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## Synergizing Talent Management and Ethical Work Values to Enhance Engagement and Employee Performance in Higher Education

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### Abstract

This study investigates whether talent management and values-based ethics are associated with employee performance in higher education, and whether work engagement explains this linkage. Ethical work values in this study are conceptualized as faith-based values rooted in organizational and cultural contexts. We used an explanatory survey design and collected responses from 200 non-academic staff working in public, private, and faith-based universities. The hypothesized relationships were tested using PLS-SEM. The findings indicate that TM is positively related to both engagement and performance. Ethical work values also show a meaningful association with engagement, and engagement functions as a partial mediator in the TM–performance relationship. Furthermore, ethical values amplify the effectiveness of talent management practices in fostering engagement. Integrating talent management with ethical work values provides a value-based human resource management approach that may strengthen employee engagement and performance in higher education institutions. From an applied perspective, the model supports institutional efforts to strengthen quality education (SDG 4) and decent work (SDG 8) by promoting ethical and sustainable HR practices in universities.

### KEYWORDS

talent management; ethical work values; work engagement; employee performance; higher education institutions.

### Introduction

The landscape of human resource management has evolved into a highly competitive and continuously shifting environment, requiring organizations to adopt more adaptive talent strategies. Reports by McKinsey and the World Economic Forum highlight the ongoing talent war as a strategic issue across industries, where organizations compete to attract, develop, and retain highly competent employees (McKinsey & Company, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2023). Effective talent management is a central factor shaping organizational competitiveness and long-term sustainability (Sinisterra et al., 2024). Within higher education, this pressure is reflected in increasing expectations for accountability and service quality, including the performance of non-academic staff (Hendrawan et al., 2024).

These dynamics align with the broader international sustainability agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4 concerning educational quality and SDG 8 regarding productive and inclusive employment. Enhancing HR management quality in universities directly supports these goals through improved institutional governance and employee well-being (F. Bagis et al., 2024).

HR management issues extend beyond industry to higher education in Indonesia (F. Bagis & Adawiyah, 2025) and previous studies report persistent challenges such as high turnover intention, low work engagement, and limited career development among non-academic staff (Faridli et al., 2026; Gibrani et al., 2026; Puspitasari et al., 2026.). Similar conditions are observed across multiple higher-education institutions in the region, spanning public, private, and faith-based universities that vary in organizational profiles.

Despite these contextual differences, many institutions still lack integrated Talent Management (TM) systems aligned with their organizational culture and values.

From the perspective of the Resource-Based View, employees are regarded as valuable organizational resources that, when strategically managed, can contribute to long-term institutional competitiveness (Barney, 1991; Lin & Wu, 2014). Within the RBV perspective, human capital in universities can be interpreted as a strategic resource that fulfills the VRIN criteria (valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable). Non-academic employees possess institutional knowledge and administrative expertise that are difficult to replicate across universities. Through structured talent management practices, universities are able to develop and retain these valuable capabilities, thereby strengthening their long-term institutional competitiveness.

TM thus functions as a strategic tool to identify, develop, and retain high-potential employees. The Faith-Based Ethical Framework, grounded in Islamic spiritual values, views work as an act of worship and moral duty, fostering honesty, fairness, and responsibility that enhance motivation and commitment (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007; Ateeq et al., 2025; F. Bagis, Adawiyah, et al., 2025; Udin, 2024). Lastly, Work Engagement (WE) within positive psychology reflects vigor, dedication, and absorption that drive performance and loyalty (Nabhan & Munajat, 2023; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Integrating these frameworks provides a holistic lens to examine how TM and IWE interact to influence performance through engagement.

Empirical findings show TM enhances performance via engagement (Collings et al., 2019; Schinnenburg & Böhmer, 2025; Sinisterra et al., 2024), while faith-based ethical framework strengthens commitment and suppresses counterproductive behavior (Javid et al., 2024; Qasim et al., 2022; Udin et al., 2022). However, studies combining TM, faith-based ethical framework, and engagement in a single model remain limited, especially in Indonesian higher education. The main research gaps lie in: (1) the dominance of industrial-sector studies over academic contexts (Hendrawan et al., 2024); (2) limited examination of faith-based ethical framework's psychological mechanisms via engagement (Ateeq et al., 2025; Udin, 2024) and (3) the scarcity of cross-institutional comparisons among state, private, and Islamic universities with differing cultural values. Previous studies have primarily examined talent management within corporate or industrial contexts. Empirical studies focusing on higher education institutions, particularly non-academic employees, remain limited. Moreover, existing studies tend to examine Islamic work ethics and employee performance separately, without investigating the psychological mechanism linking these variables through work engagement. Therefore, this study integrates talent management and faith-based ethical values within a unified framework and tests their relationships in a multi-institutional higher education setting.

