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The Tawhidic Paradigm as Workplace Spirituality in Islamic Higher Education: Governance, Talent Management and Organizational Excellence

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Abstract: The concept of workplace spirituality is increasingly attracting scholarly attention due to its potential to foster meaningful work, ethical behavior, and organisational success. However, empirical research remains limited regarding how faith-based spirituality translates into formal organisational practices. This study explores the manifestation and institutionalization of the Tawhidic paradigm as a foundation for workplace spirituality within an Islamic higher education institution. Particular focus is placed on governance, talent management, and organisational excellence. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving representatives from four staff associations, and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis. Three key themes emerged from the findings: the strength of spirituality and community spirit within the Tawhidic paradigm; challenges in governance and talent management; and the integration of workplace harmony with organisational excellence. The Tawhidic paradigm was found to provide a robust foundation for spirituality and community spirit. However, concerns regarding implementation transparency, recognition, career advancement, promotion criteria, and professional competence created a gap between held spiritual values and formal organisational practices. This resulted in tension between harmony and excellence, suggesting that a supportive and comfortable work environment could contribute to complacency, resistance to change, and a lack of readiness to embrace technology and artificial intelligence (AI). By bridging the gap between values and organisational practices, this study extends the scope of workplace spirituality beyond individual and communal experiences toward a more holistic framework for sustainable organisational excellence within Islamic higher education institutions.

Keywords: *Tawhidic Paradigm, Workplace Spirituality, Islamic Work Ethic, Organisational Justice, Organisational Paradox Theory, Talent Management, Governance, Sustainability*

1. Introduction and Background

In the contemporary management landscape, institutions are increasingly shifting away from traditional economic and transactional management models toward fostering workplace spirituality. It reflects an organisational concept that promotes meaningful work, intrinsic purpose, and a deep sense of community among employees. In Islamic Institutions or religiously based Institutions, this spiritual paradigm is based on the Tawhidic Paradigm (Mhd. Sarif, 2014; Mhd. Sarif et al., 2015), which changes the concept of work management from a formal work obligation to work that is considered an act of worship carried out with a sense of accountability (amanah), behavioral excellence (ihsan) and operational efficiency (Itqan). Academic literature consistently states that a strong spiritual foundation will act as a catalyst for institutional resilience (Howard et al., 2023), foster high levels of employee motivation (Kendall, 2019), build psychological strength (Dubey et al., 2022; Sultan & Hussain, 2025), as well as interpersonal cooperation (ukhuwah) (Tigedi et al., 2024). Thus, these values function as core organisational, social and psychological capital in maintaining organisational performance and excellence (Ahmad et al., 2024; Mhd. Sarif et al., 2023; Zahrah, 2015).

However, the problem arises when there is a lack of research related to the management of organizations based on religious or spiritual values, especially their implementation, effectiveness and challenges in corporate governance. Despite the theological framework such as the practice of justice ('adl) in a meritocracy based on competence (al-qawiyy) and integrity (al-amin) (Mhd. Sarif, 2015, 2016; Mhd. Sarif et al., 2024), the gap between the values held and the practice of these values often occurs in their operational environments. It has

led to a lack of procedural and distributive justice in decision-making such as promotion decisions and succession planning. Thus, it severely erodes institutional trust and reduces the motivation of highly skilled or academically talented staff (Raza et al., 2013; Ilyana et al., 2023). Additionally, this structural inconsistency leads to an organisational paradox where an overemphasis on employee relationship harmony and conflict avoidance (ukhuwah) indirectly shapes a comfort zone mentality and culture. The organization's normalization of maintaining the status quo has weakened initiatives for strategic transformation and competitive market efforts. This poorly managed harmony-excellence conflict can hinder the organization's future readiness and innovation in shaping the global higher education transition to Education 4.0 and 5.0, which demand advanced digital fluency and Artificial Intelligence (AI) readiness. Employees in this constrained ecosystem exhibit low digital and AI capabilities, along with strong resistance to automated workflows (Akour & Alenezi, 2022; Alenezi et al., 2023; Almeida & Simoes, 2019; Duasa et al., 2020).

Although existing studies have extensively explored the psychological benefits of workplace spirituality, there has been little empirical attention paid to how faith-based institutions address the conflict between embodied spiritual values and their implementation within organisational structures, particularly in relation to governance, organisational justice, and strategic excellence. To address this gap, this study examines higher education institutions implementing faith-based workplace spirituality to investigate how spiritual values interact with formal corporate governance, talent management channels, and organisational excellence (Duasa et al., 2020). As such, it can provide ideas for actionable plans to reframe professional accountability, transparent performance measures, and technological skill enhancement not as organisational economic goals, but as direct manifestations of spirituality in organisational practices in achieving Al-Ihsan (holistic excellence) and Al-Itqan (precision and operational quality).

2. Literature Review

To study the implementation of faith-based organisational management or workplace spirituality practices, especially in higher education institutions, the operational reality of workplace spirituality must be assessed through multiple theoretical dimensions. This management challenge is quite complex in a religiously-based environment, where Islamic spiritual values are sometimes not aligned with the formal corporate structures of modern governance, strategic talent development and institutional performance metrics. To transform workplace spirituality from an isolated psychological phenomenon, this study attempts to position it as an organisational ecosystem that potentially contributes to different perspectives on administrative behavior and its effectiveness.

