

Beyond material reward: A holistic-transcendental human resource management model for pesantren institutions

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to analyze the strategies for improving the quality of human resources (HR) in *Pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding schools) through the integration of spiritual values and modern management principles. Amid the pressures of modern educational standards, there is a strategic need for *Pesantren* to transform their HR management without losing their traditional essence.

Method – This research employed qualitative case study design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with 8 key informants—including foundation secretaries, university rectors, and school principals—as well as participatory observation and document analysis. The data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana.

Findings – The findings reveal that HR transformation is achieved through three strategic pillars: (1) Value-based recruitment that prioritizes organizational loyalty and *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (mainstream Sunni Islamic traditions) values alongside academic linearity; (2) Integrated capacity building through cross-sector partnerships; and (3) A transcendental motivation system that balances material rewards with spiritual fulfillment (seeking divine blessing). The integration of these elements establishes the Holistic-Transcendental HRM Model. This article contributes to the HRM literature by demonstrating that spiritual values can function as the core operating system of institutional resilience, offering a highly sustainable alternative to conventional, secular material-based motivation.

Keywords: Strategic Management, Quality of Education, and Islamic Boarding School Institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The shift in the educational paradigm in the era of globalization requires educational institutions to adopt strategic management principles to ensure their sustainability and competitiveness (Ghoni et al., 2025). In an ever-changing ecosystem, an organization's effectiveness is no longer determined solely by the availability of physical infrastructure but also by managerial capabilities to optimize all institutional assets (Chabane et al., 2023). These dynamics are forcing educational institutions to undergo a fundamental transformation, shifting from traditional management models toward modern management practices that are more accountable and responsive to global quality standards (Kasmia & M'hamed, 2023).

Pesantren, as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, has deep historical and sociological roots in shaping the nation's character. Traditionally, pesantren have served as centers for the transmission of religious knowledge (*tafaqquh fiddin*) under

the guidance of charismatic religious leaders known as kiai (Dhofier, 2025). However, amid the current technological disruption, Islamic boarding schools face a dual challenge: preserving the authenticity of Salafist traditions while meeting increasingly competitive national educational standards. This situation calls for a balance between the noble values of Islamic boarding schools and a professional managerial approach, particularly in human resource development (Wirosukarto et al., 1996).

The quality of an Islamic educational institution is essentially a reflection of the quality of the human capital that drives it (Oktaria et al., 2024). Human resources (HR) are not merely a factor of production, but a strategic asset that determines the direction of an institution's transformation (Nicolás-Agustín et al., 2022). The success of Islamic boarding schools in addressing the challenges of modernization depends heavily on the capacity of their educators and educational staff to integrate technical expertise with spiritual values. Therefore, human resource management within Islamic boarding schools requires a specialized approach that addresses not only cognitive aspects but also the transcendental aspects that define the very essence of these institutions.

However, the reality on the ground reveals a significant gap between ideal expectations and empirical reality. According to 2023 data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there are more than 463,300 *pesantren* educators in Indonesia. However, the majority of them still hold educational qualifications below the bachelor's degree (S1) level. (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). This skills gap results in the institutions' low competitiveness in meeting contemporary educational quality standards. The lack of systematic career development planning has left many Islamic boarding schools stuck in a reactive and ad hoc approach to human resource management (Ritonga, 2025). Previous researchers have conducted numerous studies on *pesantren* management from various perspectives. Wardani, for example, emphasizes that strategic leadership is key to enhancing the competitiveness of *pesantren* institutions in this era of competition (Wardani & Swasono, 2019). Meanwhile, Anam and Hariyanto explained the importance of implementing formal management functions such as POAC (*Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling*) to improve the organizational structure of the Islamic boarding school (Anam & Hariyanto, 2020). Other studies have also shown that an appropriate evaluation and compensation system significantly increases teacher loyalty in Islamic educational settings (Miranti, 2025).

Although research on *pesantren* management is emerging, a significant theoretical gap remains. Previous literature has extensively explored religion-based organizational behavior through concepts such as the Islamic Work Ethic (Yousef, 2001), Workplace Spirituality (Pawar, 2009), and religion-based servant leadership. Furthermore, studies on international Islamic educational models, such as Turkish *Imam Hatip* schools or Malaysian *madrasahs*, have highlighted the challenges of integrating secular curricula with religious mandates. However, most existing models treat spiritual values merely as complementary elements to secular management frameworks. The synthesis of spiritual values, POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling) principles, and cultural-spiritual Key

Performance Indicators (KPIs) within a single empirical framework has not been fully operationalized in earlier studies.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how value-based recruitment and integrated competency development can strengthen institutional resilience. The novelty of this article lies in the development of an integrative-contextual human resource development model, in which organizational loyalty and intellectual independence are fostered through management that centers on the *pesantren's* cultural roots.

To systematically address this gap and guide the analysis, this study formulates three primary research questions: 1) How does *Pesantren* Qamarul Huda integrate spiritual values into its HR recruitment and capacity-building practices? 2) How does the transcendental motivation system sustain educator loyalty and reduce turnover amid limited material compensation? 3) What conceptual model can be constructed to comprehensively describe this integrative HR management approach?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2017) (Miles et al., 2018), to explore and analyze in depth specific phenomena related to human resource (HR) development strategies within the *pesantren* environment. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to understand empirical realities and socio-cultural contexts holistically rather than merely testing hypotheses. The primary unit of analysis in this study is the institutional HR management strategy implemented across multiple educational units under the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School Foundation, located in Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. This location was purposively selected due to the boarding school's highly complex institutional structure, which encompasses 20 educational units ranging from early childhood education to the university level.

The field data collection process took place intensively over ten months, from August 2024 to May 2025. Primary data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 8 key informants directly involved in institutional governance, selected using purposive sampling. To provide transparency regarding the data sources, the profiles of the key informants are detailed in Table 1.

Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through a review of institutional documents, strategic planning archives, program implementation reports, teacher qualification data, and partnership memorandums of understanding (MoUs). The researcher served as the primary instrument, conducting participatory observations of daily human resource management activities and compiling documentation continuously.

Data analysis was conducted inductively and iteratively. The transcribed interview and observation data underwent a rigorous three-stage coding process: (1) *open coding*, where initial transcripts were broken down into discrete parts and assigned preliminary labels (e.g., 'ideological screening', 'scholarship provision', 'devotion'); (2) *axial coding*, where these initial codes were grouped into broader conceptual categories linking HR practices with spiritual values; and (3) *selective coding*, which integrated these categories

into the core analytical themes presented in the findings (e.g., value-based recruitment, transcendental motivation).

