Tarekat-Based Female Leadership in Enhancing Teaching Staff Loyalty at Islamic Boarding Schools

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Info Artikel	Abstract
	Mainstream literature on pesantren (Islamic boarding school) leadership often marginalizes the role of women and relies heavily on secular transactional theories to explain staff retention. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing a Tarekat-based model of female leadership to enhance teaching staff loyalty. Employing a qualitative case study approach at Pondok Pesantren Al-Urwatul Wutsqo in Jombang, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings reveal that the female leadership model represents a unique hybrid synthesis of managerial-professional, maternal-nurturing, and spiritual-Mursyid roles. Through the internalization of Sadziliyyah values, specifically Tawazun (Work-Worship Fusion) and Mahabbah (politics of affection), the leadership successfully transforms work motivation from transactional to transcendental. Theoretically, this study expands the dominance of Social Exchange Theory (SET) by proposing the concept of Covenantal Loyalty. Unlike secular loyalty, which typically rests on material incentives and transactional contracts, Covenantal Loyalty offers a more resilient and sustainable commitment model by internalizing spiritual values into organizational practices. Operationally, this loyalty is manifested through Khidmah (sincere devotion beyond formal duties) and Tabarrukan (seeking blessings beyond financial compensation). By integrating these pillars, this research offers a new perspective on how spiritual values can transform into an epistemological foundation for modern organizational governance that prioritizes integrity and long-term resilience.
	Abstrak\n*Literatur arus utama mengenai kepemimpinan pesantren sering kali memarginalkan peran perempuan dan terlalu bergantung pada teori transaksional sekuler untuk menjelaskan retensi pegawai. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menganalisis model kepemimpinan perempuan berbasis tarekat dalam meningkatkan loyalitas tenaga pengajar. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif di Pondok Pesantren Al-Urwatul Wutsqo di Jombang, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipan, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa model kepemimpinan perempuan di sini merepresentasikan sintesis hibrida yang unik antara peran manajerial-profesional, maternal-pengayom, dan spiritual-Mursyid. Melalui internalisasi nilai-nilai Sadziliyyah, khususnya Tawazun (Fusi Kerja-Ibadah) dan Mahabbah (politik kasih sayang), pimpinan berhasil mentransformasi motivasi kerja dari transaksional menjadi transendental. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini memperluas dominasi Teori Pertukaran Sosial (SET) dengan mengajukan konsep Loyalitas Kovenan (Covenantal Loyalty). Berbeda dengan loyalitas sekuler yang umumnya berbasis pada insentif material dan kontrak transaksional, Loyalitas Kovenan menawarkan model komitmen yang lebih tangguh dan berkelanjutan melalui internalisasi nilai spiritual ke dalam praktik*

organisasi. Dalam dimensi operasional, loyalitas ini dimanifestasikan melalui konsep Khidmah, yakni pengabdian tulus yang melampaui deskripsi tugas formal, serta Tabarrukan, yaitu upaya mencari keberkahan atau nilai tambah spiritual yang melampaui kompensasi finansial. Dengan mengintegrasikan kedua pilar tersebut, penelitian ini menawarkan perspektif baru mengenai bagaimana nilai spiritual dapat bertransformasi menjadi landasan epistemologis bagi tata kelola organisasi modern yang mengedepankan integritas dan resiliensi jangka panjang.

INTRODUCTION

Various literatures agree that leadership is a determining factor in shaping loyalty (Putri et al., 2025). However, within the pesantren ecosystem, loyalty is not merely understood as professional retention; rather, it is viewed as a manifestation of khidmah (sincere devotion) rooted in spiritual motivation (Mulyana, 2024). Although contemporary leadership theories such as Transformational Leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993) and Servant Leadership (Ihwan, 2025; Spears, 1996) have proven effective in many contexts, these models, often adopted from the corporate world, frequently cannot be fully applied within the unique context of pesantren (Aldyandra et al., 2025). These institutions possess distinct characteristics rooted in charismatic, cultural, and spiritual authority, in which staff compliance is driven by the pursuit of divine blessings (barakah). This uniqueness necessitates an exploration of leadership models rooted in the pesantren tradition itself, leadership that seamlessly merges managerial aspects with profound religious dimensions.