To systematically distinguish the values-practice gap, harmony-excellence paradox and technological capability gap identified in contemporary institutions, this study combines three theoretical frameworks. First, Organisational Paradox Theory serves as the primary analytical tool for examining the structural tension between a comfortable environment and a focus on performance. Second, the Islamic Work Ethic (Mhd. Sarif, 2014; Mhd. Sarif et al., 2015) provides the foundational epistemological framework for analyzing how a spiritual paradigm influences employees' intrinsic motivation and workplace relationships. Finally, Organisational Justice Theory is employed to assess the transparency, fairness, and systemic integrity regarding the institution's human capital development and evaluation. Collectively, this framework establishes a robust analytical basis for evaluating the empirical data presented in this study.

Organisational Paradox Theory

In the study of contemporary management, an organization is not a static entity concerned solely with stability; rather, it is a dynamic structure and system that interacts with a constantly changing environment. To understand this challenge, Smith and Lewis (2011, p. 382) formulated the Organizational Paradox Theory. This theory defines a paradox as "contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time." This differs from a dilemma, which presents a clear choice between alternatives and seeks a resolution through synthesis. A paradox, by contrast, involves an ongoing tension where both opposing elements are essential for organizational sustainability. Smith and Lewis (2011) categorize these tensions into four key quadrants: learning (adaptation versus exploitation), organizing (control versus flexibility), performing (competing goals), and belonging (identity versus alignment). In professional institutions, the paradox between belonging and performing often manifests as a structural tension between maintaining a comfortable,

established workplace culture and supporting organizational performance that demands change. When applied to institutional governance, this framework explains how systems can become trapped in specific operational failures, particularly when organizational units remain within their respective comfort zones. If management prioritizes the preservation of internal harmony and collective identity over performance metrics, the institution risks fostering a culture of complacency. Conversely, if the focus is placed solely on performance metrics without regard for organizational harmony, employee well-being and commitment may be compromised. Therefore, Organizational Paradox Theory argues that sustainable institutional excellence requires a shift from an "either/or" stance to an acceptance of "both/and," where managers proactively address structural tensions rather than attempting to suppress them.

Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) & The Tawhidic Paradigm

To analyze the operational reality of Islamic Educational Institutions (IEIs), the management framework must be integrated with a fundamental understanding of the Tawhidic Paradigm. The Tawhidic Paradigm positions Tawhidic (the oneness of God) as the ultimate epistemological and ontological lens through which all human actions, including administrative governance and labor, are carried out (Fareed, 2022; Ismail & Sharif, 2011; Siddiqi, 1979). Within this paradigm, Ahmad and Owoyemi (2012) and Ali and Al-Owaihan (2008) conceptualize Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) by defining it as an orientation that shapes individual engagement in the workplace as a spiritual, moral, and social obligation. Unlike utilitarian workplace ethics that link productivity to economic incentives and organisational utility, IWE elevates professional labor to the status of worship (ibadah) (Ahmad & Owoyemi, 2012; Fareed, 2022). While secular workplace ethics practices prioritize individual ambition, career achievement, and self-actualization, IWE provides a mechanism to achieve Falah (holistic success in worldly life and the hereafter), which requires employees to view their organisational roles through the lens of amanah (trustworthiness) and ihsan (spiritual goodness and excellence).

Additionally, Islamic management literature also emphasizes that IWE practices require a balanced continuity between character and ability. This administrative balance is derived from the classical Quranic framework of personnel selection found in Surah Al-Qasas (28:26) (Al-Quran Al-Karim Mu'jam, 2020, Al-Qasas 28:26), which outlines a dual-criteria system: Al-Qawiyy (Competence and Strength) and Al-Amin (Integrity and Trustworthiness). In the form of organisational behavior, Al-Amin represents the moral foundation of honesty, dedication, and adherence to spiritual values. On the other hand, Al-Qawiyy represents professional strength, which in the contemporary era translates into teaching or work competence, pedagogical innovation, administrative capabilities, and digital literacy or Artificial Intelligence (AI). Overemphasis on Al-Amin at the expense of Al-Qawiyy results in a morally strong but structurally weak institution that suffers from talent shortages and critical technological gaps. Conversely, focusing solely on Al-Qawiyy while neglecting Al-Amin will undermine the integrity of the institution and damage the spiritual ecosystem. Modern scholars therefore argue that true IWE implementation requires an explicit organisational alignment in which spiritual devotion (ibadah) is structurally translated into professional competence, quality and continuous improvement - a state known in Islamic administration as itqan (Rofie et al., 2025; Suhendra et al., 2025).

Organisational Justice Theory

Although the intrinsic motivation of employees in religiously based environments is largely driven by spiritual ethics (Syahir et al., 2025), their relationship with the institution is fundamentally mediated by perceptions of justice (Abdullah & Al-Abrrow, 2023). To understand this dynamic concept, the academic literature relies on Organisational Justice Theory, pioneered by Greenberg (1987) and further refined by Colquitt (2001). This theory examines how employees evaluate the fairness of management structures and decision-making processes, as well as the psychological impact of these evaluations on workplace behavior, organisational trust, and commitment (Malla & Malla, 2023). Organisational justice is structurally divided into three main dimensions: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice.

In institutional governance, distributive justice involves the perceived fairness of the allocation of resources and outcomes, such as compensation, workload, and promotion. Employees evaluate whether the rewards they receive are consistent with their structural inputs and the efficiency of their professional outputs. Procedural justice, on the other hand, is crucial to analyzing institutional talent management, referring to the perceived fairness of the rules, policies, and mechanisms used to determine those outcomes. Colquitt (2001) emphasizes that procedural justice requires processes that are consistent, impartial, accurate, open to correction and most

importantly, transparent. Finally, interactional justice focuses on the quality of interpersonal treatment received from leadership, particularly in relation to preserving employee dignity, respect, and information transparency.

