Impact of Islamic work ethics on civil servants' performance: Mediating effect of work engagement

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ABSTRACT

Purpose — *This research focused on examining the influence of Islamic work ethics on work engagement and performance among civil servants in Indonesia. Moreover, the study explored the mediating effect of work engagement.*

Method — *For this study, Muslim civil servants working in Makassar, Indonesia were selected as participants. To enhance the precision of the results, specific criteria for the respondents were established, including: (1) Civil servants holding a permanent position (including honorary roles); and (2) civil servants with a minimum of three years of work experience. A total of 150 responses were obtained. The survey was conducted using Google Forms, and the data was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Partial Least Square (PLS) PLS-SEM Version 3.0.*

Result — *Islamic work ethics positively and significantly influence the work engagement and performance of civil servants in South Sulawesi. Concurrently, work engagement positively and significantly impacts the performance of these civil servants. Additionally, work engagement serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between Islamic work ethics and performance.*

Novelty — *This research utilized Islamic work ethics derived from Islamic perspective literature to examine their influence on work engagement and performance among civil servants in Indonesia. Furthermore, the study investigated the mediating role of work engagement to determine its significance in the context of public service.*

Keywords: Islamic work ethics, work engagement, performance, civil servants

INTRODUCTION

An organization's most valuable asset is undoubtedly its employees. In its development, the Islamic religion is found to have a meaningful role in influencing individual behaviors both in social life and in the workplace (Rana & Malik, 2016). Islam offers a complete guide to life, addressing all aspects of life, whether physical, social, intellectual, or spiritual. Islam deals deeply with human life, including theological elements propagated through Christianity and other religions (Ali, 2010; Syed & Ali, 2010). The approach from an Islamic perspective has begun to be integrated into the concept of HRM (Rana & Malik, 2016). It focuses primarily on a human-centric approach, encompassing all parts of human existence including the individual, physical, material, social, spiritual, and other worlds. Islamic values include morality, where all forms of activity must be based on Islamic ethics, because Islam does not recognize a dichotomy between worldly affairs and religious affairs (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008). In an effort to improve performance, many businesses create and adopt religious values by applying Islamic values as an organizational culture. In other words, companies can form an Islamic organizational culture to improve their employees' performance. Interest in Islam-related studies has increased in Islamic countries, encouraging business and management practices to be renewed within the framework of their beliefs, politics, and culture.

The phenomenon of work engagement is experienced not only by private organizations (companies) but also by public organizations (governments) around the world. The trigger was

a wave of bureaucratic reform (or New Public Management) that demands that the state civil apparatus produce optimal performance and provide the best public services (Lynn, 1998; Mahmudi, 2003). One concept that has proven effective in meeting this challenge is promoting work engagement programs for civil servants (Pritchard, 2008). If they perform well, then collectively, the government agencies they work for will also be perceived positively by society (Bakker, 2015). Work engagement drives many important aspects in government, such as achieving strategic goals, providing responsive community services, promoting innovation, retaining productive employees, encouraging high levels of participation, and maintaining a positive culture in the workplace (Noesgaard & Hansen, 2018). In terms of public relations, involvement can help shift public opinion on government regulations and policies (B. Lavigna, 2015).

Over the past decade or so, academic interest in understanding Islam and its relationship to different management practices has increased significantly. The existing literature reveals that Islamic work ethics has become one of the most discussed topics in the development of HR management theory (Aflah et al., 2021; Branine & Pollard, 2010; Wahab & Masron, 2020). One of the most widely adopted Islamic constructs in HRM is Islamic work values (Aldulaimi, 2016; Wahab & Masron, 2020; Yousef, 2001). As part of this emerging literature, organizations are considered to include and facilitate a spiritual dimension despite being rational systems. Specifically, several previous studies have explored the consequences of Islamic work ethics on HR behavior, especially employee engagement and performance (Hayati & Caniago, 2012; Nasution & Rafiki, 2019; Rawwas et al., 2018). However, until now, most research has focused mainly on the normative aspects of Islamic management, primarily in the fields of Islamic economics and Islamic banking, which have received the most coverage. The literature on management also highlights the gap that exists between Islamic management theory and practice (Branine & Pollard, 2010; Razimi et al., 2014). As a result, understanding the potential role of Islam in determining HR behavior is still in its early stages. Therefore, to encourage Islamic teachings to become more accessible and widely studied for work-related aspects, this paper aims to empirically investigate the influence of Islamic work ethics on employee engagement and performance in the context of state civil servants.