This juncture reveals several significant research gaps within the scholarship of pesantren management. The primary gap pertains to gender bias in pesantren Leadership studies. Existing literature focuses almost exclusively on the figure of the *Kiai* (Achidsti, 2014). The same applies in this research (Azzahra & Thofhani, 2025). The role of the *Nyai* or Bu *Nyai* is frequently relegated to mere supportive or domestic functions (Muniroh et al., 2024), overlooking the modern reality in which many female figures in pesantren now exercise autonomous control and hold strategic roles in managerial decision-making. This study aims to bridge this gap by establishing female Leadership as its primary focus.

The second gap lies in the oversimplification of spiritual leadership. Much existing research limits its scope to the labels of charismatic leadership, Weber, or spiritual leadership (Udayana Putra, 2020) within a universal context. This study argues that leadership grounded in a specific Tarekat *(Sufi order)* possesses dimensions that are far deeper and more practical. Specifically, this research focuses on the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat*, which is recognized for its unique characteristics, including an emphasis on the balance between *dzikir* (spirituality) and *fikir* (intellectuality), alongside a robust work ethic and strong social engagement (Maliki Abitolkha & Muhamad, 2020). To date, there is a dearth of research that specifically links the distinct Sadziliyyah doctrines of a leader to concrete managerial practices in building faculty (*Ustadz*) loyalty. This presents a significant opportunity to fill the void within the field of Islamic educational management studies.

This research focuses on a specific location at Pondok Pesantren Al-Urwatul Wutsqo, Jombang. The selection of Al-Urwatul Wutsqo as a case study is crucial because, based on three months of intensive observation, the institution is recognized as a primary center for the development of the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat* in Jombang, a tradition deeply rooted in both culture and spirituality. The core uniqueness of this institution lies in its integration of tarekat doctrines into its organizational governance system. Unlike other pesantren that may rely solely on charisma (Hamidah, 2025), Al-Urwatul Wutsqo explicitly adopts the *Sadziliyyah* teachings of *Tawakkal (trust in God)*, *Qana'ah* (contentment), and *Zuhud* (asceticism) as its leadership philosophy and work ethos. This is manifested through managerial policies that emphasize service quality (khidmah), simplicity, and a long-term orientation, all of which are believed to contribute to staff stability and

loyalty. Furthermore, the pesantren is managed by a female figure (*Nyai*) who holds autonomous, strategic control, offering a rare opportunity to examine female leadership within an institution integrated with these specific *Tarekat* teachings. Thus, Al-Urwatul Wutsqo serves as an ideal representation, providing a comprehensive picture of the Sufistic-Feminine leadership model in practice.

Therefore, this research aims to bridge this dual gap by analyzing *Tarekat*-Based Female Leadership in Enhancing Faculty Loyalty at Pondok Pesantren Al-Urwatul Wutsqo, Jombang. The significance of this study lies in its twofold contribution. Theoretically, it offers a novel conceptual framework: the *Sufistic*-Feminine Leadership Model. This model illustrates how a leader (*Ibu Nyai*) executes organizational governance by synthesizing sacred spiritual authority (as a *Mursyid* or Spiritual Guide) with a humanistic, compassionate approach (as a Mother), thereby transcending general charismatic concepts within the context of Islamic education. Practically, the findings provide valuable insights and a replicable model for pesantren leaders on how the distinct spiritual values of the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat* can be translated into effective managerial strategies to mitigate turnover and enhance faculty loyalty.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of *Tarekat Shadhiliyya*-based female Leadership. The research site was selected purposively at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. Intensive fieldwork was conducted over a period of three months. This site was chosen for its uniqueness as a hub for the *Tarekat* Shadhiliyya, featuring a central female Leadership figure who actively manages the teaching staff. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques (Nurdiani, 2014), categorized into three groups: (1) The female leader (*Ibu Nyai*) as the key informant; (2) Teaching staff (comprising both senior and newly recruited teachers) as primary informants; and (3) Other relevant pesantren administrators as supporting informants.