Addressing these gaps, this research proposes a value-based HR model that integrates TM and faith-based ethical framework to promote sustainable performance. In regional contexts where higher-education institutions are shaped by strong social and religious values, the adoption of Islamic value-based TM aligns with SDG 8 by promoting ethical and inclusive work systems that sustain organizational development. Moreover, examining WE as a mediator clarifies the psychological process linking managerial practices to performance outcomes.

The novelty of this study lies in combining TM and faith-based ethical framework under the RBV and positive psychology frameworks, empirically tested in Indonesian higher education with a comparative multi-institutional approach. Specifically, this research aims to: (1) analyze the

influence of TM on employee performance; (2) examine the direct and moderating roles of faith-based ethical framework; (3) test WE as a mediating variable; and (4) compare the effects across different university types. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on Islamic value-based HRM and contribute to achieving SDG 4 and SDG 8 through improved educational quality and sustainable work systems in higher education institutions. (Bagis, 2026; F. Bagis et al., 2026). This study contributes to the HRM literature in three ways. First, it integrates talent management and Islamic work ethics within the RBV framework to explain employee engagement and performance. Second, the study focuses on non-academic employees in higher education institutions, a group that has received limited attention in HRM research. Third, the study provides comparative evidence across public, private, and Islamic universities.

#### Resource-Based View Theory

This research is based on the RBV approach as its primary conceptual foundation. RBV theory asserts that an organization's competitive advantage depends on its ability to manage strategic resources that are difficult for competitors to replicate resources (Barney, 1991; Lin & Wu, 2014). Superior HR are strategic assets that can create sustainable competitive advantage when managed through effective TM practices. In the context of higher education, the RBV approach emphasizes the importance of employee management as a strategic asset for universities to improve institutional performance, academic productivity, and the quality of administrative services. Thus, TM practices are not merely administrative efforts, but rather organizational strategies to strengthen institutional competitiveness. This theory is then integrated with value and psychological approaches, namely faith-based ethical framework and Positive Psychology through the concept of WE. This integration allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how managerial aspects TM and spiritual values faith-based ethical framework may interact in influencing positive work behavior and performance of university employees. Ethical values may also function as intangible organizational resources embedded within institutional culture. Based on the RBV perspective, effective talent management practices strengthen employee capabilities, which subsequently enhance engagement and performance outcomes.

#### Talent Management and Employee Performance

TM serves as an organizational strategy to ensure that employees with the best potential and competencies are managed effectively (Barney, 1991; Collings et al., 2019). Through the process of identification, development, and retention, TM creates a productive and sustainable work environment. Research shows that TM practices positively influence employee performance by increasing skills, motivation, and WE (Schinnenburg & Böhmer, 2025; Sinisterra et al., 2024). In the university context, TM helps improve the effectiveness of administrative and educational staff in supporting academic services and institutional operations. Hypothesis 1: Talent Management positively influences university employee performance.

#### Faith-Based Ethical Framework and Employee Performance

Islamic work ethics are conceptually derived from religious teachings that emphasize moral responsibility, sincerity, and accountability in professional activities (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007). Values such as honesty, responsibility, and fairness are believed to strengthen intrinsic motivation and improve individual performance (Ateeq et al., 2025; Udin et al., 2022). Previous research shows that employees who embrace IWE values tend to have higher affective commitment and avoid counterproductive behavior