When applied in organizations, Organisational Justice Theory reveals a critical managerial weakness often referred to as the value practice gap (Chrystal et al., 2019; Eriksson et al., 2025; Petrulaitiene & Jylhä, 2015). In many religiously based organizations, leadership may explicitly champion the spiritual values of absolute justice, equity, and transparency. However, if the operating system is weak in terms of objective performance measurement - resulting in opaque succession planning, subjective promotion criteria, or unequal distribution of promotions and recognition, employees will experience a significant sense of procedural and distributive injustice. The literature suggests that religious or intrinsic motivation does not protect employees from the psychological effects of systemic injustice (Kaur, 2026; Stockkamp et al., 2023). When procedural justice is compromised, it erodes institutional trust, creates internal political friction, and reduces organisational member commitment. Therefore, ensuring structural organisational justice is not just an administrative necessity; it is a fundamental prerequisite for aligning the realities of faith-based organization operations with stated theological values.

In this regard, this study aims to explore how the Tawhid paradigm is manifested as workplace spirituality in religiously-based higher education institutions. It further examines its perceived effectiveness in supporting governance, talent management, and organizational excellence, while investigating the structural challenges faced in translating its spiritual principles into organizational practices. Particular attention is paid to the tensions between values and practices, integrity and professional competence, and organizational harmony and the pursuit of excellence.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore how the Tawhidic paradigm is manifested and institutionalised as workplace spirituality within an Islamic higher education institution. The study examined participants' perceptions of how Tawhidic values support organisational governance, talent management, and organisational excellence, as well as the challenges involved in translating these values into institutional practices.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion involving representatives from four major staff associations, which include the Academic Staff Association, Professional Management Association, Support Staff Group Union, and General Staff Union. In total, six participants representing academic, professional, administrative, and support staff participated in the study. The Academic Staff Association session was conducted as a focus group involving three participants (current and former leaders), while the remaining three sessions were conducted as individual interviews. All these participants are in the top management of each association.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their roles as representatives of their respective staff associations and their experience with staff training and development at the higher education institution. Each interview or focus group session lasted approximately one to two hours and was conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview questions explored current training and development practices, the integration of Islamic values, perceived strengths and challenges, and recommendations for developing a Tawhid-based training and development framework. All interviews were video-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, involving familiarisation with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, and refinement.

Following the initial coding, codes with similar meanings were compared and grouped into broader subthemes. For example, codes relating to work as *ʿibādah*, *amānah*, ethical alignment, *ukhuwah*, and mutual support formed the subthemes of spiritual meaning and workplace community. Codes concerning transparency, promotion, career progression, recognition, and competency development formed the governance and talent-management subthemes. Meanwhile, codes relating to complacency, resistance to change, technological

readiness, and competitiveness formed the harmony–excellence subthemes. These subthemes were reviewed against the coded data and subsequently consolidated into three overarching themes: spiritual and communal strengths of the Tawhidic paradigm; governance and talent-management challenges; and the integration of workplace harmony with organisational excellence. To enhance the credibility of the findings, perspectives from different staff categories but at the same level as a leader were compared to achieve data triangulation across participant groups (Table 1).

Table 1: Participants by Staff Association and Data-Collection Method

Staff association	Participant code	Data-collection method	Total
Academic Staff Association	P1-P3	Focus group discussion	3
General Staff Union	P4	Individual interview	1
Support Staff Group Union	P5	Individual interview	1
Professional Management Association	P6	Individual interview	1
Four staff associations		**One focus group and three individual interviews**	6

4. Results

The main purpose of this study is to explore the operational dynamics of Workplace Spirituality in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), with a specific focus on current and structural challenges in Governance, Talent Management and Organisational Excellence. As noted in the literature review, while the integration of spiritual paradigms yields significant communal strengths, it simultaneously introduces complex structural paradoxes and administrative tensions. Qualitative empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, offer an in-depth examination of how these dynamics play out in the institution studied. To ensure empirical consistency and readability, findings are directly organized around three core analytical themes that emerge from the data, whose relevance is precisely mapped onto the research objectives. Figure 1 illustrates the thematic network of this study, which demonstrates the progression from raw data codes to structural themes.

In this section, a reveal of findings, supported by verbatim narrative excerpts from participants (labeled as P1, P2, etc. to maintain confidentiality), is presented. This discussion synthesizes empirical data in the existing theoretical frameworks, Organisational Paradox Theory, Islamic Work Ethic (IWE), and Organisational Justice Theory. This integrated approach ensures that participants' experiences are systematically leveraged to understand the value-practice gap, future readiness, and strategic alignment of harmony and merit in the higher education landscape. The analysis began with the thorough transcription and familiarization of the raw interview data. Initial open codes were then generated by labelling specific phrases and paragraphs relating to first, workplace spirituality - sense of community, governance - competency and organisational harmony-excellence. These initial codes were subsequently clustered into broader sub-themes based on conceptual similarities. Finally, these sub-themes were conceptualized into three overarching thematic pillars that directly address the core objectives of this study. Table 2 shows the Participant-Code Mapping to Themes, Sub-Themes and Codes.