This study seeks to fill the gaps left by previous studies and make distinctions about the gaps observed in the literature. First, the lack of uniformity in writings on Islamic work ethics is evident in most existing research. A number of studies have listed some common Islamic work ethics in their studies, but the values they use vary. Based on studies (Wahab & Masron, 2020), this study attempts to adapt the core items that are considered most accurate in reflecting the work ethic of a Muslim to produce the latest findings. Furthermore, although the influence of Islamic work ethics on performance has been studied extensively, the performance variables raised have not been specific, leading to biased results. To address this, we use performance, a measure based on employees' core duties, and then investigate whether Islamic work ethics can directly affect the performance of civil servants. Hence, this study aims to analyze the impact of Islamic work ethics on work engagement and performance among civil servants in Indonesia. Additionally, we seek to go beyond existing studies to capture Islamic dynamics and spirituality by testing whether each variable of work engagement can act as a mediator in the direct relationship between Islamic work ethics and performance.

METHOD

Sampling and data collection

This research focuses on all Muslim civil servants working in the city of Makassar, Indonesia. Given the very large number, the most appropriate sample selection technique used is purposive sampling, also commonly known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling (Sreejesh et al., 2014). This technique allows researchers to describe the main impact of findings on populations. More specifically, homogeneous purposive samples are selected because the members of the sample share certain characteristics, namely being Muslim civil servants. To obtain more

accurate results, several criteria for respondents are determined: (1) civil servants who have the status of permanent employees (including honorary staff); and (2) civil servants who have had at least 3 years of work experience. Setting these criteria is crucial to get samples that are relevant to the problems addressed in this study.

The primary data collection method is a survey containing a structured list of statements. Specifically, online surveys were chosen as the most effective way to minimize contact and the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Singh & Sagar, 2021). Another technical reason for choosing this method is to provide broad access to respondents throughout the city of Makassar at an affordable cost, with ease of use, and time efficiency. Electronic questionnaire links using Google Forms are created and then disseminated online to civil servants via email and social media platforms that are most widely used in Indonesia, such as WhatsApp and Facebook. The data collection period lasts approximately two months, from June to August 2023. A total of 150 responses were collected and subsequently analyzed.

Data analysis

The analytical techniques used in this study are Variant-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Partial Least Square (PLS), hereinafter referred to as PLS-SEM. The application of SEM in social science research is advantageous due to its ability to develop dimensions of a concept or factor, which is very commonly used, as well as its capability to empirically measure influence (Ringle et al., 2018). Additionally, PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for testing the effects of mediation between variables. The measurement in PLS-SEM is divided into two parts: the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model includes tests for validity and discriminant validity, while the structural model assesses the significance of relationships between variables.

Measurement items

Three variables were measured in this study. The questionnaire instrument covering Islamic work ethics was adapted from qualitative research by Hamzah et al. (2021) and Wahab et al. (2016), and it consists of eight items. Then, three work engagement items were adapted from studies by Bailey et al. (2017) and Kumar & Sia (2012). Finally, the performance variable consists of five items and is adapted from the work of Hamid & Ashoer (2021) and Kim et al. (2019). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from one/1 ("strongly disagree") to five/5 ("strongly agree"). The operational definition of each construct is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Variable measurement items

Construct	Items	Source
Islamic work ethic	IWE1 – Piety (*taqwa*)	(Hamzah et al., 2021; Wahab et al., 2016)
	IWE2 – Trustworthiness	
	IWE3 – Truthfulness (*sidq*)	
	IWE4 – Benevolence (*ihsan*)	
	IWE5 – Sincerity	
	IWE6 – Timeliness (*iltizam bil mawa'id*)	
	IWE7 – Hardworking (*mujahadah*)	
	IWE8 – Patience	
Work engagement	WE1 – I focus on my work intensively	(Bailey et al., 2017; Kumar &; Sia, 2012)
	WE2 – I try hard to do my job	
	WE3 – I try to do my job to the best of my ability	
Performance	PER1 – I completed the assigned task well	(Hamid &; Ashoer,
	PER2 – Meet the criteria for structured work	

	PER3 – Neglecting part of the job he has to do	2021; Kim
	PER4 – Perform tasks that should be done	et al., 2019)
	PER5 – Regularly perform high-performance job tasks	

Source: Developed by the authors (2023)

Hypotheses development

Islamic work ethics and work engagement

Islamic work ethics orient and influence the involvement and participation of its adherents in the workplace (Branine & Pollard, 2010; Rana & Malik, 2016). This ethic views work not only as a means to enhance economic, social, and psychological self-interest but also as a way to maintain social prestige, advance the welfare of society, and reaffirm faith (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008). An Islamic tenet consistently advocates that its followers treat work as a mandatory activity and an act of virtue, respecting the fulfillment of human needs (Yousef, 2001). In the context of new public management, institutions that apply Islamic ethics in their organizational culture, in accordance with the principles and values of religiosity, are likely to drive civil servants to become more involved in public service activities. Based on the explanation above, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1: Islamic work ethics significantly affect the work engagement of civil servants