This study included 10 informants selected through purposive sampling. The selection was based on specific criteria to ensure the depth and relevance of the data, namely: (1) teaching staff with a minimum of 5 years of service to capture aspects of long-term loyalty; (2) active practitioners of the *Syadziliyah Tarekat* within the pesantren environment; and (3) individuals who have direct interaction with the *Nyai* (the female leader). The informants included one leader (the *Nyai*), five senior teachers, two administrative staff members, and two division heads. This diversity ensures that the phenomenon of loyalty is examined at multiple structural levels.

Data collection was conducted using triangulation techniques to achieve data saturation and comprehensiveness. Three primary methods were utilized: (1) Participant observation (Mikkelsen, 2011), wherein the researcher engaged in the daily activities of the pesantren to directly observe Leadership practices, the communication of *Tarekat* values, and the work climate; (2) Semi-structured in-depth interviews with all informant categories to explore the leader's Leadership philosophy and the teaching staff's perceptions of loyalty; and (3) Documentation study to analyze secondary data such as the vision and mission, employment statutes, and relevant meeting minutes.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative analysis model by Miles and Huberman, as cited in Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, which encompasses three simultaneous flows: data condensation (selecting and focusing), data display (organizing data), and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure data trustworthiness, this study applies the credibility criteria of Lincoln and Guba, as cited in (Setiawan, 2018) through, (1) Triangulation, employing both source

triangulation (comparing data across informants) and methodological triangulation (comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents); and (2) Member check, which involves confirming preliminary findings with key informants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result
The *Tarekat Shadhiliyya*-based women's Leadership model at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo Islamic Boarding School in Jombang.

The first finding indicates that the female Leadership model *(Ibu Nyai)* at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo is not singular. Instead, it is a unique synthesis of three simultaneous roles: (1) Managerial-Professional Role, (2) Maternal-Collegial Role, and (3) Spiritual-Murshid Role. These three roles interlock, creating a hybrid Leadership model effective in managing the teaching staff. The managerial role serves as the hand that directs, the maternal role as the heart that nurtures, and the *mursyid* role as the spirit that secures loyalty.

The first finding demonstrates that the female leadership model *(Ibu Nyai)* at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo is not singular. Rather, the model implemented is a unique synthesis that functions simultaneously through three central roles: (1) the Managerial-Professional role, (2) the Maternal-Collegial role, and (3) the *Mursyid*-Spiritual role. These three roles are interconnected, forming an effective hybrid leadership model for managing teaching staff. The managerial role serves as the hand that organizes, the maternal role acts as the heart that embraces, and the mursyid role functions as the soul that binds loyalty.

The first aspect is the managerial-professional role. This role is supported by the teaching of *Fikir* (work/intellectuality) within the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat*. As expressed by a Head of Curriculum (TP-1):

> *"Do not assume that because this is a pesantren, the work is lax. Ibu Nyai is very detailed and firm regarding administrative matters. She has a deep understanding of lesson plans (RPP), syllabi, and even attendance records. During evaluation meetings, we cannot take things lightly. She demands that we be professional and stay updated with educational developments." (Interview, TP-1, Head of Division).*

The second aspect is the maternal-collegial role. This managerial firmness is balanced by a personal approach deeply infused with maternal values. The leader positions herself as both a mother figure and a colleague to the teaching staff. Observations reveal that the leader remembers personal details about her teachers, such as their children's names, family circumstances, and the specific challenges they face. This is strongly felt by a newly recruited teacher (TP-5):

> *"I was surprised when I first started here. In less than a month, Ibu Nyai already knew my name and asked how my child was doing at home. We (the teachers) are treated like family. When there is a problem, we perform a sowan (a visit to her). It is not stiff like visiting a superior, but rather like visiting our own parents. This is what makes us feel at home (betah)." (Interview, TP-5, Senior Teaching Staff 1).*

The third aspect, which serves as the foundation and the primary differentiator, is the *Mursyid*-Spiritual role. The leader serves not only as the institutional director but also as a spiritual mentor (*Muqaddam* or *Mursyid*) to practitioners of the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat* within the pesantren environment, including teachers. This role places the leader in a position of supreme spiritual authority, which the teaching staff sincerely obeys."She is our *Mursyid* (spiritual guide), not just a Director. A decision from a managerial meeting is one thing, but we all understand that the final decision often awaits guidance after she performs istikharah (prayer for guidance). Her authority is not merely

based on a formal decree (SK), but it is a spiritual authority. We hold her in deep ta'dzim (profound respect and reverence)." (Interview, TP-2, Administrative Staff).