Table 2: Participant-Code Mapping to Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Participants Supporting the Code
Spiritual and Communal Strengths of the Tawhidic Paradigm	**Spiritual meaning and ethical alignment**	Work as ibadah and service	P4, P5
		Alignment of work and religious values	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
		Spiritual awareness and sense of purpose	P1, P3, P4, P5
		Amanah, ‘adl, ihsan and accountability	P1, P5, P6
		Spiritually oriented development programmes	P3, P4, P5, P6

	Sense of community and workplace cohesion	Mutual respect and cooperation	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6
		Ukhuwah and collective identity	P3, P4, P5, P6
		Supportive and harmonious relationships	P3, P4, P5, P6
		Belonging and collegiality	P3, P4, P5
		Volunteerism and social engagement	P4, P5
	Governance and organisational justice	Transparency in succession planning	P5
		Fairness in promotion and staff grading	P5
		Career progression opportunities	P3, P4, P5, P6
		Fair rewards and recognition	P3, P5
Governance and Talent Management Challenges	**Professional competency and talent development**	Espoused value - practice gap	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
		Compliance-oriented training	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
		Unclear spirituality–competency link	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6
		Digital and AI capability gaps	P1, P2, P3, P6
		Leadership and research capability	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6
		Innovation and future-readiness	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6
	Harmony–excellence tension	Comfort-zone mentality	P5,P6
		Complacency arising from contentment	P5, P6
		Resistance to change	P5, P6
		Weak competitiveness and innovation	P5, P6
		Limited performance striving	P6
	Toward a holistic Tawhidic framework	Ihsan and itqan as excellence	P1, P5, P6
		Continuous learning and accountability	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
Integrating Workplace Harmony with Organisational Excellence		Transparent, merit-based HR systems	P3
		Leadership and innovation development	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6
		Spiritual integrity with institutional excellence	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6

Theme 1: Spiritual and Communal Strengths of the Tawhidic Paradigm

The first theme extracted from the thematic analysis established the foundation of the institutional workplace culture. Participants consistently identified a deeply held spiritual framework and strong interpersonal relationships as key drivers of organisational cohesion and individual motivation in this Higher Education Institution. The qualitative data reveal that employees do not view their professional roles within the institution merely as transactional economic activities. Instead, their work is integrated into their personal spiritual identities. For instance, Participant 1 (P1), an academic leader, former leader and member, explained:

P1: "But I think we also need to acknowledge a paradigm shift. When we talk about ibadah, it's not just that narrow definition, right? For instance, all the technical skills are there to improve our productivity, and that itself is part of fulfilling amanah (trust). If we can relate it to these broader concerns, it would be beneficial. Don't limit ibadah

only to discussions of Islamisation.".. "When we talk about ihsan, there's a connotation of being compassionate, empathetic, and benevolent, basically. It's also related to doing your job to the best of your ability"
P3: "This understanding is what I feel is lacking in training. It's essential for academic staff to have the ability to translate this understanding into practical applications. For instance, how do we communicate to students that all knowledge comes from Allah and is already aligned with Islam"
P2: "Or perhaps just a reminder that Islam also encompasses these values. For example, in scientific methods—if we look at Islamic sciences, like Ilmu Hadis, it's very scientific and rigorous. But people tend to forget that."…. "For me, with these training programs, we don't always need to explicitly state Islamic values because… of course, we have very beautiful Islamic values to incorporate and these values don't contradict mainstream approaches"
This high level of intrinsic, spiritually-driven motivation is strongly reinforced by a deeply communal, supportive social environment. Participants frequently used familial terms to describe their working relationships with colleagues. Participants 4 (P4) and 5 (P5), both are department heads, noted:
P4: "Not only are we given the chance to share our views, but Alhamdulillah, the relationship between the staff union and the top management is really good."
P5: "Brotherhood (ukhuwah) is also strongly emphasized... our staff- from support to academic levels worked together to assist her (outside trainer)... She was impressed by the attitude (budi-bahasa courtesy) and support provided by everyone involved."
Similarly, Participant 6 (P6), a leader of a professional association, emphasized that this communal cohesion acts as a support mechanism among staff. *P6: "Now, they involve a number of senior staff... This is very important because they need to hear from those with experience. It's a knowledge transfer…. and they also do mentor-mentee relationships..."*

Theme 2: Governance and Talent Management Challenges
While the foundational baseline established in Theme 1 highlights strong spiritual equity, the second theme explores the critical administrative friction within the Higher Education Institution (HEI). The qualitative data reveals that when informal spiritual ideals are not backed by formalized corporate structures, severe challenges emerge regarding institutional governance, promotional transparency, and succession planning. Participants expressed shared concerns that the administrative processes within the HEI frequently lack the structural clarity and predictability expected of a modern higher education provider. A primary area of concern was the lack of transparent communication regarding institutional pathways for career advancement. Participants raised concerns regarding transparency, resource allocation, recognition, career progression, and promotion criteria, as reflected in the following accounts.
P1: "We don't even know anything about the budget… . It would be good to know. And sometimes, there's this tendency to overlook our in-house experts. Actually, we have many in-house experts, but instead, we go and hire external ones."
P2: "And there should also be rewards….. But there needs to be support. I feel the support system is somewhat lacking."
P3: "So, it comes back to transparency. How much are you paying these external experts? Couldn't you allocate some of that budget to pay internal ones?"
P4: "Since we are small, we are the smallest... when we sit together, we don't want to be seen as sidelined... We strive to make our voices heard, to be visible, so we are not left behind"
P5: "Currently, I notice our institution lacks a strong career path program for staff. While there are programs available, they are not effectively carried out. I hope these programs will be improved and implemented properly in the future."
P6: "And we still don't know how far the management looks into that profiling. We also don't know how much the training is considered when it comes to promotions, especially among administrators. We don't know what criteria are being used to move someone to the next level."