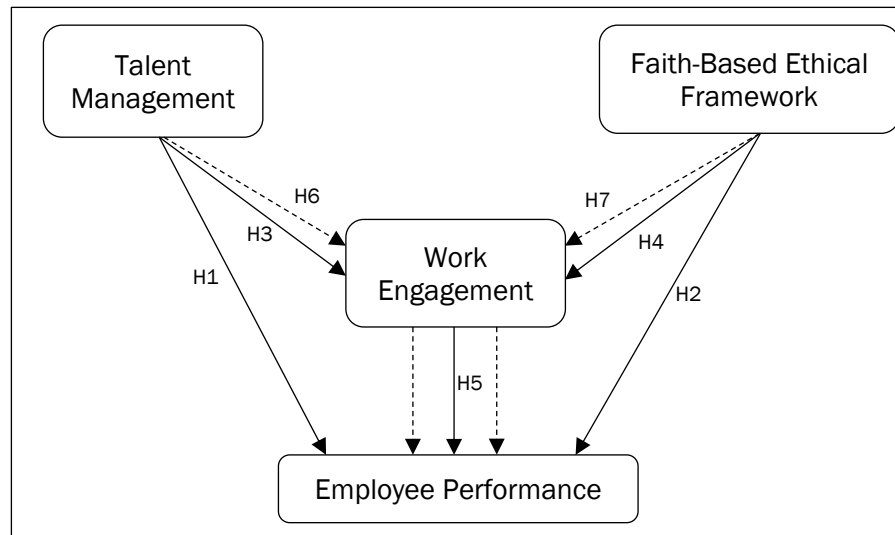


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

(Javid et al., 2024; Qasim et al., 2022). Therefore, implementing faith-based ethical framework in universities has the potential to improve work quality and employee professionalism.

Hypothesis 2: Faith-based ethical framework has a positive impact on university employee performance.

#### Talent Management and Work Engagement

Good TM practices can increase employee sense of appreciation and career satisfaction, ultimately strengthening WE. According to (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010), Employee engagement is generally characterized by sustained energy, strong involvement, and deep concentration toward job responsibilities. Employees who receive development support and career opportunities tend to show higher WE (Hendrawan et al., 2024; Sinisterra et al., 2024).

Hypothesis 3: Talent management has a positive effect on work engagement.

#### Faith-Based Ethical Framework and Work Engagement

The values of the faith-based ethical framework not only shape moral behavior but also create spiritual meaning in work, which has direct implications for WE. From an Islamic perspective, work is seen as a form of worship and social service (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007). Employees who are oriented towards values such as honesty, responsibility, justice, and hard work will experience a greater sense of purpose in their work (Udin, 2024). Previous research confirms that faith-based ethical framework has a positive impact on aspects of engagement, such as vigor (energy and resilience at work), dedication (passion and pride in work), and absorption (focus and enjoyment at work) (Javid et al., 2024; Qasim et al., 2022). In the university context, faith-based ethical framework values can strengthen employee loyalty and commitment to the institution's vision of values-based education and public service. Therefore, the stronger the implementation of faith-based ethical framework values, the higher the level of employee engagement with the organization.

Hypothesis 4: Faith-based ethical framework has a positive impact on work engagement.

#### Work Engagement and Employee Performance

The concept of WE from positive psychology explains that employees' emotional and cognitive involvement in their work is a key determinant of performance (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Employees who exhibit vigor, dedication, and absorption tend to demonstrate higher productivity, complete

tasks effectively, and make extra contributions to the organization (Nabhan & Munajat, 2023). Research across various sectors shows that engagement is not only directly related to individual performance but also increases innovation, service quality, and internal customer satisfaction (Sinisterra et al., 2024). In the context of higher education, WE is particularly important for non-academic staff, as their role supports the smooth running of administrative, academic, and student service systems. Therefore, high WE will boost overall university performance by increasing efficiency and service quality.

Hypothesis 5: Work Engagement has a positive effect on employee performance.

#### The Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Effect of Talent Management on Employee Performance

According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model and positive psychology perspectives, engagement can be viewed as an intervening psychological process through which managerial practices and ethical values translate into performance outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). TM provides organizational resources in the form of development opportunities, reward systems, and a supportive WE that strengthen employees' sense of belonging and engagement. When employees feel valued and supported, they become more emotionally and cognitively engaged in their work (Schaufeli, 2017). In higher education institutions, engagement reflects not only job involvement but also a sense of academic service and institutional mission.

Studies by (Collings et al., 2019; Sinisterra et al., 2024) show that TM increases engagement, which ultimately has a positive impact on performance. In a university context, TM, which focuses on career development, performance recognition, and empowerment of non-academic employees, has the potential to foster WE, which in turn leads to better performance. Therefore, WE is seen as a mediator that strengthens the relationship between TM and EP.

Hypothesis 6: Work engagement mediates the effect of talent management on employee performance.

#### The Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Influence of Faith-Based Ethical Framework on Employee Performance

In addition to directly influencing performance, faith-based ethical framework values also have an indirect influence by increasing WE. Spiritual values within faith-based ethical framework foster a deeper sense of meaning in work (meaningful work), which increases intrinsic motivation and employee dedication (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007; Udin, 2024).

Employees who believe that work is worship tend to be more diligent, consistent, and responsible in completing their tasks, which in turn increases engagement (Javid et al., 2024). Ethical values may strengthen the impact of talent management by enhancing meaning-making and value alignment between employees and institutional missions.