The Internalization of *Tarekat Shadhiliyya* Values to Enhance Teaching Staff Loyalty

The research findings reveal that faculty loyalty within the institution is cultivated through an organic process of internalizing Tarekat Shadhiliyya values, rather than through transactional or coercive measures. This loyalty is primarily driven by the leader's implementation of Tawazun (the balance of intellect and remembrance) and Mahabbah (compassionate love). By framing professional duties as a form of spiritual devotion (*dzikir*) and adopting a maternal leadership style rooted in profound compassion, the leader fosters a deep sense of intrinsic motivation and affective commitment among the teaching staff. Consequently, this spiritual and humanitarian approach creates a unique organizational bond where loyalty is built upon a foundation of mutual care and shared religious values."

The second finding identifies that faculty loyalty is not built through coercion or purely transactional contracts. Instead, loyalty grows organically from the leader's internalization and practical implementation of *Sadziliyyah Tarekat* values. Two primary values identified as the most influential are (1) the Principle of Tawazun (the balance of *Fikir-Dzikir* or Intellect-Remembrance) and (2) the Principle of *Mahabbah* (Compassionate Love). The leader (IN-1) herself emphasized this point:

> *"Our teachings (Sadziliyyah), as taught by Abul Hasan As-Sadzili, are a Tarekat Syughul (an order of active work), not a Tarekat Uzlah (an order of seclusion). Therefore, the teachers here must be professional (Fikir); they must be disciplined and competent. However, this professionalism must be wrapped in taqwa (God-consciousness) and dzikir (remembrance). To teach well is, in itself, a form of our dzikir." (Interview, IN-1, Leader).*

Observations conducted on October 10, 2025, revealed that every coordination meeting (a representation of *Fikir*) consistently opens with the *Simthud Duror salawat* and the recitation of the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat's Istighosah*, and concludes with further prayers (a representation of *Dzikir*). This spiritual framing effectively prevents burnout and instills a profound sense of intrinsic motivation, ultimately leading to organizational loyalty. Meanwhile, the value of *Mahabbah* (Compassionate Love) is implemented through a maternal leadership style characterized by profound welas asih (compassion). This serves as the leader's strategic approach to fostering affective commitment. The leader personally assists faculty members facing difficulties, providing both moral support and material aid, such as financial assistance from personal funds or institutional resources.

> *"The salary here might be standard; it could even be higher elsewhere. However, here, our humanity is nurtured. When my child was seriously ill and required significant medical expenses, Ibu Nyai was the first to help without me even asking, and she did the same when I gave birth. She took care of everything. Our loyalty is built upon this sense of mahabbah and a profound sense of indebtedness (utang budi) of that nature." (Interview, TP-3, Senior Teaching Staff 2).*

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that faculty loyalty is not merely a product of contractual obligations, but rather an organic manifestation of deeply internalized spiritual values. Through the principle of Tawazun, professional duties are harmonized with divine consciousness, transforming routine teaching tasks into a form of spiritual devotion (*dzikir*). This approach effectively mitigates burnout and shifts staff motivation from purely extrinsic to more sustainable, profound intrinsic motivation, which serves as a stable foundation for organizational commitment.

Furthermore, implementing Mahabbah through a compassionate, maternal leadership style creates a powerful emotional bond between the leader and the faculty. By prioritizing human welfare and providing tangible support during personal crises, the leader fosters a high level of affective commitment that transcends financial incentives. Ultimately, the practice of Tarekat *Shadhiliyya* values within this educational institution proves that a value-based approach can cultivate enduring loyalty by bridging the gap between professional competence and spiritual integrity.