Islamic work ethics and civil servants' performance

The impact of Islamic work ethics on employee performance has been confirmed in various contexts (Gheitani et al., 2019; Hamzah et al., 2021; Nasution & Rafiki, 2020; Yousef, 2001). In government service, examining the influence of Islamic work ethics on civil servants' performance is critical to ensure the successful implementation of new public management strategies and, eventually, to gain trust from society. According to Aldulaimi (2016) and Rana & Malik (2016), Islamic work ethics can improve individual performance, particularly if work is seen as an elaboration of *aqidah*, charity (work) based on knowledge, and work exemplifying divine qualities. In the context of civil servants, who are Muslims, it is intriguing to investigate how Islamic values influence their performance in serving the community. In line with the above understanding, the following hypothesis, H2, was formulated:

H2: Islamic work ethics significantly affects the performance of civil servants

Work engagement and civil servants' performance

Employee engagement represents a commitment to offer opportunities for workers to influence management decision-making at some level through the exchange of knowledge and experience (Bakker et al., 2008). Leading experts agree that engaged employees tend to exhibit energy, enthusiasm, and a willingness to invest in their work (Kahn, 1992; Kim et al., 2019; Kumar & Sia, 2012). In the context of civil servants, engagement is reported to be low in the government sector, which hampers work productivity (Bakker, 2015; R. Lavigna, 2017). Individuals involved in work should feel motivated to exert the necessary effort to produce optimal performance. Furthermore, the relationship between engagement and performance, especially in public service employees, has been relatively under-investigated (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2013). Therefore, based on the above line of argumentation, we propose the following hypothesis:

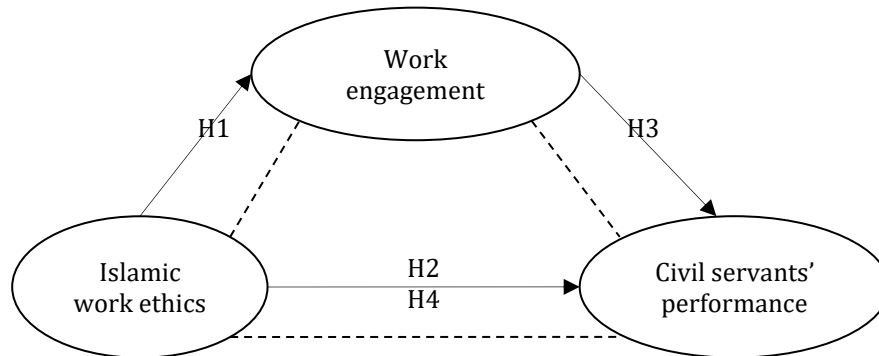H3: Work engagement significantly affects the performance of civil servants

Islamic work ethics and civil servants' performance mediated by work engagement

Human resource literature commonly acknowledges that work engagement plays a crucial role as a mediator for performance (Hamid & Ashoer, 2021; Motyka, 2019; Ramalu & Rashid, 2017).

Given this understanding, it is intriguing to explore whether these three variables – Islamic work ethics, work engagement, and performance – can mediate the relationship between Islamic work ethics and performance within the government sector. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Work engagement mediates the relationship between Islamic work ethics and the performance of civil servants

Figure 1. Research model

Source: Developed by the authors (2023)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic of respondents

Based on the primary data collection, the profiles of respondents in this study consist of Muslim civil servants working in Makassar City, South Sulawesi. Firstly, the gender distribution of respondents is quite balanced, with 51% being men and 49% women. Furthermore, the majority of respondents are aged between 25 to 30 years and have an average monthly net income of 3 to 5 million Rupiah. Additionally, the civil servants surveyed were employees working at the South Sulawesi Governor's Office and the Makassar Mayor's Office.

