resources: Ikhlas is a personal matter and an autonomous theological motivator. ASN employees reflect on the meaning of work through a vertical relationship with Allah SWT, not because they are directed by official organizational guidance.
WE -> Perform	0.67	Psychological Articulation Bridge: Work engagement acts as a concrete transmission channel that converts metaphysical spiritual energy into tangible productive performance.

To explore extreme variations within the quantitative model, integration was conducted by developing comparative inter-case narratives of employees. Employees in the first group demonstrate a mature absorption of spiritual values from informal interaction with leaders who

walk the walk and embody al-Iffa. Their transcendental consciousness shifts their orientation from mere "avoidance of bureaucratic sanctions" toward "maintaining integrity before God." When the element of calling (*panggilan jiwa*) is fulfilled, they consciously invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional capacities fully (high engagement), culminating in superior public service performance (performance excellence). In contrast, informants in a second group—despite being capable of producing high in-role performance outputs to meet formal administrative performance targets—experience severe psychological exhaustion (burnout) and are vulnerable to anxiety, as their motivation is purely driven by volatile external incentives. They perceive that the absence of official organizational guidance on the meaning of work renders them susceptible to workload exploitation (overwork), concealed by management through *ikhlas* rhetoric.

The concept of spiritual leadership undergoes development in accordance with the Indonesian context. There is a demand for a spiritual leadership model rooted in ethical, ascetic (*zuhud*), and mystical dimensions, consistent with (Azzuhri et al., 2024). However, the qualitative findings critically reveal that the concept of spiritual leadership in Indonesia undergoes a profound cultural reconceptualization compared to (Fry, 2003) original model. Consistent with the study of (Azzuhri et al., 2024), spirituality in Indonesia cannot be separated from formal religiosity. Leadership is viewed as a dual mandate: vertical responsibility to God (as *khalifah*) and horizontal responsibility to human beings. The development of this model incorporates the transcendental dimensions of local Indonesian culture through a *Qalb* competency approach based on the harmony of the heart and religious values. For Indonesian society, spirituality cannot be separated from religiosity. Spirituality is understood as the closeness of human beings to God through the absorption of religious values in daily life. In Fry's model, leadership constitutes a mandate purely of human origin. However, in the Indonesian context, influenced by Islamic tradition, leadership is viewed as a dual mandate—from God (as God's vicegerent on earth) and from humanity. Although the concept of spiritual leadership is more deeply rooted in religious teachings and culture, in practice, its realization proves difficult.

There are methodological limitations to implementing the transcendental meaning of leadership in public institutions, owing to the extremely complex conditions and various challenges faced by these institutions. The *Qalb* Competency, identified as an important dimension of spiritual leadership by (Azzuhri et al., 2024), is not yet ready—or has not yet been willing—to be integrated into actual operational systems. *Qalb* competency consistently remains trapped as a "moral metaphor" that is alien in daily practice. In contrast to (Azzuhri et al., 2024) study, which drew its sample from the homogeneous ecosystem of Islamic banking, the present study identifies the operationalization of *Qalb* competency as a major challenge, with methodological resistance regarding inclusivity in heterogeneous public institutions reflected in the instruments used. These institutions also confront problems of immense complexity involving political conflicts of interest, budgetary pressures, and rigid bureaucratic regulations. These conditions render spiritual leadership—as an organizational resource capable of driving resource caravans and gain spirals to support increased *ikhlas*, engagement, and performance—difficult to realize.

The study's findings demonstrate consistency with previous studies, though the effect sizes tend to be modest despite being significant. Spiritual leadership influences *ikhlas* work, consistent with its role as a resource supporting engagement. However, spiritual leadership does not directly influence performance. Nevertheless, the position of spiritual leadership as an important organizational resource appropriate to the cultural context and societal conditions of Indonesia is affirmed. Furthermore, the explanatory findings of this study confirm the crucial mediating role of work engagement in manifesting the influence of *ikhlas* work on performance

improvement. In this context, work engagement operates as an intermediary psychological mechanism (psychological bridging mechanism) that transforms individuals' transcendental orientation into concrete productive behavior in the empirical domain. This phenomenon indicates that work engagement acts as a psychological articulation—a bridge that reduces the gap between transcendental spiritual consciousness (metaphysical), both at the employee level (ikhlas work) and the leadership level (personal spiritual leadership), and actual behavioral efficacy within the organizational environment. Theoretically, engagement may be conceptualized as a manifestation of the psychological process that bridges individuals' transcendental spiritual capacity into concrete performative action in the real world.

Theoretically, work engagement operates as a psychological articulation (psychological bridging mechanism) that bridges transcendental (metaphysical) spiritual capacity—both at the leadership level (PSL) and the individual level (ikhlas work)—into concrete performative action in the real world. Abstract spiritual values are converted into concrete work energy (vigor, dedication, absorption) when the element of employees' calling is fulfilled (W. L. Wu & Lee, 2020). Through this psychological bridge, abstract spiritual values are transformed into employees' resilience to maintain optimal performance (performance excellence) even in the midst of the complex, volatile, and chaotic public bureaucratic environment (Fry, 2016; Samul, 2024). Ikhlas work and spiritual leadership have been demonstrated not to operate in a mechanistic-linear manner toward performance. Spiritual values must undergo a process of qualitative cognitive regulation (SCT) and the fulfillment of spiritual well-being to trigger work engagement (COR) before they can manifest as public service productivity oriented toward worship.

E. CONCLUSION

Organizational resources and personal resources form the basis for the development of the JD-R model. Spiritual leadership (PSL) does not mechanistically or linearly correspond to an increase in employees' physical productivity. This relationship is fully mediated by work engagement. Work engagement functions as a psychological articulation bridge (psychological bridging mechanism) that converts abstract spiritual energy from the leader and personal sincerity into concrete performative action in the real world. Ikhlas Work is legitimately demonstrated to be a new personal resource element in the JD-R model that directly enhances employee performance. The internalization of rectified intention (*niyyah*) triggers the itqān work ethic (diligence and precision), which creates emotional stability and performance consistency that are not susceptible to the fluctuations of office politics or minimal material appreciation. Although PSL has been shown to powerfully drive Ikhlas Work, its practical implementation in the public sector faces resistance due to bureaucratic complexity. Qolb Competency has not been integrated into actual operational systems and frequently remains trapped as a "moral metaphor" due to political conflicts of interest, budgetary pressures, and rigid bureaucratic regulations. Furthermore, in the absence of structural ethical boundaries, "ikhlas work" rhetoric is vulnerable to misuse by organizations to conceal excessive workload exploitation (overwork).

In view of the qualitative findings regarding the risk of manipulation of ikhlas rhetoric to conceal overwork, future research should quantitatively examine the role of Organizational Justice Climate (or Structural Justice) as a moderating variable in the relationship between Ikhlas Work and work engagement. This is important for confirming the level of justice at which ikhlas can function sustainably without inducing burnout. As the research sample was focused on ASN employees in Indonesia with the operationalization of ikhlas based on classical Islamic theology, future studies are advised to replicate this model in more specific public service organizations or to test equivalent personal spirituality constructs (indigenous

resources) in different multicultural and multi-faith contexts to enhance the model's generalizability. Given that the supply of spiritual resources and work engagement within COR theory is dynamic and fluctuates over time (triggering gain or loss spirals), the use of cross-sectional data in the quantitative phase limits the capture of these dynamics. Future research should consider longitudinal designs or diary studies to capture daily or weekly changes in employees' levels of ikhlas and work engagement.

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