Teaching Staff Perceptions of the Spiritual-Based Leadership Model (Shadhiliyyah)

The third finding confirms that this spiritual leadership model produces a unique perception of loyalty. For the majority of the teaching staff at *Al-Urwatul Wutsqo*, loyalty is not interpreted transactionally (in terms of salary or career); rather, it is understood relationally and spiritually, specifically as *Khidmah* (devotion) and *Tabarrukan* (the pursuit of blessings). This is a key finding that distinguishes loyalty within this institution from loyalty in corporate organizations.

The first perception identifies the leader as a Teacher and Parent, rather than a Superior. The teaching staff consistently avoids bureaucratic or corporate terminology such as boss, superior, or manager when referring to the leader. Instead, the dominant terms used are Ibu *Nyai*, Our Teacher, or Mother. This perception fundamentally shifts the dynamics of the professional relationship; it moves from an instructional relationship (superior-subordinate) to one rooted in deep reverence (*ta'dzim*).

> *"We do not feel as though we have a superior here. We have a Mother and a Teacher; therefore, we hold her in ta'dzim. When she is firm, it is the firmness of educating and reminding us, not the firmness of judging or scolding. It feels entirely different in our hearts. We feel a deep sense of segan (profound reluctance and respect) at the thought of ever disappointing her." (Interview, TP-4, Senior Teaching Staff 3).*

The second perception involves conceptualizing loyalty as Khidmah (Devotion). This constitutes the core of their loyalty. The teaching staff perceives their professional activities, such as teaching and administrative work, as a form of devotion to their teacher (*Ibu Nyai*), who is also their *Mursyid*. Within the pesantren tradition, *khidmah* represents the highest value. This perception effectively transforms their psychological contract: shifting from working for a salary to serving for the sake of the teacher's rida (spiritual blessing and approval).

> *"If you ask why we stay here for so long, the primary answer is khidmah. We are not simply working here; we are serving. We would feel ashamed if our work were not of the highest quality, because we work for our teacher, not merely for the foundation. The salary is just a side effect of our devotion." (Interview, TP-1, Senior Teaching Staff 4).*

The third perception interprets loyalty as *Tabarrukan* (the pursuit of blessings). This represents a spiritual incentive that transcends material valuation. The teaching staff believes that by serving sincerely (demonstrating loyalty) under the guidance of a *Mursyid* (*Ibu Nyai*), they will attain barokah (divine blessings) in their lives. These blessings are perceived in various forms, such as the smooth flow of sustenance (*rezeki*), inner peace, and the enduring benefit of knowledge for their families.

> *"Loyalty here is a spiritual bond. We believe that ngalap berkah (seeking blessings) from someone as learned ('alim) and as spiritually practiced as she is brings barakah into our lives. The knowledge we teach becomes beneficial, and our families at home feel ayem (peaceful and serene). That is something that cannot be bought anywhere else." (Interview, TP-2, Senior Teaching Staff 5).*

Meanwhile, the findings regarding these latent dynamics were confirmed through interviews with the staff of Division 2 (Student Affairs and Logistics), who bear the heaviest physical workload. One informant revealed an internal struggle between physical exhaustion and spiritual commitment, and how the leader's personal touch effectively mitigated this tension. "To be honest, it is exhausting. As a human being, it occasionally crosses my mind: how long can I keep this up, while my peers outside have already become well-established?

These thoughts often arise late at night when the students are being difficult. Yet, strangely, every time I perform sowan (visit the leader), before I even have a chance to complain, *Ibu Nyai* greets me first, asks about my mother's well-being at home, and prays for me. Instantly, I feel a sense of shame. She provides a sense of peace that money cannot buy. Consequently, I regard this fatigue as a form of mujahadah (spiritual struggle) to cleanse my sins." (Staff, Division 2).