Table 1

Profiles of Key Informants

Informant Code	Name / Initial	Position	Institutional Unit	Years of Service	Interview Technique
INF-1	Ridho Kamil	Foundation Secretary	Foundation Central Board	20 Years	In-depth Interview
INF-2	Haji Menap	Rector	UNIQHBA (University)	15 Years	In-depth Interview
INF-3	TGH. Lalu Tamim A. A.	Head of Boarding School	Pesantren / Non-formal	20 Years	In-depth Interview
INF-4	Abdul Qadir	Vice Rector for Academics	UNIQHBA (University)	10 Years	In-depth Interview
INF-5	H. Muhammad Ahyar	Director	IAIQH (Institute)	10 Years	In-depth Interview
INF-6	Lalu Sapwan	School Principal	SMK Qamarul Huda	15 Years	In-depth Interview
INF-7	H. M. Zarkasi Efendi	Head of Madrasah	MA Qamarul Huda	15 Years	In-depth Interview
INF-8	Ustadz Taufik	Central Board Member	Pesantren Central Board	20 Years	In-depth Interview
INF-9	Hj. Huryah	Head of School	Islamic Kindergarten of Qomarul Huda	25 Years	In-depth Interview

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the scientific findings, the researchers applied prolonged engagement in the field and triangulation of data sources (cross-checking leadership statements with institutional documents). Furthermore, the researchers employed *member checking* by returning the synthesized transcripts and preliminary interpretations to key informants (INF-1 and INF-3) to verify the accuracy of the data. Finally, to maintain qualitative rigor, the researchers practiced *reflexivity* by continuously documenting their preconceptions and positionality, thereby minimizing the risk of subjective bias in shaping the institutional narrative (confirmability).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An HR Planning Framework Based on an Integrative Vision

Human Resource (HR) planning and management at the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School are not designed in isolation. However, they are integrated into a management framework that operates under a single institutional authority: the Foundation. Observational data indicate that this boarding school manages a highly complex educational ecosystem, encompassing seven levels of formal education, ranging

from RA, MI, MTs, MA, SMK, the Islamic Institute, to the University, as well as non-formal units such as the boarding school dormitory and Ma'had Aly (Observations, 2025). The existence of this multi-institutional structure demands a centralized yet flexible human resources planning approach, ensuring that capacity development for educators at every level ultimately converges on a single goal: the boarding school's vision to cultivate a generation that is intelligent and of noble character.

Table 2*Thematic Summary of Research Findings*

No.	Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Data Source	Key Information
1.	Value-Based Recruitment	a. Academic linearity b. Ideological screening (Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah)	Interviews, Participatory Observation	INF-1, INF-2, INF-3, INF-9
2.	Integrated Capacity Building	c. Pesantren track record d. Structured competency programs e. Doctoral scholarships f. Cross-sectoral MoUs	Interviews, Strategic Documents, MoUs	INF-1, INF-2, INF-3
3.	Transcendental Motivation	g. Work as an act of worship h. Seeking divine blessing (<i>barokah</i>) i. Etiquette-based evaluation	Interviews, Participatory Observation	INF-1, INF-3, INF-7, INF-8

To ensure the continuity of this vision, the human resources planning framework is built upon the ideological and cultural values inherited from the pesantren's founder, TGH. Lalu M. Turmudzi Badaruddin. This is clearly evident in the way the foundation views educators not merely as academic staff but as ideological cadres who bear a moral responsibility. The instillation of these values begins at the initial planning stage for teacher and lecturer needs, where the foundation prioritizes recruiting educators from internal sources or alums networks who already understand the culture of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah An-Nahdliyah*. The educator data table (Table 3) records a total of 416 educators across all units, with the majority holding bachelor's (S1) and master's (S2) degrees, and several faculty members holding doctoral (S3) qualifications at the university level. The plan to meet the teacher-student and lecturer-student ratios is based on specific projections of needs for each level (Documentation, 2025).

To ensure that human resources planning is effective and adaptive, the foundation implements a tiered coordination and synchronization mechanism. An interview with the Foundation Secretary, Ridho Kamil, confirmed this:

We hold a coordination meeting for all leaders to review the results or evaluations of all educational levels we conduct once a year. There are also meetings at each institution held once a month, specifically before and after the end of the semester" (Interview, Ridho Kamil, October 23, 2024).

This statement demonstrates that planning is not merely a static document at the start of the year, but a dynamic process that is periodically evaluated. Through these forums, the direction of human resource development, whether related to academic or religious competencies, is realigned with actual needs in the field.

Table 3

Data on Teaching Staff from All Research Sites

No.	Name of Institution			Number of Educators	D3	S1	S2	S3
1.	Islamic	Preschool	Qamarul Huda	5	-	5	-	-
2.	Islamic	Elementary	School Qamarul Huda	19	-	17	2	-
3.	Islamic	Junior High	School Qamarul Huda	65	-	55	10	-
4.	Islamic	Senior High	School Qamarul Huda	68	1	54	11	1
5.	Vocational High School Qamarul Huda			48	2	41	4	1
6.	IAIQH			60	-	-	52	8
7.	UNIQHBA			158	-	-	140	18
8.	Pondok	Pesantren	Qamarul Huda Bagu	51	-	23	5	-

In addition to internal alignment, the human resources planning architecture of Islamic boarding schools is also designed to integrate modern competency requirements with spiritual development. At the formal education level, development planning focuses on modern pedagogical adaptations, such as implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which representatives from the relevant ministries directly monitor. Conversely, in the non-formal unit (*pesantren*), HR planning is centered on strengthening literacy in classical Islamic traditions. This was stated by the Central Board of the *Pesantren*, Ustadz Taufik:

“We have a weekly book discussion program. We teach the texts, listen to the students’ recitations, and hold preparatory meetings for the text exams as a requirement for advancing to the next diniyah grade” (Interview, Taufik, October 25, 2024).

This differentiated focus demonstrates mature planning that maps the unique needs of each educational entity without compromising the *pesantren’s* identity.

From a macro perspective, the success of these human resources planning architecture, grounded in an integrative vision, is reflected in strong public enthusiasm and stable institutional performance. Rather than implementing a massive teacher expansion system, the foundation has opted for a *replacement system*, with recruitment conducted solely to fill vacancies to maintain budget efficiency and cohesion among the teaching

staff. The Head of MA Qamarul Huda, H. M. Zarkasi Efendi, emphasized this stability by stating, *In terms of human resources, we feel we are very strong and do not yet need to replace our teaching staff*" (Interview, H. M. Zarkasi Efendi, January 10, 2025). This statement serves as a strong indicator that strategic planning that integrates academic professionalism with the nobility of Salafi values can create a resilient, loyal human resources structure with a strong *sense of belonging* to the pesantren.