Several studies confirm that engagement serves as a psychological channel that bridges the relationship between religious work values and performance outcomes (Fachrunnisa et al., 2014; Mohammed Sayed Mostafa & Shen, 2020). In the context of higher education institutions in Indonesia, which have a strong religious foundation, engagement stemming from work is a crucial factor strengthening the influence of faith-based ethical framework on employee performance (Faridli et al., 2026).

Hypothesis 7: Work Engagement mediates the influence of faith-based ethical framework on Employee Performance. The overall conceptual relationships are illustrated in Figure 1.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study employed an exploratory–constructive research design to formulate a strategic living-wage framework for Indonesia’s hospitality industry. Within this framework, the MULTIPOL method was applied as a systematic tool to evaluate and prioritize diverse wage programs and policies under varying future scenarios. This approach is particularly suited for addressing the multidimensional nature of wage policy, where conflicting stakeholder objectives and economic uncertainties require a structured multicriteria evaluation (Fauzi, 2019; Godet, 2001).

### Data Collection

Data were elicited through a structured Focus Group Discussion (FGD) specifically designed to populate the MULTIPOL decision matrix. Participants were purposively recruited to represent a balanced tri-partite perspective, involving stakeholders from three 4–5 star hotels (international chains and local brands), the Jakarta Hotel and Restaurant A quantitative explanatory approach was applied to test the proposed relationships among TM, a faith-based ethical framework, work engagement, and employee performance. This approach is appropriate for examining both direct and indirect relationships within an integrated conceptual model grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), Positive Psychology, and faith-based ethical framework. The research was conducted across several higher education institutions, encompassing public, private, and faith-based universities. The focus is on non-academic employees, whose roles are critical to institutional effectiveness but often underrepresented in HR development studies. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used based on university type. Referring to methodological recommendations for SEM analysis, a minimum sample threshold above 150 respondents was considered appropriate for statistical estimation. The sampling frame consisted of non-academic employees from five universities representing public, private, and Islamic institutions. A proportionate stratified sampling technique was applied based on institutional type to ensure balanced representation across university categories. We used a structured questionnaire with a five-point response format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Measurement items were adapted from validated sources: TM (Collings et al., 2019; Schinnenburg & Böhmer, 2025), faith-based ethical framework (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007; Udin, 2024), WE (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010), and performance

**Table 2.** Results of Testing the Relationship Between Variables

(Koopmans, 2014). A pilot test with 30 respondents ensured instrument clarity and reliability. The model was estimated using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4.0. We first assessed the measurement quality (reliability and validity) and then evaluated the structural relationships, including direct effects and the proposed mediation pathways. To examine whether the effects differ by institutional type (public, private, and Islamic universities), we additionally performed a multigroup comparison analysis (Cheah et al., 2020). This methodological framework provides robust empirical insight into how TM and faith-based ethical framework jointly affect performance through engagement. Furthermore, it supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by promoting sustainable, ethical, and inclusive HR practices in higher education.

## Result and Discussion

### Data Description and Respondent Profile

This study involved 200 non-academic employees from five universities in Indonesia, consisting of public, private, and Islamic universities. As many as 58% of respondents were female and 42% were male. Most respondents were aged 26–40 (63%), had more than 5 years of service (57%), and worked in administration and student services. This condition reflects employees with fairly high career stability and are relevant to the research focus on engagement and TM in the context of higher education organizations.

### Test Measurement Model (Outer Model)

All variables had an AVE value of  $> 0.5$  and a CR of  $> 0.7$ , indicating convergent validity was met (Hair et al., 2021) as presented in Table 1. Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT criterion, with all values below the threshold of 0.85. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded the correlations between constructs.

### Structural Model Test (Inner Model)

As shown in Table 2, all hypothesized relationships between variables are statistically significant and supported. The coefficient of determination indicates that  $R^2(WE) = 0.56$  and  $R^2(EP) = 0.64$ , suggesting substantial explanatory power of the structural model (Hair et al., 2021). This indicates substantial explanatory power of the structural model.