Table 1. Summary of Study Findings

Research Focus	Key Field Findings	Implications on Loyalty
The *Tarekat Shadhiliyya*-Based Women's Leadership Model	1. Manager: Firm regarding administration, lesson plans (RPP), and discipline. 2. Maternal Figure: Attentive to teachers' personal issues, remembers their children's names, and provides a sense of comfort. 3. *Mursyid* (Spiritual Guide): Guides the tarekat (spiritual path) and serves as a spiritual role model.	1. Professionalism is maintained (due to the Manager role). 2. Teachers feel at home and develop emotional bonds (due to the Maternal role). 3. Teachers exhibit sincere obedience (ta'dzim) (due to the Mursyid role).
Internalizing *Shadhiliyyah* Values to Foster Loyalty	1. *Tawazun* (Balance): The Leader frames professional work (Fikir) as an integral part of worship (Dzikir). 2. *Mahabbah* (Love and Compassion): The Leader actively assists teachers facing difficulties (illness, financial issues, etc.).	1. Teachers are spiritually motivated (seeing work as an act of worship). 2. Teachers feel cared for and possess a sense of debt of gratitude, resulting in non-transactional loyalty (beyond mere salary).
Educators' Perceptions of the Leadership Model	1. *Khidmah* (Devotion/Service): Service to the Teacher/Mursyid. 2. *Tabarrukan* (Seeking Blessings): *Seeking* blessings from the Leader.	1. The loyalty bond is extremely strong, as it is rooted in spiritual values (khidmah) rather than a work contract. 2. Teachers are unlikely to leave despite better salary offers, because their primary goal is seeking blessings (barakah).

Source: Data Collection, 2026

Discussion

Deconstructing the Leadership Model

The female leadership model (*Ibu Nyai*) operates within a complex hybrid architecture. This model is not singular; rather, it is a dynamic amalgamation of three roles often considered contradictory in classical management literature: the Managerial (Professional-Rational), the Maternal (Emotional-Relational), and the *Mursyid* (*Spiritual*-Transcendental). The leader's success in synthesizing these three roles offers both a critique of and an enrichment to contemporary leadership theories. In the sociological context of pesantren, which has historically been dominated by patriarchal structures centered around male *Kyais*, female leadership is frequently relegated to a

complementary or domestic role (Wu et al., 2022). However, the findings at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo demonstrate the opposite phenomenon. The female leader successfully subverts gender stereotypes by leveraging the Maternal role as a source of strategic strength rather than a weakness (FrenchII, 2016).

These findings strongly validate Servant Leadership theory, as articulated by Greenleaf, albeit with a distinct cultural nuance. While Western Servant Leadership emphasizes service as an ethical choice, in this pesantren, service is a maternal manifestation of the leader. This approach fosters what Edmondson defines as Psychological Safety (Novitasari et al., 2021). Subordinates feel secure in voicing concerns, admitting mistakes, and expressing themselves because the leader is perceived as a protector rather than a judge (Narwadan et al., 2025). The relevance of these findings is particularly high when linked to post-pandemic management discourses (2020-2023). Recent literature, such as (Goti, 2024) It highlights the urgency of Compassionate Leadership. In an era where the global workforce faces mental health crises and burnout(Santoso et al., 2025) (Santoso et al., 2025), Target-oriented masculine leadership models are increasingly being abandoned (Meta Tri Sulaksana, 2026). The maternal model of *Ibu Nyai*, prioritizing empathy (*Mahabbah*) and people-oriented care, has proven to be an effective organizational fortress. This suggests that the feminization of management in pesantren is not a sign of declining discipline, but rather an evolutionary adaptation that fosters a more resilient and humane organization.

The second dimension is the Managerial role. The leader demonstrates a proficient technocratic capacity in administration, curriculum development, and performance evaluation. In organizational theory, this is identified as legal-rational authority (Chairi, 2019). However, the research findings indicate that managerial rationality at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo possesses a distinct epistemological root. *Ibu Nyai's* professionalism is not driven by the logic of capitalism (profit accumulation) or secular bureaucracy; rather, it is rooted in the theological doctrines of the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat*, specifically the concept of *Syughul* (Occupational Activity). Unlike other *Sufi* orders that may emphasize passive asceticism, the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat* teaches that attaining closeness to God (wusul) can be achieved through professional worldly activities, provided the heart remains detached from them. Therefore, when the leader demands administrative discipline and the submission of Lesson Plans (RPP), it is framed not as a mere administrative requirement, but as a spiritual obligation.