Recruitment and Selection Mechanisms: Balancing Academic Qualifications and Loyalty

The recruitment and selection mechanisms for educators at the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School differ from those of educational institutions in general. The foundation does not use a mass open recruitment approach (*expansion system*). Instead, it uses a recruitment pattern based on specific needs or a replacement system, in which admissions are conducted only to fill vacancies or replace retiring educators. This strategy is designed as an instrument of quality control and ideological defense, whereby the *pesantren* implements a dual selection system that harmonizes national academic professionalism standards with a cultural filter grounded in the values of devotion.

In formal education institutions, particularly from the secondary level (MTs, MA, SMK) through higher education (IAIQH and UNIQHBA), meeting academic qualifications is an absolute, non-negotiable requirement. The Foundation strictly adheres to standards of academic linearity to ensure that the quality of Classroom instruction aligns with accreditation requirements and modern professional standards. Rector of Qamarul Huda Badaruddin University, Haji Menap, emphasized this in his interview:

"For us, from the university level down to MTs, the principle must be linear. This means educators must have a field of expertise that aligns with the subject or course they will teach. We do not accept instructors who lack a relevant academic background, as this concerns the institution's academic quality and professional standards. (Interview, Menap, October 26, 2024).

Beyond the fulfillment of these formal academic standards, the most decisive layer of selection in hiring educators is the screening for ideology and loyalty. All prospective teachers and lecturers, without exception, regarding their assigned units, are required to possess a religious understanding aligned with the values of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah An-Nahdliyah* (NU-affiliation). Based on field observation data, the validation of candidates' character and competencies is not only conducted through document screening but also through a one-month teaching probation period (*probation*) (Observation, 2025). During this period, the candidates' discipline, interpersonal ethics, and loyalty are directly monitored by unit leaders and reported to the foundation before the individuals are approved as permanent teaching staff.

Far more specific and in-depth requirements are applied to non-formal educational units, such as boarding schools and *Ma'had Aly*. In this sector, a college degree is not the sole criterion; rather, a track record of cultural education within the pesantren environment

is. The Head of the Islamic Boarding School, TGH. Lalu Tamim Ali Akso detailed these specific standards:

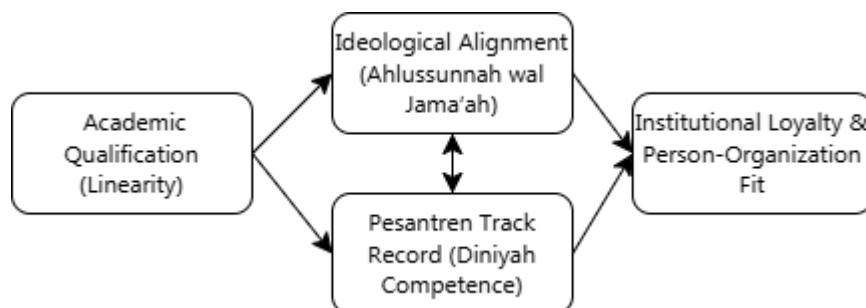
In this recruitment process, a candidate must demonstrate a strong commitment to service. Additionally, they must understand NU ideology. We also require that prospective teachers have spent at least four years as a resident student at one of the NU pesantren. For those teaching at Ma'had Aly, they must also be able to read classical Islamic texts (Interview, Tamim Ali Akso, October 28, 2024).

The requirements of proficiency in *tajwid* and *nahwu-shorof*, along with a track record of *pesantren* education, are presented as a guarantee of the preservation of the Salafi tradition amid institutional modernization.

The harmonization of academic qualification requirements and cultural loyalty criteria has proven to produce a resilient and stable workforce. The institution's *value-based recruitment* approach has successfully filtered individuals focused solely on professional careers, replacing them with educators who possess a strong *sense of belonging* to the *pesantren*. Based on field observations, these multi-layered selection criteria have a direct impact on the extremely low staff turnover rate, ensuring that each educator not only fulfills the function of knowledge transfer in the classroom but is also capable of shouldering the moral responsibility of serving as a role model for the students (Observations, 2025).

Figure 1.

Value-Based Recruitment Framework at Pesantren



Strategies for Educator Capacity Building through Strategic Partnerships

Capacity building for educators at the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School is implemented through a centralized training program that responds to changes in the national curriculum. The Foundation does not leave its educational units to fend for themselves in responding to updates in the education system; rather, it facilitates structured competency-building programs. These trainings focus on mastering modern pedagogy and academic literacy skills. The Foundation's Secretary, Ridho Kamil, confirmed that these programs are conducted regularly:

We also hold training on the Merdeka Curriculum, which is, of course, directly monitored by the Ministry of Education or its representatives. Additionally, the

university conducts journal training and other related activities” (Interview, Ridho Kamil, October 23, 2024).

This centralized approach ensures that every educator, from elementary to secondary education levels, maintains a uniform standard of understanding when applying modern teaching methods in the classroom.

At the higher education level, investment in human resources is directed toward advancing educational attainment through scholarship programs. The foundation recognizes that the demands of university accreditation and research quality cannot be met through short-term training alone but require advancing academic degrees to the doctoral level (Ph.D.). This effort is carried out by providing full financial support to faculty members deemed to have high academic achievement and dedication to the institution. This was emphasized by Abdul Qadir, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs at Qamarul Huda Badaruddin University (UNIQHBA), who stated:

Specifically at the university and the institute, we also have a doctoral program, namely doctoral scholarships for high-performing faculty members, as well as community service programs” (Interview, Abdul Qadir, April 10, 2025).

This internal scholarship policy serves a dual purpose: to accelerate faculty competence and to reward long-term loyalty.

A network of domestic strategic partnerships serves as another crucial pillar for bridging gaps in managerial and academic capacity. The Qamarul Huda Islamic Institute (IAIQH) is actively establishing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with various well-established public and religious universities to facilitate academic exchange, joint research, and the development of teaching methodologies. IAIQH Director H. Muhammad Ahyar detailed the broad scope of this collaboration:

We are collaborating with various universities, both domestic and international, as part of our efforts to enhance the quality of our faculty and student workforce.” (Interview, Muhammad Ahyar, April 10, 2025).

These partnerships involve leading universities such as the Islamic University of Malang (UNISMA), UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, and UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, as well as language development institutions in Kampung Inggris Pare, which directly enrich the academic knowledge and teaching methodologies of faculty members within the pesantren environment.

A strategic leap in human resource development is also being achieved through internationalization and the involvement of the industrial and public service sectors. The need to produce professionals, particularly at vocational high school and university levels, requires instructors and students to possess practical skills recognized by the business and industrial sectors (DUDI). UNIQHBA Rector, Haji Menap, explained the scope of these partnerships:

We have established collaborations with PT. Pertamina, and with Brawijaya University... We also have partnerships with eleven universities in the Philippines and one university in Malaysia (Interview, Menap, April 10, 2025).