The empirical results reinforce the theoretical perspective of the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), which emphasizes the strategic value of human capital. The analysis reveals that TM has a significant and positive influence on both WE and EP. This finding supports previous studies (Collings et al., 2019; Sinisterra et al., 2024), which emphasized that effective TM practices such as selective recruitment, structured career development, and targeted retention programs enhance employees’ psychological attachment to their organizations. In the context of higher education, this indicates that universities that implement systematic TM initiatives, especially for non-

**Table 1.** Measurement Model Evaluation Results

Variabel	AVE	CR	Cronbach Alpha	Status Validitas
Talent Management (TM)	0.74	0.92	0.88	Valid & Reliabel
Faith-Based Ethical Framework	0.70	0.90	0.86	Valid & Reliabel
Work Engagement (WE)	0.68	0.91	0.87	Valid & Reliabel
Employee Performance (KP)	0.72	0.93	0.89	Valid & Reliabel

Relationships Between Variables	Path Coefficients ( $\beta$ )	t-Statistik	p-Value	Results
TM $\rightarrow$ WE	0.48	9.21	0.000	Supported
IWE $\rightarrow$ WE	0.31	5.88	0.000	Supported
WE $\rightarrow$ KP	0.42	8.15	0.000	Supported
TM $\rightarrow$ KP	0.29	4.97	0.001	Supported
IWE $\rightarrow$ KP	0.33	5.02	0.000	Supported
TM $\times$ faith-based ethical framework $\rightarrow$ WE	0.18	2.47	0.014	Supported
TM $\rightarrow$ KP (via WE)	0.20	3.55	0.001	Partial Mediation

academic employees, are more likely to achieve stronger commitment, better service quality, and higher institutional productivity.

Furthermore, the results confirm that faith-based ethical framework significantly affects both engagement and performance. Employees who internalize values such as honesty, responsibility, and justice tend to exhibit higher levels of vigor, dedication, and focus at work. This aligns with the argument of (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007; Udin, 2024), who state that IWE instills a spiritual and moral foundation that balances faith and professionalism. In the context of university governance, the implementation of faith-based ethical framework not only fosters integrity and accountability but also enhances collective commitment toward organizational goals. Thus, the internalization of Islamic ethical functions as a reinforcing process that nurtures both individual excellence and institutional harmony.

Another key finding is that WE serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between TM and performance. This mediation confirms that effective TM indirectly improves performance through the enhancement of engagement levels. Employees who perceive fair opportunities for growth, recognition, and learning tend to feel more energized and emotionally attached to their work (Nabhan & Munajat, 2023; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). In this context, engagement operates as an intervening psychological mechanism that connects managerial practices with performance outcomes. This finding supports the positive psychology perspective that focuses on cultivating intrinsic motivation and sustained well-being among employees (F. Bagis, Rabiatal Adawqiyah, et al., 2025).

In addition, the interaction analysis demonstrates that faith-based ethical framework strengthens the relationship between TM and engagement, indicating that ethical and spiritual values amplify the effectiveness of TM practices. In value-driven organizations such as universities, where moral culture plays a central role, the synergy between TM and faith-based ethical framework fosters a more cohesive and purpose-driven work climate. This interaction provides a new theoretical insight: spiritual values are not only compatible with modern management systems but can also enhance their strategic effectiveness.

Overall, these findings underline that integrating TM, faith-based ethical framework, and WE contributes substantially to the development of human capital that is both competent and conscientious. The study provides empirical evidence that TM initiatives aligned with ethical values can produce sustainable motivation (sustainable work engagement) that supports long-term performance improvement. Moreover, The findings suggest the potential contribution of integrating talent management and ethical values in strengthening engagement and performance. By strengthening employee capability, engagement, and ethical orientation, universities indirectly advance these goals through transparent governance, equitable career development, and productive institutional ecosystems.

## Conclusion

The present findings indicate that talent management exerts a positive influence on work engagement and employee performance among university employees. Faith-based ethical framework directly impacts engagement and performance, strengthening the relationship between TM and engagement. WE operates as a mediating mechanism between TM and performance, meaning WE is an important psychological mechanism for improving performance. The integration of TM and faith-based ethical framework has been proven to create a more effective, ethical, and sustainable promising HRM approach, supporting the achievement of SDGs 4 and 8.

A limitation of this study is that it only involved non-academic employees from five universities in one region, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. Data collection was carried out using a cross-sectional approach, so it cannot describe the dynamics of long-term relationships between variables. Variables were measured using respondent perceptions (self-report), which has the potential to introduce social bias. Future research could expand the context by involving lecturers or academic units, and comparing them across regions or countries and could also add variables such as psychological safety or organizational justice as contextual factors that strengthen engagement. Future studies may address potential common method bias by using multi-source data or longitudinal research designs.

## Author contributions

Conceptualized the research, developed the theoretical framework, conducted the data analysis, and led the manuscript writing process. FB contributed to the development of the research instruments, data collection, and provided substantial input in refining the theoretical and methodological aspects of the study. Hengky WW contributed to data analysis, interpretation of results, and participated in drafting and revising the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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