The third dimension, which offers the greatest novelty, is the role of the *Mursyid*. The leader is not merely a director, but a Spiritual Guide. Western management literature recognizes the Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT) proposed by Louis Fry (2003), which defines organizational spirituality inclusively through vision, hope, and altruistic love (Erlin & Herri, 2018). However, Fry's model tends to be generic and religiously agnostic to ensure applicability within multinational corporations. The findings at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo reveal the limitations of Fry's model; spiritual leadership here is Specific, Doctrinal, and Institutionalized. *Ibu Nyai's* authority does not derive solely from personal charisma, but from a recognized spiritual lineage (sanad). This creates a unique form of obedience known as *ta'dzim*. *Ta'dzim* transcends professional compliance; it is an esoteric obedience in which subordinates believe that loyalty to the leader is a path toward eternal salvation (*ukhrawi*).

Authentic leadership requires leaders to act in accordance with their core values (Benawa, 2014). In this instance, *Ibu Nyai* demonstrates a high degree of authenticity, as her managerial behavior directly reflects her spiritual practices (*riyadhoh*). She leads by example, demonstrating consistency in both worship and professional duties. These findings propose that the most robust form of authentic leadership is not built through superficial soft-skill training but rather through the long-term internalization of spiritual disciplines. In this context, the *Tarekat* functions as a

school of leadership that molds a leader's character to be resilient against the temptations of corruption and the abuse of power qualities that are critically sought after amidst the current global leadership crisis.

The Mechanism of Value Internalization: Mahabbah (Love) and Tawazun (Balance) as a Strategy for the Management of Meaning

The second finding highlights how the abstract values of the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat*, specifically *Mahabbah* (Love) and *Tawazun* (Balance), are translated (operationalized) into concrete human resource management strategies. This represents a process of meaning management (Listiowaty, 2020), in which the leader frames work reality to generate motivation (Hidayat et al., 2025). The implementation of the Mahabbah value, manifesting through personal attention and non-formal welfare assistance, holds profound theoretical implications. Within the Organizational Commitment theory (Arfani, 2024) Commitment is categorized into three types: Affective (wanting to stay), Normative (feeling obligated to stay), and Continuance (needing to stay due to a lack of alternatives). The research findings confirm that the *Mahabbah* strategy specifically targets the formation of Affective Commitment, which is widely recognized as the strongest form of commitment and the best predictor of performance.

The teaching staff at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo do not perceive themselves as mere employees (production assets), but rather as family members (organic constituents). When the leader assists with family medical expenses or memorizes their children's names, a profound emotional exchange occurs (Rugman & Verbeke, 2003). This finding extends Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. Herzberg categorizes interpersonal relationships and supervision quality as *'hygiene factors'*, elements that prevent dissatisfaction if present, but do not inherently generate motivation (Suryani et al., 2023). However, this study demonstrates the contrary: within a collectivist-religious cultural context, interpersonal relationships serve as a Primary Motivator. The leader's compassion serves as an intrinsic incentive valued more highly than annual bonuses.

This offers critical insights into retention management for non-profit organizations. When an organization cannot compete on financial rewards, it must excel at relational rewards. *Mahabbah* (Love) is a cost-effective yet high-impact strategy for securing employee loyalty (Verbeke & Kano, 2016). Perhaps the most significant theoretical contribution of this research lies in the operationalization of *Tawazun* (Intellectual-Spiritual Balance). In management practice at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo, *Tawazun* is not interpreted as a dichotomous 50:50 time division between worship and work, but rather as an Ontological Integration (Melin, 1992). The leader consciously frames *Fikir* activities (professional work, teaching, meetings, administration) as an alternative manifestation of *Dzikir* (remembrance of God).