In the health sector, partnerships are closely built with government agencies, the local Health Office, and the regional hospital network (Praya Regional General Hospital and Mataram Regional General Hospital). This interaction with industry and health practitioners indirectly compels pesantren educators to continually update their learning modules to ensure they remain aligned with workplace operational standards.

Capacity building is not limited to the formal academic sphere; it is also carried out in a structured manner within non-formal institutions, which serve as centers for the transmission of Salafi traditions. Partnerships are established with umbrella religious organizations and partner Islamic boarding schools that specialize in specific fields of study to deepen the capacity of caregivers and *ustadz*. The Head of the Islamic Boarding School, TGH. Lalu Tamim Ali Akso highlighted the importance of this integration:

We certainly collaborate with PBNU, as well as PCNU, throughout NTB. Additionally, we have invited Ma'had Aly Sukorejo as a partner in the human resource development of Ma'had Aly students at this boarding school (Interview, Tamim Ali Akso, February 5, 2025).

The presence of external partners, such as Ma'had Aly Sukorejo, facilitates the transfer of methodologies for studying classical literature and training future religious scholars. This cross-sectoral integration, spanning ministries, international universities, corporations, and the Nahdlatul Ulama network, demonstrates that Islamic boarding schools can leverage their social capital to enhance the quality of human resources while maintaining their spiritual roots.

Implementation of the Transcendental Motivation System and Human Resources Rewards

The sustainability of educational quality at the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School depends heavily on the stability of the teaching staff's loyalty, which is built upon a foundation of dual motivation: structural and transcendental. Rather than making financial compensation the primary draw, the institution instills the value of spiritual devotion as the driving force behind performance. This philosophical foundation was directly passed down by the boarding school's founder and is encapsulated in the four pillars of institutional service. The Foundation's Secretary, Ridho Kamil, reaffirmed these fundamental principles:

We firmly uphold the founder's teachings. He said, 'Do not be ashamed of praise, do not retreat from criticism.' Next is our motivation to seek the pleasure of Allah SWT, to seek blessings from the Divine Teacher, and the intention to serve religion, the nation, and society (Interview, Ridho Kamil, October 23, 2024).

This paradigm effectively transforms the status of teaching from a professional obligation into an act of worship.

The internalization of these transcendental values has been shown to foster psychological resilience and a strong sense of commitment among educators. The process of transferring knowledge is no longer viewed merely as a transaction between employee and employer, but rather as a calling of the soul and an intellectual honor. The principal of SMK Qamarul Huda Bagu, Lalu Sapwan, reflects on the profound meaning of this profession within the pesantren environment: *We teach here because of a calling from the heart. This is not merely a job, but a form of worship. Serving at the pesantren is an honor*" (Interview, Sapwan, February 13, 2025). This intrinsic motivation is further strengthened by a supportive academic ecosystem, in which young teachers continuously receive cultural guidance from senior *asatidz*, thereby creating a work environment that is spiritually soothing and stimulates academic growth.

Although spiritual motivation strongly drives the institution's ethos, the foundation takes a realistic approach by not overlooking the importance of material and structural reward systems. These rewards are intended as the institution's objective recognition of educators' dedication and exceptional contributions. This appreciation policy is implemented through a promotion scheme based on actual work performance. *"If we feel that an educator has been very helpful or has made a significant contribution, then we will promote them,"* explained Ridho Kamil regarding this *reward* mechanism (Interview, Ridho, November 14, 2024). Beyond mere rank promotions, the foundation also allocates incentives in the form of continuing education scholarships for teachers and lecturers, making it a mutually beneficial investment that supports individual career development while simultaneously boosting institutional quality.

In terms of other aspects of material well-being, Islamic boarding schools provide additional financial incentives on strategic occasions, such as Teachers' Day, as a symbol of emotional appreciation for educators' daily dedication. Interestingly, institutional loyalty stems more from social recognition and non-material appreciation from the surrounding community. The principal of RA Qamarul Huda, Hj. Huryah, describes how the balance between logistical incentives and moral support fosters teacher loyalty: *"Yes, those incentives exist, but they aren't the main thing. We are actually more motivated by the moral support from our leaders and the community."* (Interview, Huryah, February 20, 2025). This empirical reality confirms that material rewards in Islamic boarding schools are positioned as supplementary tools, while inner satisfaction acts as the primary instrument for sustaining dedication. The implementation of this dual-motivation and rewards system is directly linked to the performance evaluation indicators for educators. The success of a teacher or *ustadz* is not measured solely by the completeness of Classroom administrative records or students' academic achievements, but is heavily weighted on the consistency of their moral exemplary conduct outside the classroom. The Head of the Islamic Boarding School, TGH. Lalu Tamim Ali Akso made a strong statement regarding these cultural performance standards:

For *ustadz* and *ustadzah*, the measure of performance is not merely the ability to teach, but also to serve as a model of proper conduct, to remain steadfast in

participating in collective worship activities with the students, and to play a role in fostering discipline” (Interview, Tamim Ali Akso, February 5, 2025).

It is this harmonization between a proportional *reward* system and etiquette-based performance evaluation that ultimately secures long-term loyalty, creates stability among the teaching staff, and reduces staff turnover to a minimum.

A Tiered System for Monitoring and Evaluating Human Resources Performance

Human Resources (HR) evaluation and oversight at the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School are carried out through a systematic, tiered, and ongoing process. This mechanism is designed to ensure that all development programs align with the foundation’s central policies while remaining adaptable to the unique operational needs of each educational unit. Supervision is not viewed merely as a control mechanism but as a quality-assurance process aimed at ensuring that every strategy to enhance the capacity of teachers and staff is effectively implemented on the ground.

At the highest level of coordination, the foundation maintains strategic control by holding annual meetings that involve all unit leaders, from the kindergarten level up to the university. This forum serves as a platform for alignment to evaluate the institution’s major achievements and formulate policy directions for the following year. Abdul Qadir, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs at Qamarul Huda Badaruddin University (UNIQHBA), explained this evaluation structure:

We conduct our evaluations through annual meetings, which are directed by the foundation and attended by all institutional leaders from kindergarten through higher education. to identify program shortcomings and formulate new ideas as solutions for improving the quality of human resources. (Interview, Abdul Qadir, April 10, 2025).

This centralized guidance ensures that the integrity of pesantren values is maintained amidst the modernization of management across each formal educational entity.