Theme 3: Integrating Workplace Harmony with Organisational Excellence
The final theme captures the main synthesis of the study. It addressed the explicit conflict between maintaining the communal harmony identified in Theme 1 and driving the professional excellence required by modern higher education. The data highlight how an unmanaged paradox between these two elements has created an institutional comfort zone, resulting in somewhat technological and innovation capability gaps. The participant accounts suggest a potential tension between workplace harmony and organisational excellence, although this tension was not expressed equally across all participants. It was articulated most clearly by P6, who associated

institutional comfort with reduced competition, limited performance striving, and resistance to change. Related concerns were raised by P1 regarding reluctance to engage in further learning, P3 regarding technological adaptation, and P4 regarding monitoring and attitudes towards performance. Participants admitted:

P1: "At the academic level, there's sometimes a perception among academics that they already know everything and don't need further training. This mindset needs to change... some people prefer to stick to old-school methods. We need to instill the mindset that we should unlearn and relearn."

P2: "Some of the technical, technology-based, or methodological sessions are actually very effective in improving our research skills. However... many online training sessions tend to be more online-based, which, for me, is less impactful..."

P3: "Another issue I'd highlight is the technological gap. For us, especially from the X- generation, transitioning to technology is a struggle for some of us, right?"

P4: "If they don't complete the required courses or fail to meet the criteria... Then they ask, 'Why didn't we get promoted?'... we emphasize the need for serious and regular monitoring... The achievement we want to target is not reached. Why? There is an attitude problem."

*P6: "Sometimes we need competition. Competition is really missing here because we are too comfortable with what we have now."…. P6 added: "Exactly... the concept of redha (contentment) is too much about just accepting... We need someone who can integrate all these Islamic principles while also keeping up with modernization... We have scholars speaking about values like being humble, being a good Muslim, practicing Ihsan, being A'dl, applying integrity in the workplace, and being kind. That's all good, but we're not competing."… "We need to change our curriculum… we need to change our syllabus, we need to adapt, we need to embrace... IR 4.0... and the new business landscape... You need to realise... there is no guarantee of sustainability if you're not embracing changes."… "If we still apply the same... training the same... producing the same... we shape the same... thinking the same. We are stagnan**t**, by the way."*

This protective insulation has had perceived implications on the institution's future-readiness, particularly regarding technological modernization. When asked about adaptation to contemporary educational tools, participants highlighted several gaps:

P1: "All these training programs are designed to increase productivity and enable us to fulfil our amanah... They align with the mission of IIUM, which in turn aligns with the Tawhidic Paradigm. However... there's a need to emphasize and frame these trainings more explicitly in relation to the Tawhidic Paradigm. Not just superficially, but also focusing on how these values are practiced in real implementation."

P2: "There's literature in business administration that highlights the importance of incorporating Islamic values in human resource management. One key aspect is how these values help individuals improve themselves."

P3:" And the framework should also evolve with current needs. For example, people are now talking about AI. Technology, especially AI, is advancing rapidly... As lecturers, we need to enhance our knowledge on the use of AI... we need to be one step ahead."

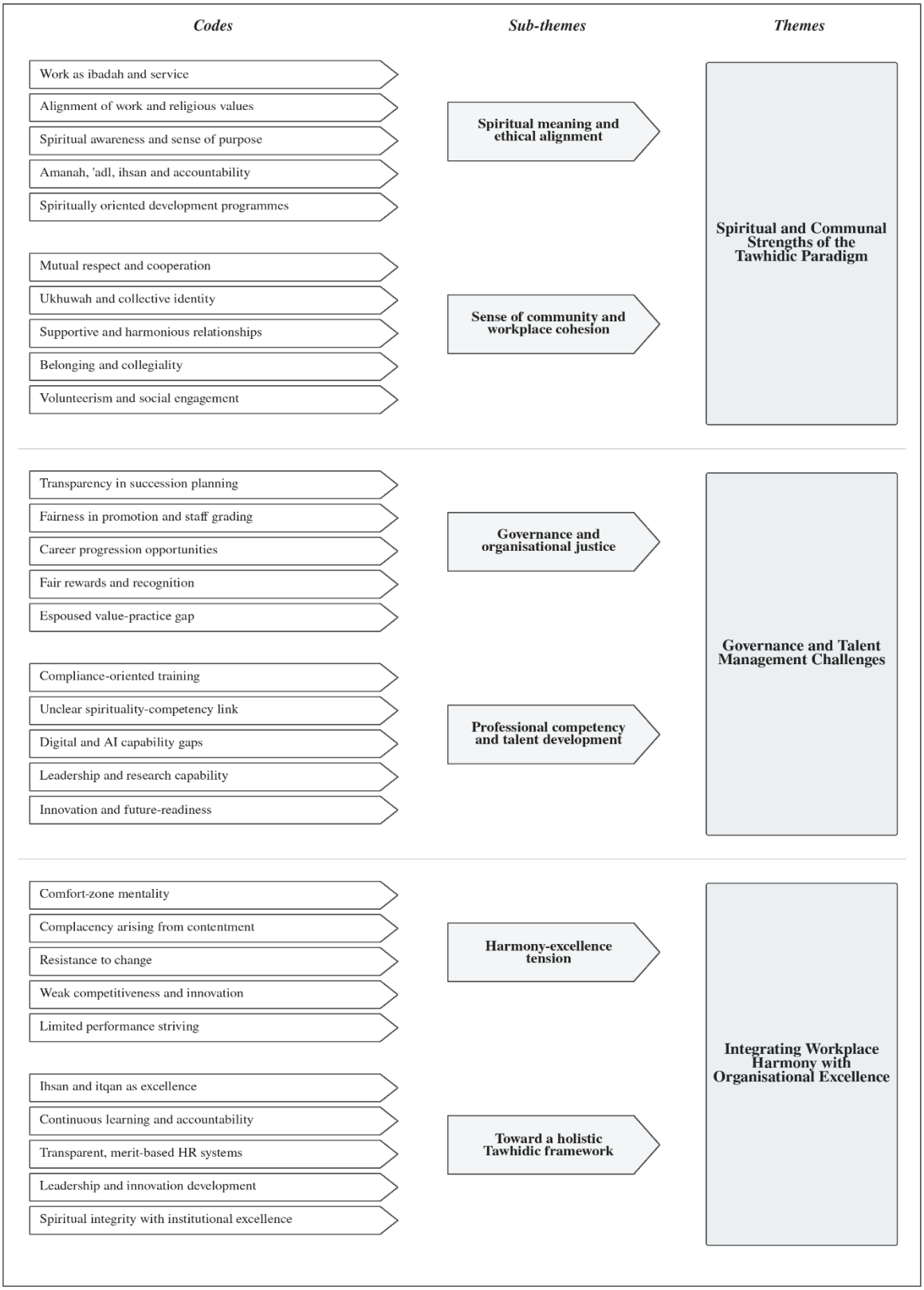
P4: "The training provided is not always fully in the form of subjects related to Islamic topics... sometimes the training is provided by external parties, and those external parties don't come with an Islamic background or knowledge... to make it more aligned with Islamic values, maybe it's lacking... but other programs (internal parties) can supplement or balance the values that might be missing."