Preliminary analysis of PLS-SEM

The first step in evaluating PLS-SEM is the outer model evaluation, which consists of several steps (Hair et al., 2019). First, this involves testing for convergent and discriminant validity. The convergent validity of reflective indicators is tested using the SmartPLS 3.0 program, which involves examining the loading factor value for each construct indicator and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable. An instrument is considered to have met the criteria for convergent validity if it has a loading factor above 0.7. Based on the test results, it is observed that all items measuring constructs have values greater than 0.7, thereby confirming their validity in measuring their respective variables. Second, the AVE values for discriminant reliability on all measurement variables show values greater than 0.5, indicating that all items are reliable in measuring their latent variables. Furthermore, the value of composite reliability on all constructs is greater than 0.7, further affirming the reliability of all items in measuring their latent variables. Finally, Cronbach's Alpha values on all constructs are greater than 0.6, thus confirming the reliability of all sub-variables in measuring their latent variables. Lastly, the test also confirms discriminant validity from the cross-loading, indicating that each item is capable of measuring the latent variables corresponding to that item. The summary results of the outer model assessment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Outer model evaluation

Items and Variables	Loading factors	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
IWE1<-Islamic work ethics	0.752	0.674	0.889	0.887
IWE2<-Islamic work ethics	0.751			
IWE3<-Islamic work ethics	0.786			
IWE4<-Islamic work ethics	0.773			
IWE5<-Islamic work ethics	0.881			
IWE6<-Islamic work ethics	0.739			
IWE7<-Islamic work ethics	0.824			
IWE8<-Islamic work ethics	0.776			
WE1<- Work engagement	0.849	0.648	0.903	0.892
WE2<- Work engagement	0.724			
WE3<- Work engagement	0.704			
PER1<- Performance	0.857	0.695	0.886	0.880
PER2<- Performance	0.869			
PER3<- Performance	0.845			
PER4<- Performance	0.828			
PER5<- Performance	0.836			

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 output (2023)

The second evaluation in PLS-SEM involves assessing the structural model (Hair et al., 2019). The first criterion is to assess the R-square (R^2) value for each endogenous latent variable, which indicates the predictive power of the structural model. Based on the output calculations, the R^2 value for work engagement is 0.516 (51.6%) and for performance is 0.570 (57%). Therefore, it can be interpreted that the influence of all exogenous constructs on endogenous variables is moderate (Hair et al., 2019). The second step involves checking for multicollinearity in the research model by examining the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The VIF value must be less than 5, as a value greater than 5 would indicate collinearity between constructs (Hair et al., 2019). According to the test results, all VIF values are less than 5, meaning that there is no multicollinearity issue in this research model.

Hypotheses testing

The final step in the inner model evaluation includes hypothesis testing, which is done by examining the parameter coefficients and significance effects (t-statistics or p-values) between variables. Hypothesis testing is conducted using bootstrapping with the assistance of the Smart PLS 3.0 software program. This process helps in determining the relationship between the influence of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. To assess significance, T-table values are used for a confidence level of 95% (significant at $\alpha < 0.05$), and with degrees of freedom (df) equal to n-2, which in this case is 200 – 2 = 198, the critical value is 1.96. Hypothesis testing for each of the relationships between latent variables is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Hypotheses testing results

Direct Influence	Estimation	S.E.	T Statistics	P Values	Decision	Hypotheses
IWE → WE	0.308	0.092	3.348	0.001	Significant	Accepted
IWE → PER	0.329	0.093	3.538	0.001	Significant	Accepted
WE→ PER	0.367	0.086	4.267	0.000	Significant	Accepted
Mediation	**Estimation**	**S.E.**	**T Statistics**	**P Values**	**Decision**	**Hypotheses**
IWE→ WE → PER	0.285	0.095	3.002	0.003	Significant	Accepted

Description: IWE: Islamic work ethics; WE: Work engagement; PER: Performance

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 output (2023)

The results indicate that Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) has a positive and significant effect on Work Engagement (WE), with a path coefficient of 0.308. This significant result is evidenced by a t-statistic value of 3.348, which is greater than the t-table value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.001, which is smaller than 0.05. Hence, Hypothesis 1 (H1) is accepted. Furthermore, the output reveals that IWE has a positive and significant effect on Performance (PER) with a path coefficient of 0.329. This is supported by a t-statistic value of 3.538, exceeding the t-table value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.001, below 0.05, thus accepting Hypothesis 2 (H2). Additionally, WE shows a positive and significant effect on PER, with a path coefficient of 0.367. This finding is corroborated by a t-statistic value of 4.267, surpassing the t-table value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000, less than 0.05, leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis 3 (H3). Finally, the analysis confirms that WE mediates the relationship between IWE and PER (IWE → WE → PER) positively and significantly, with a path coefficient of 0.285. This significant mediation is indicated by a t-statistic value of 3.002, which is above the t-table value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.003, which is below 0.05, thereby accepting Hypothesis 4 (H4).