Supervisory activities at the operational level of formal education institutions are carried out more technically through regular monthly monitoring and at the end of each semester. Unit leaders, such as school principals and university rectors, have the authority to monitor teachers’ discipline, attendance, and instructional quality in the classroom. At SMK Qamarul Huda Bagu, for example, supervision is conducted comprehensively across both academic and non-academic aspects to ensure graduates’ competencies align with their fields of expertise. The school principal, Lalu Sapwan, emphasized the intensity of this supervision:

The principal and teachers routinely and meticulously oversee program implementation. This is our strategy to ensure that the quality of human resources remains high, so that the programs implemented are successful. (Interview, Sapwan, February 13, 2025).

This routine monitoring pattern allows the institution to intervene quickly in response to managerial challenges that arise during the learning process.

The distinctive nature of the evaluation system is particularly evident in non-formal institutions (*pesantren*), which place greater emphasis on spirituality, etiquette, and exemplary conduct by instructors. In this sector, performance indicators range from mastery of classical literature (*kitab kuning*) and the ability to recite the Qur'an from memory to the consistency with which students maintain discipline in the dormitories. The Head of the Islamic Boarding School, TGH. Lalu Tamim Ali Akso explained this participatory monitoring model:

We always hold monthly meetings with the dormitory heads and teachers. In addition, we also conduct special weekly evaluations for the teachers. I personally oversee the implementation of the boarding school's programs. (Interview, Tamim Ali Akso, February 5, 2025).

This personal, role-model-based supervision ensures that students' character development remains under strict quality control.

As a result of this tiered supervision system, the *pesantren* has successfully maintained a stable workforce that is competent in terms of both quantity and quality. Qualification data show a total of 416 educators with strong educational backgrounds, with higher education levels dominated by master's (S2) and doctoral (S3) degree holders. The success of this monitoring system is reflected in Abdul Qadir's statement affirming that the institution has now reached a stable point in meeting its educational staff needs: "*The human resources at the foundation and in the boarding school are already very complete. Alhamdulillah, we have no shortage of educators*" (Interview, Abdul Qadir, April 10, 2025). The effectiveness of this evaluation mechanism ultimately fosters a culture of high accountability, in which every individual within the organization is continuously encouraged to develop in alignment with the *pesantren's* integrative vision.

DISCUSSION

The Dialectic of Spiritual Values and Modern Management in Human Resource Transformation

The transformation of human resource (HR) management at the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School has yielded findings that challenge conventional views regarding the dichotomy between professionalism and spirituality. Based on recruitment data and evaluations presented earlier, HR management at this institution mechanically adopts the principles of modern institutional management while also engaging in a dialectical process, that is, integrating corporate management principles with *Salafi* values. According to Wirosukarto et al., modern Islamic boarding schools must address strategic managerial aspects to maintain resilience in an era of disruption (Wirosukarto et al., 1996). Thus, this study demonstrates that such a strategy will succeed only if spirituality is positioned not as a complement but as the core foundation of professionalism itself (Pawar, 2009; Merlo & Harter, 2025). This understanding aligns with the perspective of Muhammad Nuryahman et al. on Integrative Islamic Education Management, in which workplace loyalty does not stem from contractual obligations, but rather from the

internalization of the value of service (*servant leadership*) and divine blessing (Nuryahman et al., 2024).

Theoretically, these findings offer a new synthesis of management functions, which a secular-rational approach has long dominated (Gülalp, 2023). For example, in the application of the POAC managerial functions (*Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling*) examined by Anam and Hariyanto in the context of Islamic boarding schools, the *actuating* function is generally understood as an effort to motivate subordinates through structural incentives. (Anam & Hariyanto, 2020). However, the empirical reality at Qamarul Huda Bagu shows that *Actuating* operates through the doctrine “*do not advance because of praise, do not retreat because of criticism*”, a moral message from TGH. L. Turmudzi Badaruddin, which effectively triggers the intrinsic motivation of educators (Interview, Ridho Kamil, October 23, 2024). This phenomenon expands Dessler’s competency-based *Human Resource Management* framework, which encompasses both technical and academic competencies, into *Value-Based Human Resource Management*, a values-based management approach where spiritual piety is recognized as a *Key Performance Indicator* (KPI) equally as important as formal academic qualifications (Dessler, 2023).

Compared to previous studies that have highlighted the shortcomings of Islamic boarding schools in terms of human resource qualifications, such as the findings of Ritonga, who noted that many boarding schools remain stuck in reactive human resource management without clear career paths, Qamarul Huda Bagu’s strategy presents the antithesis (Ritonga, 2025). This pesantren demonstrates that traditional institutions can implement modern *career sustainability*. The doctoral (Ph.D.) scholarship program for faculty members at UNIQHBA and the involvement of teachers in Merdeka Curriculum training show that pesantrens are consciously addressing the *gap* in national educational qualifications without sacrificing their NU identity. This step reinforces findings on the role of strategic leadership (Wardani & Swasono, 2019), in which the head of the foundation at Qamarul Huda serves not only as a charismatic leader but also as a visionary human resources manager.

This dialectic enriches our understanding of how institutional loyalty is formed. As Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory states, *motivators*, namely achievement and recognition, determine satisfaction, while *hygiene factors* such as salary and working conditions prevent dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 2017). Within this *pesantren* dialectic, Herzberg’s concept takes on a different form. The opportunity to serve, earn Allah’s pleasure, and receive blessings from the Spiritual Teacher sociologically shifts in function to become an absolute *motivator* that far surpasses financial incentives. This is where the fundamental difference lies between secular HR management and *pesantren* HR management. When material compensation is not optimal, spiritual compensation serves as a buffer that maintains stable performance and the loyalty of teaching staff over the long term, even for up to a dozen years.

This two-way management structure forms a model for a Professional Spiritually-Based HR Strategy. *Pesantren* have religious rules for managing their teachers and provide

a conceptual framework that spiritual values based on *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* can be operationalized as strategic management *tools* (Budhwar et al., 2010). This model refutes the pessimistic view that the *pesantren* tradition hinders the advancement of professionalism (Arif et al., 2020). On the contrary, Qamarul Huda Bagu demonstrates that when spiritual values are dialectically integrated with modern quality standards, such as academic accreditation and tiered oversight, this *pesantren* produce educators who not only possess academic excellence but also genuine moral resilience amid the whirlwind of education's commercialization.

The Effectiveness of a Values-Based Recruitment Model on Institutional Resilience

The existence and resilience of Islamic boarding schools in the age of disruption, as highlighted by Wirosukarto (Wirosukarto et al., 1996) It depends heavily on the extent to which the institution can filter the tide of modernization without losing its roots and identity. In the context of the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School, the first line of defense for this resilience lies in its human resources recruitment strategy. Instead of adopting a massive open recruitment system, the boarding school implements a closed, needs-based selection policy (*replacement system*) with very strict ideological filters. This practice demonstrates that recruitment in Islamic educational institutions cannot be viewed merely as an administrative process of filling positions, but rather as a strategic instrument to ensure the continuity of the transmission of *Salafi* values from one generation of educators to the next (Rohmadi et al., 2024).