*P5: "It's important to revisit and adhere to the original vision of our institution - its foundation on Islamisation, Internationalisation, and Comprehensive Excellence. These goals must align with professionalism and the strong sense of ukhuwah that this organisation was founded upon**."***

P6:"We need someone who can integrate all these Islamic principles while also keeping up with modernization... Practicing Ihsan, being Ad'l, applying integrity in the workplace, and being kind…. that's all actually good, but we're not competing."

As such, Figure 1 summarizes the study findings into three interrelated themes. It shows that while the Tawhid paradigm reinforces the meaning of spirituality and workplace community, the full potential of the organization is still constrained by governance and talent management challenges as well as the tension between maintaining harmony and pursuing excellence.

Figure 1: Thematic Structure of the Tawhidic Paradigm as Workplace Spirituality in Islamic Higher Education



Discussion

Spiritual and Communal Strengths of the Tawhidic Paradigm

Theme 1 demonstrates that the Tawhidic paradigm provides a robust spiritual and communal foundation within the institution. Participants conceptualize spirituality not merely as formal religious activity but as a broader understanding encompassing work, responsibilities, professional conduct, and interpersonal relationships. Participant P1's interpretation of 'ibadah' (worship) illustrates this broader perspective by linking technical skills and productivity to the fulfillment of a sacred trust ('amanah'). Similarly, 'iḥsan' is understood not only as compassion and benevolence but also as the optimal execution of responsibilities, rooted in the awareness that one acts as though Allah is constantly watching. This indicates that workplace spirituality within the Tawhidic paradigm integrates spiritual obligations with professional performance (Ahmad et al., 2024). Participants also emphasized the importance of translating Islamic principles into daily professional practice. Participant P3 highlighted the need for academic staff to understand the origins of knowledge and its connection to Allah, and how this understanding can be practically conveyed through teaching. Participant P2 also viewed Islamic values as compatible with professional and scientific practices, pointing to the rigor of Islamic scholarly traditions such as 'Ilm al-Hadith. P2 observed that Islamic values need not always be explicitly labeled, as Tawhidic principles are embedded in professional practice through underlying ethical foundations rather than merely through religious terminology.

Beyond individual spiritual significance, research findings reveal a strong sense of community and unity within the workplace. Participant P4 describes positive relationships between staff representatives and senior management, enabling employees to voice their views, while P5 emphasizes the aspect of 'ukhuwah' (brotherhood) through cooperation across various staff levels. Mutual support, courtesy, and a spirit of helpfulness—exemplified by the assistance provided to external trainers—serve as illustrations of manifested Islamic values. The strength of this communal spirit is further reflected in P6's account of senior staff involvement, mentor-mentee relationships, and knowledge sharing. Such practices demonstrate how workplace relationships can facilitate the transfer of experience, peer support, and the personal development of others. Overall, Theme 1 suggests that the Tawhidic paradigm manifests through two interconnected dimensions: spiritual significance and ethical alignment which can be reflected in the concepts of 'ibadah' – worship, 'amānah' – trustworthiness, and 'iḥsān'- excellence. Meanwhile, the application of Islamic values in professional practice, along with community and workplace unity, is evident in 'ukhuwah', mutual support, knowledge sharing, and positive organisational relationships. These spiritual and communal strengths form a vital foundation for institutionalizing the Tawhidic paradigm within the organization.

Governance and Talent Management Challenges

Theme 2 reveals a gap between espoused values and governance and talent management practices. Although the Tawhidic Paradigm emphasizes "Al-a'dl' (Justice), 'Amanah' (Trustworthiness), 'Ihsan' (Excellence) and accountability, there is a gap between strong spiritual and institutional ethical foundations and the formal organisational systems. Participants voiced concerns regarding transparency, recognition, career progression, promotion criteria and organisational support which are not consistently translated into organisational practices.

When P1 and P3 questioned the use of external experts despite the availability of in-house expertise, with P3 specifically raising concerns about transparency in resource allocation, issues of organisational justice are clearly evident in perceptions regarding transparency and resource allocation. As for recognition, P2 emphasized the need for appropriate rewards and stronger organisational support, while P4 expressed concern that smaller groups of staff might be marginalized.