Discussion

Islamic work ethics and work engagement

Islamic work ethics have been confirmed to exhibit positive and significant effects on work engagement among civil servants in Indonesia. This finding corroborates previous research (Aflah et al., 2021; Farid et al., 2017; Ramalu & Rashid, 2017), demonstrating that Islamic work ethics can significantly impact employee engagement by influencing how individuals approach and perceive their work. Derived from Islamic teachings and principles, Islamic work ethics emphasize values that are crucial for civil servants in this study. For example, Islam stresses the importance of honesty and integrity in all interactions, which can contribute to a work environment where civil servants feel morally upright, fostering a sense of pride and involvement in their service to the community. Additionally, Islam encourages its followers to be diligent and committed to their work. This strong work ethic can lead to increased effort, dedication, and perseverance among civil servants, ultimately enhancing their level of engagement.

Islamic work ethics and civil servants' performance

Islamic work ethics have a positive and significant influence on the performance of civil servants in Indonesia, aligning with findings from prior studies (Arifin & Murniyati, 2020; Hamzah et al., 2021). Islamic work ethics can be a crucial predictor for the performance of civil servants as it provides a behavioral framework and set of values that influence how individuals approach their work. These ethics emphasize the importance of honesty and integrity in all dealings. Civil servants who adhere to these principles are likely to perform their duties with transparency and reliability. Furthermore, Islam encourages its followers to be diligent and work hard to fulfill their responsibilities. Civil servants who apply these principles tend to be more productive and committed to their duties.

Work engagement and civil servants' performance

Work engagement has been shown to have a positive and significant impact on the performance of civil servants in Indonesia. This finding reinforces previous research (Hamzah et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2012; Motyka, 2019). Engaged individuals are likely to be more productive because they invest physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in their work. In the context of this study, the involved civil servants tend to complete tasks efficiently and effectively, thus contributing to overall productivity in offices and government agencies. Furthermore, civil servants who are highly engaged often focus more on producing high-quality output for the community. Their commitment to their duties leads to increased attention to detail and higher standards of work.

Evidently, this can result in improved public services and effective policy implementation in the government sector.

Islamic work ethics and civil servants' performance mediated by work engagement

Work engagement was once again found to play a substantial mediating role in this study, aligning with previous research (Hamid & Ashoer, 2021; Motyka, 2019; Ramalu & Rashid, 2017; Yousef, 2001). This is because when Islamic work ethics influence the mindset and behavior of civil servants in the workplace, they may develop a stronger sense of purpose, dedication, and responsibility in their work serving society. This increased dedication and sense of responsibility, in turn, can lead to higher levels of work engagement. Additionally, higher work engagement is often linked with improved performance. Engaged civil servants tend to be more productive, innovative, and committed to achieving organizational goals. Therefore, work engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between Islamic work ethics and performance among civil servants in South Sulawesi. In conclusion, organizations such as governments that cultivate Islamic work ethics can indirectly enhance performance by fostering higher levels of work engagement among their employees.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the impact of Islamic work ethics on work engagement and performance among civil servants in Indonesia. Additionally, the mediating role of work engagement was also tested using PLS-SEM. While existing literature mainly focused on the normative aspects of Islamic management and circulated in the fields of Islamic economics and Islamic Banking, which have always received the greatest coverage, the literature on management lacks the bridge between Islamic management theory and practice. Hence, this study attempts to fill that gap by investigating the relationship between work engagement, Islamic work ethics, and performance among civil servants using the South Sulawesi Governor's Office and the Makassar Mayor's Office as the sample for this study.

This study found that all the constructs are positively significant towards each other. Islamic work ethics have a positive and significant effect on work engagement and performance among civil servants in Makassar, Indonesia. Simultaneously, work engagement has a positive and significant effect on performance, and work engagement mediates the influence between Islamic work ethics and performance positively and significantly.

Several practical implications can be drawn from this study. First, Islamic ethics, such as honesty, punctuality, and proactive behavior in the workplace, contribute to civil servants' engagement and lead to improved performance. Second, effective communication with stakeholders, especially when delivering services to the public, is crucial for achieving organizational goals and providing excellent public service. Therefore, organizations, such as governments, that cultivate Islamic work ethics can indirectly enhance performance by encouraging higher levels of work engagement among their employees.

Despite the research conducted, it is believed that many aspects have not been included in the research model. For further development, recommendations for future research are outlined. First, similar research can be conducted at the national level or in other government agencies to obtain a comprehensive picture of the Islamic work ethics model, work engagement, and performance in government sector organizations. Second, the study focused only on the variables of Islamic work ethic leadership, work engagement, and performance, limiting the predictive power of the model. Future research could potentially integrate additional key variables such as organizational structure, organizational culture, work-life balance, and workload. Lastly, this study only tested the effects of variable mediation, leaving ample opportunities for future research to explore tests like moderation.

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