In theory, this practice expands the scope of conventional human resource management. Dessler argues that ideal recruitment focuses on *person-job fit*, that is, the alignment between an individual's competencies and the demands of the job (Dessler, 2023). However, Qamarul Huda Bagu goes beyond these standards by requiring an extreme *person-organization fit*, namely absolute alignment with the *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah An-Nahdliyah* (NU) ideology. According to (Hasibuan, 2020), value alignment is the strongest predictor of long-term performance. In formal education, academic linearity is indeed required. However, in non-formal education, prerequisites such as at least four years of boarding school experience and the ability to read classical Islamic texts serve as measures of cultural competence that cannot be replaced by any college degree.

This value-based recruitment approach addresses the managerial shortcomings that often plague traditional educational institutions. In her study, Ritonga criticizes the fact that many Islamic boarding schools fail to adapt because their human resource management systems operate haphazardly, without measurable selection standards (Ritonga, 2025). The antithesis of that criticism is clearly evident in this institution; the multi-tiered recruitment process has actually succeeded in producing staff who possess a very strong *sense of belonging* (Ikhwan & Yuniana, 2022). When a teacher is hired not merely for their bachelor's degree, but for their track record of dedication and moral integrity, the psychological bond formed between the individual and the institution goes beyond the contractual employment relationship (Nawawi, 2025), thereby significantly reducing staff turnover.

Furthermore, these findings offer a new perspective on previous studies regarding organizational functions and loyalty. Past applications of POAC in *pesantren* focused more on the structure of task distribution (Anam & Hariyanto, 2020), and highlighting compensation as the key to loyalty (Miranti, 2025). Qamarul Huda Bagu's recruitment model demonstrates that the seeds of loyalty are actually sown long before compensation is offered, namely during the selection phase. The one-month teaching trial period, which is used to assess candidates' conduct and discipline, confirms Lubis's view that the spiritual dimension of recruitment is essential (Lubis et al., 2021). It is not about buying loyalty with a salary, but rather screening candidates who already possess the seeds of loyalty and a willingness to serve from the very moment they step through the gates of the Islamic boarding school.

The concept above at least redefines meritocracy in human resource management within Islamic educational institutions (Mohib & Nadi, 2026). While modern meritocracy measures only academic performance and professional portfolios, this study proposes a Cultural-Spiritual Meritocracy model. This model asserts that ideologically exclusive recruitment policies, such as the requirement of NU affiliation, are not a form of managerial discrimination, but rather a highly effective institutional protection strategy (Hasan et al., 2024). This selection model, which harmonizes technical qualifications with a commitment to tradition, offers a new framework for other Islamic boarding schools to maintain their academic competitiveness without losing sight of the philosophical roots of their founding.

Cross-Sectoral Partnership Synergy as a Catalyst for Improving the Quality of Islamic Boarding School Education

Efforts to transform human resources within traditional Islamic educational institutions are often hindered by institutional exclusivity (Munifah et al., 2025). However, the managerial reality at the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School demonstrates the opposite paradigm, in which openness to cross-sectoral collaboration is the primary driver of improved educational quality. (Bowser et al., 2024). This institution's strategic move to partner with external parties demonstrates that Islamic boarding schools do not operate in a sociological vacuum (Roqib, 2021). Wirosukarto emphasized the need for contemporary Islamic boarding schools to adapt to the demands of the times to maintain resilience (Wirosukarto et al., 1996). Similarly, the expansion of this *pesantren* partnership network is a concrete manifestation of that responsiveness. Partnerships are not viewed merely as an administrative formality, but rather as a tool for social engineering designed to accelerate educators' adaptation to global educational standards (Nurdi et al., 2025).

The gap between academic qualifications and practical skills, which is often a weakness in *pesantren* education (Ritonga, 2025) systematically addressed through strategic partnerships with higher education institutions and the business and industrial sectors (Eftychiou, 2025). At the higher education and vocational levels, the involvement of corporate entities, such as PT Pertamina, and healthcare institutions, such as Praya Regional General Hospital and Mataram Regional General Hospital, compels university professors and vocational teachers to update their practical skills continually. On the other

hand, academic collaborations with leading universities such as Brawijaya University, UNISMA, and dozens of universities in the Philippines and Malaysia have created a climate of massive knowledge transfer. This phenomenon introduces a new dimension to the *Organizing* function within the POAC framework (Anam & Hariyanto, 2020). The management of human resources at Islamic boarding schools extends beyond the walls of the foundation, incorporating external expertise (*outsourcing*) to *comprehensively enhance the competitiveness of graduates* (Wang et al., 2025).

In addition to vertical partnerships with the industrial sector and higher education, this quality improvement initiative is also supported by horizontal partnerships with the community's cultural ecosystem and alums networks (Manaf & Irfanudin Kurniawan, 2024). The involvement of the local community and alums extends beyond financial support to the creation of a *support system* that ensures the sustainability of the educational process. This finding is highly relevant to the theory that asserts that the external environment is a crucial pillar of human resource management (Li, 2023; Sedarmayanti, 2017). This is because Islamic boarding schools indirectly involve their alums in promotional activities and the surrounding community in the school's economic ecosystem (Pratistha et al., 2025). This fosters a sense of collective pride that psychologically motivates educators to perform at their best to uphold the institution's reputation in the public eye (Fauzi, 2023).

Interestingly, this expansion of secular and professional partnerships has not diluted the institution's *Salafi* identity at all, thanks to a balancing effect achieved through strategic partnerships with mainstream religious entities. The *pesantren's* non-formal education units strengthen the capacity of caregivers and *ustadz* through intensive collaboration with PBNU, PCNU, and specialized institutions such as Ma'had Aly Sukorejo. Through this synergy among *pesantren*, the preservation and transmission of classical literature can be managed more methodically and systematically. As a concrete example, studies of Islamic literary heritage, such as the manuscript *Al-Hishnul Hashin al-Ma'ruf bi Ratib al-Haddad* by KH. Abdullah Faqih continues to receive in-depth and authoritative analysis thanks to scholarly transmission exchanges with partner *pesantren* (Faqih, 2026). This balance in collaboration ensures that educators are not only technologically and industrially literate but also deeply rooted in the scholarly traditions of the Indonesian archipelago (Syaiqhu & Faruq, 2025).