Such concerns raised by P5 and P6 further illustrate the link between organisational justice and talent management. P5 highlighted weaknesses in the existing career path system, while P6 questioned the clarity of promotion criteria and the extent to which training and staff profiling contribute to career advancement. Participants also emphasized the need to strengthen research competencies, technological and AI capabilities, leadership succession planning, and profession-specific skills.

From a Tawhidic perspective, these findings highlight the importance of balancing 'Al-Amīn' (trustworthiness, integrity, and ethical character) with 'Al-Qawiyy' (strength, capability, and professional competence). Spiritual integrity must be supported by transparent organisational systems that recognize merit, foster competence,

and provide equitable advancement opportunities. Conversely, professional competence must remain grounded in 'adl' (justice), 'amanah' (trust/stewardship), and ethical accountability. Thus, the effective institutionalization of the 'Tawhidic' paradigm requires embedding these spiritual principles into formal governance and talent management systems, thereby bridging the gap between values and practices as well as reinforcing organisational justice and professional excellence.

Overall, these views reflect concerns regarding distributive and procedural justice specifically pertaining to fair recognition, employee voice, transparency, and equitable treatment. Therefore, talent management must move beyond participation in training toward a more strategic approach that links competency development, career advancement, succession planning, and institutional needs.

Integrating Workplace Harmony with Organisational Excellence

Theme 3 identifies a potential tension between maintaining a harmonious, spiritually grounded workplace and the pursuit of continuous improvement, competitiveness, and organisational excellence. Generally, participants value Islamic principles such as 'ukhuwah' (brotherhood), 'redha' (contentment/acceptance of God's will), 'iḥsan' (excellence/benevolence), 'adl' (justice), 'amanah' (trustworthiness), and integrity. However, their views indicate that these values should not lead to complacency or resistance to change. This tension between harmony and excellence was most notably articulated by P6, who observed that a competitive spirit seemed to be fading due to excessive comfort with the status quo. P6 also cautioned against interpreting 'redha' merely as passive acceptance, emphasizing instead that Islamic principles must coexist with modernization and competitiveness. P6 added that when an organization repeatedly relies on the same training methods and mindsets, it risks becoming "stagnant" or failing to grow. This illustrates the potential risk of allowing workplace comfort and stability to stifle innovation and performance improvement.

Furthermore, P1 highlighted the tendency of some academics to cling to "old methods," emphasizing the need to "unlearn and relearn." Meanwhile, P3 identified the difficulties some staff members face in adapting to technological changes. These findings suggest that organisational harmony must be accompanied by a culture of continuous learning and adaptability (Duasa et al., 2020). This tension is highly relevant to the institution's future readiness. P3 emphasized the need for the framework to evolve in line with current demands—particularly advancements in artificial intelligence (AI)—while P6 stressed the importance of adapting to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) and shifts in the broader environment. These perspectives suggest that the Tawhidic paradigm should not be viewed as a static framework. Instead, its spiritual principles should guide the processes of continuous learning, technological adaptation, innovation, and professional development to meet the ever-changing demands of higher education.

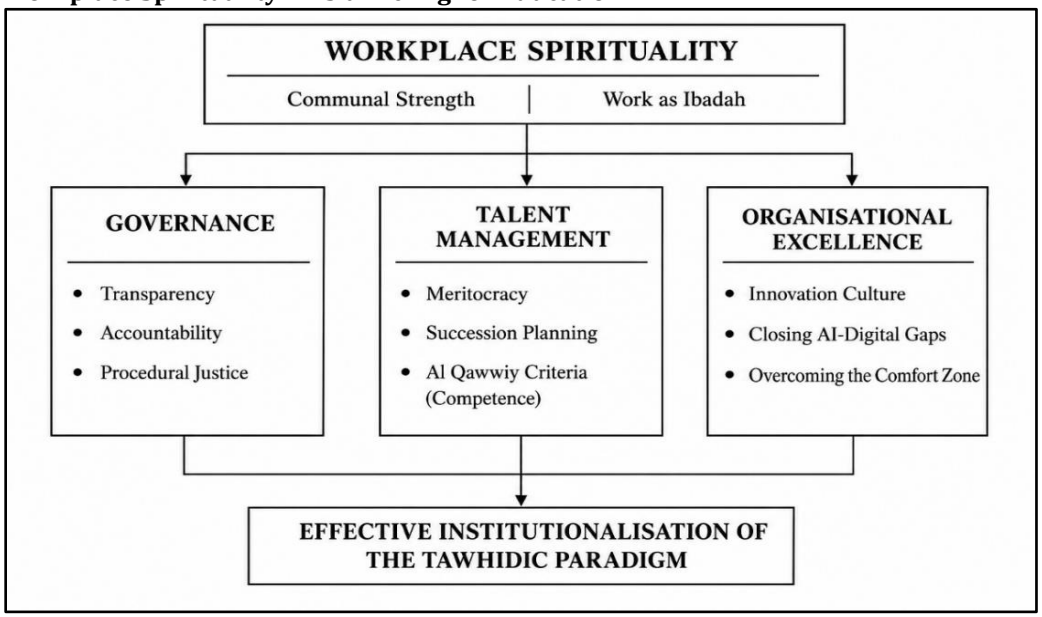
At the same time, the participants agreed on a more holistic interpretation of the Tawhidic paradigm. P1 linked it to productivity through the fulfillment of 'Amanah' (trust/stewardship), while P4 emphasized the need to balance professional training with Islamic values. P5 further argued that Islamization and holistic excellence must be aligned with professionalism and 'ukhuwah' (brotherhood/camaraderie). Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that spirituality and professional excellence are not mutually exclusive; rather, professional competence, productivity, and continuous improvement can themselves serve as practical manifestations of responsibilities grounded in Tawhidic principles. Thus, Theme 3 indicates that workplace harmony should serve as a foundation for excellence rather than a source of organisational complacency. As a result, the effective institutionalisation of the Tawhidic paradigm requires a balance between Islamic values, including 'ukhuwah' (brotherhood), 'redha' (contentment with God's will), 'amanah' (trustworthiness), 'adl' (justice), and 'iḥsān' (excellence/virtue), and the pursuit of continuous learning, innovation, technological adaptability, professional competence, and performance enhancement. Such integration establishes the basis for a holistic Tawhidic framework capable of preserving spiritual identity while supporting sustainable organisational excellence.