Indirectly, efforts to transform human resources within the *pesantren* environment offer a conceptual framework known as the Collaborative-Integrative Ecosystem. This study deconstructs the paradigm that assumes modernization through external intervention will erode the autonomy and puritanism of traditional Islamic educational institutions (Kuran & Zulfiqar, 2025). Conversely, Qamarul Huda Bagu demonstrates that cross-sector partnerships guided by a strong ideological *blueprint* are, in fact, the most effective way to bridge the gaps caused by limitations in the qualifications of internal human resources. This model offers a practical contribution to the study of contemporary Islamic education management, demonstrating that accelerating the quality of Islamic boarding schools to an international standard absolutely requires the orchestration of

collaboration that bridges the gap between secular-industrial curricula and *religious* curricula.

The Construction of a Transcendental Motivation Model: A New Perspective on Islamic Human Resource Management

The Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School's success in maintaining the commitment and loyalty of its teaching staff despite limited financial incentives has sparked a new discourse in educational management. This study explicitly posits that the organizational stability of this institution is strongly underpinned by what can be conceptualized as Transcendental Motivation (Irwandi & Zulhingga, 2026), a work ethic rooted in a metaphysical orientation that transcends the limits of material rewards. The leadership's moral message, "*seeking the pleasure of Allah SWT and seeking blessings from the Divine Teacher*", has been institutionally internalized, transforming the work paradigm from a mere professional contract into an act of worship (Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008; Ntaganda, 2025). This empirical reality serves both as a response to and an extension of the view that contemporary *pesantren* management cannot survive if it relies solely on secular management; it requires a strong infusion of spiritual values to sustain the foundation of its administrators' dedication (Wirosukarto et al., 1996).

Theoretically, these findings both challenge and enrich conventional motivation theory, particularly Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Miah & Hasan, 2022). Herzberg posited that intrinsic factor, such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility, act as true *motivators*. At the same time, pay and working conditions are classified as *hygiene factors*, factors that do not motivate, but whose absence leads to dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 2017). In the context of *pesantren* management, Herzberg's *motivator* indicator is elevated to a spiritual dimension. The highest achievement for educators here is not a promotion within the organizational hierarchy, but rather the realization of the essence of blessings, the increase in goodness derived from the knowledge they impart. This phenomenon supports the argument that intrinsic value-based motivation is far more enduring than financial compensation (S. Robbins & Coulter, 2019; S. P. Robbins & Judge, 2021). However, in this context, that intrinsic value has been sublimated into a form of Islamic spirituality (Yousef, 2001). This transcendental motivation is empirically proven to be highly sustainable and effective, rather than merely a theoretical assumption. Institutional data indicates that the average length of service for educators at Qamarul Huda exceeds 10 Years, with an exceptionally low annual educator turnover rate of approximately 2%. This low turnover rate demonstrates that when material compensation is sub-optimal, metaphysical orientation and the pursuit of divine blessing (*barokah*) function as a robust psychological buffer that secures long-term organizational commitment (Aboobaker et al., 2019).

Not only that, but the implementation of the reward system at this Islamic boarding school demonstrates an elegant balance between the ethics of service and the demands of professionalism (Rahmah et al., 2022). Although transcendental motivation is predominant, the foundation does not disregard the principle of *positive reinforcement*, a fundamental concept in reinforcement (Mangkunegara, 2019). The provision of doctoral scholarships

(Ph.D.) for high-performing faculty members at the university level demonstrates that this institution remains rational in addressing the *self-actualization* needs of its educators. This fact refutes studies that tend to view material compensation systems as the primary determinant of faculty loyalty (Miranti, 2025). At Qamarul Huda Bagu, structural rewards, whether in the form of promotions or scholarships, are not intended to *buy* loyalty, but are instead intended as a sign of the institution's respect for educators who have fully dedicated themselves to their work.

This conceptual framework also offers a fresh perspective on implementing the *Actuating* function within the POAC framework (Anam & Hariyanto, 2020). Corporate management often operates by mobilizing human resources that require intensive external managerial guidance (Kim et al., 2021), such as monthly *performance bonuses*, while the *implementation* process at the Islamic boarding school operates more autonomously (Alqadrie, 2022). The doctrine of adherence to the founder's vision fosters a communal *sense of belonging* (Redhead & Bika, 2022), where teachers and *ustadz* feel a moral obligation to uphold the institution's reputation. This perspective further underscores that Islamic ethics-based servant leadership can transform exhausting administrative tasks into a calling of the soul with transcendental value (Fry, 2003; Fikri, 2025)

Conceptually, this framework offers a transcendental motivation model as a new analytical framework in the literature on *Human Resource Management* (HRM) in religious institutions (Abidin et al., 2025). This model asserts that divine blessings and divine favor are not abstract theological concepts detached from the field of management but rather *real managerial variables* that can predict low levels of *turnover intention* and an educator's productivity (Benedict, 2025). This study contributes to filling a gap in the literature on Islamic educational management, which has often overlooked metaphysical motivations, by demonstrating that: when an institution's financial resources are limited, capitalizing on transcendental values is the most rational, resilient, and effective psychological compensation strategy for maintaining the commitment of educational staff.

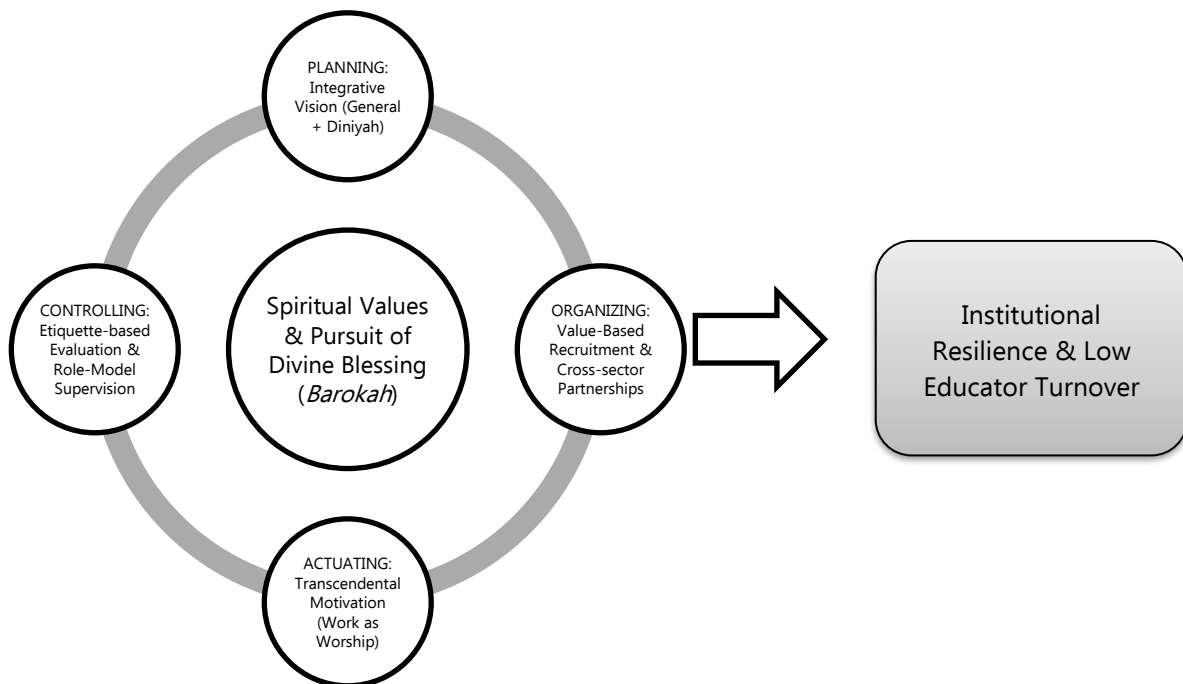
Strategic Implications and Theoretical Contributions to the Development of Islamic Boarding Schools in the Age of Disruption

The findings explored in this study collectively reposition the role of Islamic boarding schools within the discourse on contemporary educational management. In an era of disruption, where many traditional educational institutions are in decline due to their inability to meet global standards (Achmadin et al., 2024) The Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School exemplifies a successful model of resilience. This study suggests that human resource transformation in Islamic boarding schools does not require the secularization of management systems, but rather calls for *the integration of ethics and professionalism* (Zul et al., 2026). This research provides a pragmatic pathway for translating the ideals of Integrative Islamic Education Management into measurable operational policies (Nuryahman et al., 2024; Wirosukarto et al., 1996) ranging from value-based recruitment and ongoing cross-departmental training to tiered supervision based on leadership by example.

As a major theoretical contribution to management theory, this study offers a new conceptual framework, termed the Holistic-Transcendental Human Resource Management Model, as shown in Figure 2. This model goes beyond the secular *Human Resource Management* paradigm proposed by Dessler as well as Herzberg's *hygiene-motivator* theory (Dessler, 2023; Herzberg et al., 2017). In this new model, spiritual values, such as *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*, are not treated as peripheral elements, but rather as the *operating system* that drives all of POAC's functions (Anam & Hariyanto, 2020). Organizing is understood as an effort to unite the community; the pursuit of blessings drives action; and controlling serves as a guardianship of morals. This model integrates religious values into key performance indicators (KPIs) that can generate a strong *Sense of Belonging*, which in turn protects the institution from the threat of high teacher *turnover* amid the commercialization of education (Jabbar & Holme, 2025).

Figure 2.

Holistic-Transcendental HRM Model



From both a practical and strategic standpoint, these human resources management model is highly recommended for adoption by Islamic boarding schools and other Islamic educational institutions currently facing the pressures of modernization. The most essential practical implication is the urgent need to avoid separating *diniyah* (non-formal) education from general (formal) education within a single foundation (Zulhingga, 2021). Pesantren needs to design an internal succession planning system in which alums are encouraged to return to serve, while aggressively opening channels of collaboration with external ecosystems, such as universities, government ministries, and the business and industrial sectors, to address the deficit in internal academic qualifications. As Sedarmayanti noted, it

is this ability to leverage external support that catalyzes the acceleration of human resource quality without unduly burdening the foundation's internal budget (Sedarmayanti, 2017).

At the policy level (*policy implications*), these findings send a strong signal to policymakers—particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs and related agencies—that the standardization of educator quality in Islamic boarding schools should not be reduced to secular pedagogical indicators alone. Policies regarding the certification and accreditation of religious educational institutions need to be reformulated to accommodate cultural-spiritual indicators as part of professional competencies. (Robinson et al., 2023). Government interventions in support of academic advancement, such as scholarships and curriculum training, must be framed within a vision of Integrated Quality Management that values and protects the unique moral ecosystem of Islamic boarding schools (Aimah, 2021).

While this study offers a comprehensive framework, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. First, regarding *transferability*, this study is based on a single-case design at the Qamarul Huda Bagu Islamic Boarding School. Consequently, the findings cannot be directly generalized to all Islamic educational institutions, especially those with different ideological affiliations or organizational structures. Second, relying heavily on interviews with institutional leaders introduces a potential *social desirability bias*, where responses may lean toward idealized institutional narratives rather than grassroots realities. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the data collection limits the ability to verify the long-term sustainability of transcendental motivation over decades. Finally, regarding *researcher positionality*, the researchers acknowledge their familiar background with the *Pesantren* ecosystem, which facilitated deep access and trust but required rigorous triangulation and reflexivity to mitigate subjective interpretation during data analysis.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of human resource management in traditional Islamic educational institutions does not require secularizing the system or abandoning cultural identity. This study conclusively demonstrates that institutional resilience in the era of disruption is fostered by harmonizing modern management professionalism with spiritual values. The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the introduction of the Holistic-Transcendental HRM Model. Unlike conventional, secular HRM models that rely heavily on material compensation and structural incentives as primary motivators, this model positions transcendental motives (seeking divine blessing) and cultural-spiritual meritocracy as the core operating system driving the entire management cycle. This provides a highly sustainable psychological incentive that significantly reduces educator turnover despite limited financial resources.

Practically, *pesantren* managing multi-level educational units must maintain the centralization of ideological values under a single foundation command while aggressively building cross-sectoral collaborative ecosystems (with universities and industry) to accelerate quality assurance. At the policy level, these findings urge the Ministry of

Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama) to reformulate accreditation instruments and certification standards for religious educators. Policymakers should not reduce quality indicators solely to secular pedagogical metrics; they must explicitly integrate cultural-spiritual key performance indicators (KPIs)—such as moral exemplary conduct and classical literacy—into formal institutional evaluation standards.

To build upon the limitations of this study, future research should be directed into three specific areas: (1) *Comparative studies* examining *pesantren* with different religious or ideological affiliations to test the transferability of this model; (2) *Longitudinal studies* to empirically verify whether transcendental motivation genuinely sustains long-term organizational commitment across multiple generations; and (3) *Quantitative studies* aimed at developing measurement instruments for "Cultural-Spiritual Meritocracy," allowing this proposed model to be statistically tested on a much larger scale.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contribution

The authors confirm their contribution to the paper as follows: **Kudri**, Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, and Visualization; **Said, M.**, Supervision, Validation, Formal analysis, and Writing - Review & Editing; **Supriyanto, S.**, Supervision, Validation, and Writing - Review & Editing. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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