The tension between harmony and excellence was not perceived equally by all six participants. The most significant evidence came from P6, while P1, P3, and P4 provided supporting evidence regarding resistance to learning, technological adaptation, and attitudes toward performance. This does not imply that all six participants explicitly viewed this as a paradox between harmony and excellence. Instead, the concept of "Towards a Holistic Tawhidic Framework" received clear support from the group. Their views centered on a

broader concept encompassing Islamic/spiritual values, professional competence, continuous learning, accountability, technology/AI, leadership, and innovation/excellence. This extracts the second sub-theme particularly in explaining how these empirical findings lead to the proposed framework for the effective institutionalization of the Tawhidic paradigm. Therefore, the study findings indicate that institutionalizing workplace spirituality requires more than the mere presence of spiritual values within an organization. While community strength and the perception of work as a form of 'ibādah' (worship) provide a solid spiritual foundation, their contribution to sustainable institutional strengthening depends on the extent to which these values are translated into organisational practices.

Consequently, the study highlights three interconnected organisational domains: governance, talent management, and organisational excellence. Organisational governance demands higher levels of transparency, accountability, and procedural justice, while talent management must prioritize meritocracy and systematic succession planning, alongside ensuring that organisational members meet professional competency criteria (Al-Qawwiy). Simultaneously, organisational excellence requires an innovation-oriented culture capable of bridging the digital-AI divide and overcoming organisational complacency. The findings suggest that workplace spirituality should not remain solely an individual or communal spiritual experience; rather, it must be embedded into organisational systems, practices, and capabilities (Mhd. Sarif, 2014; Mhd. Sarif et al., 2021; Mhd. Sarif & Ismail, 2024). Informed by the empirical findings and relevant literature on the Tawhidic paradigm, Islamic Work Ethics, organisational justice, and organisational paradox, Figure 2 proposes a framework illustrating how workplace spirituality may be institutionalised through governance, talent management, and organisational excellence. The framework represents an analytical synthesis of the findings and literature rather than an empirically validated model.

Figure 2: Proposed Framework for the Effective Institutionalisation of the Tawhidic Paradigm as Workplace Spirituality in Islamic Higher Education



5. Managerial Implications

These findings reveal several implications for the governance and management of Islamic higher education institutions. First, institutional leaders should translate the values of Tawhid from organizational statements into observable governance practices. Principles such as a'dl, amanah, ihsan, and Itqan should be reflected in transparent resource allocation, staff recognition, promotion, succession planning, and performance appraisal. Selection criteria, decision-making procedures, and career paths should be clearly communicated and consistently applied to bridge the gap between espoused Islamic values and employees' actual organizational experiences. Second, employee talent management should integrate spiritual integrity with professional

competence. In line with the principles of Al-Amin and Al-Qawiyy, employees should be developed and evaluated based on both their ethical character and their ability to perform their duties effectively. Therefore, organizational training should move beyond general or compliance-oriented programs toward structured competency development linked to employee roles, career advancement, leadership succession, and institutional priorities. Elements such as staff profiling, mentoring, knowledge transfer, internal expertise, and learning outcomes should also be systematically linked to recognition and promotion mechanisms. Third, managers or leaders should maintain workplace harmony without encouraging complacency with existing achievements and ensure that employees are always ready for current changes. Values such as ukhuwah, mutual respect, and ridha should provide the basis for relationships and collaboration to receive constructive feedback, accountability, performance improvement, and innovation. Leaders should adopt a balanced approach that maintains employee well-being and a spirit of collaboration while establishing clear performance expectations and encouraging employees to continue to learn, adapt, and pursue excellence. In this regard, ihsan and itqan should be conveyed not only as spiritual values but also as a responsibility to achieve professional quality and continuous improvement. Finally, institutional leaders should strengthen future readiness by prioritizing digital capabilities, artificial intelligence literacy, research competence, innovation and leadership development. These capabilities should be framed as practical manifestations of amanah and responsibility to the institution and its stakeholders. Periodic assessments of competency gaps, training effectiveness, employee perceptions of fairness, and alignment between institutional values and management practices will help ensure that the Tawhid paradigm is truly institutionalized. Through these steps, workplace spirituality can become a management foundation for ethical governance, capable talent, innovation, and sustainable organizational excellence.

Conclusion

This study synthesises the empirical findings and discussions to provide practical insights and possible directions for faith-based higher education institutions, particularly Islamic higher education institutions. A qualitative analysis of Workplace Spirituality in institutions reveals that while the Tawhidic Paradigm provides deep communal strength and a highly collaborative environment (ukhuwah), participants' accounts indicate perceived gaps in governance, Talent Management and Organisational Excellence. To bridge the observed value practice gap, better manage the harmony–excellence tension and address the identified digital and AI capability gaps, institutional leadership must move beyond passive rhetoric. Thus, the proposed managerial recommendations are designed to practically institutionalize spiritual values into structured, professional and future-ready administrative protocols.

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