These findings extend and critically expand upon the popular Western concept of Work-Life Balance Triyanto et al. The concept of work-life balance is predicated on a dichotomous and secular assumption: that work is a draining, transactional public realm (Harahap et al., 2025), whereas life is a private realm reserved for happiness and meaning. The results of this study present a distinct contrast to this assumption. The *Tawazun* model at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo offers an alternative paradigm termed by the author as 'Work-Worship Fusion. In this fusion model, the boundaries between work and worship become fluid. Teachers do not need to escape from their work to find spiritual serenity; rather, the work itself, when intended in accordance with Sadziliyyah teachings, constitutes a source of serenity. This resonates strongly with contemporary management discourse regarding Meaningful Work. A study by Mustika et al. indicates that a crisis of meaning is the primary driver of turnover among Millennials and Gen Z. This research finds that the *Sadziliyyah Tarekat* provides a robust infrastructure of meaning. By transforming work motivation

from extrinsic (salary) to transcendental (seeking the pleasure of Allah), the leader successfully fosters mental resilience among the staff. They are less susceptible to burnout because every effort is reframed as an eschatological investment (investment for the hereafter). This represents a form of Spiritual Capital that serves as the institution's competitive advantage.

Reconstructing Loyalty: Shifting from Transactional Ties to a Spiritual Covenant

The third finding, regarding faculty perceptions of loyalty interpreted as *Khidmah* (devotion) and *Tabarrukan* (seeking blessings), carries radical implications, as it directly deconstructs the fundamental assumptions of exchange theory in economics and management sciences. The dominant paradigm in employee loyalty studies is Social Exchange Theory (SET), popularized by Peter Blau. SET operates on utilitarian logic, positing that individuals are rational actors who remain loyal only if the benefits received (salary, status, security) equal or exceed the costs incurred *in time, effort, and cognitive load.* (Setiyono, 2023). However, empirical findings at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo demonstrate a marked divergence from SET.

Numerous faculty members have remained for decades despite acknowledging that their financial compensation falls below market standards (compared to public schools or elite private institutions). Under strict SET logic, this should result in turnover (Benedict, 2017). Why, then, do they stay? The answer lies in redefining benefit. Within the pesantren cosmology, benefits are not limited to material (tangible) gains but also encompass Barakah (Blessings), which are intangible and eschatological. Faculty members believe that *Khidmah*, defined here as sincere devotion devoid of transactional calculation, serves as a means of drawing *Barakah* from God through the mediation of the *Mursyid*. This *Barakah* is believed to manifest as health, inner tranquility, and the success of future generations (Ma`arif et al., 2026).

Consequently, loyalty in this context is inherently Non-Transactional. It represents a form of Transcendental Rationality. The teachers remain rational actors; however, their calculation time horizon extends beyond the immediate month (salary) to encompass eternal life (the hereafter). Social Exchange Theory (SET) fails to capture this phenomenon due to its inherent secular-materialist bias (Clarke, 2009). These findings support the inclusion of spiritual dimensions as variables in modern social exchange theory. As a more adequate explanatory alternative, this study extends Rousseau's concept of the Psychological Contract. Rousseau distinguishes between transactional contracts (short-term, monetary focus) and relational contracts (long-term, trust focus) (Akbar, 2019). However, the bond observed at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo transcends both categories. Drawing on emerging theological management literature, the phenomenon of loyalty at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo is better conceptualized as a Covenantal Contract. Unlike conventional contracts grounded in self-interest, a covenant represents a sacred agreement founded upon Shared Identity and Sacred Values (Firdaus, 2017).

Within this framework, the covenant relationship comprises three distinct dimensions: (1) The Nature of the Relationship, where employment is perceived as a destiny or a divine calling, rather than a mere coincidence of the labor market (Buhori & Akbar, 2024). (2) Durability, characterized by inherent resilience. Unlike employees bound by transactional contracts who typically exit during financial crises, those under a covenantal contract remain to endure shared suffering. This suffering is reinterpreted not as a loss but as a test of spiritual loyalty that yields divine rewards (pahala). (3) Figure Centrality, wherein the covenant is anchored to the figure of *Ibu Nyai* as the *Mursyid*. She serves as the essential binding node; thus, loyalty to the institution is fundamentally derived from loyalty to the Spiritual Master (Buhori & Akbar, 2024).
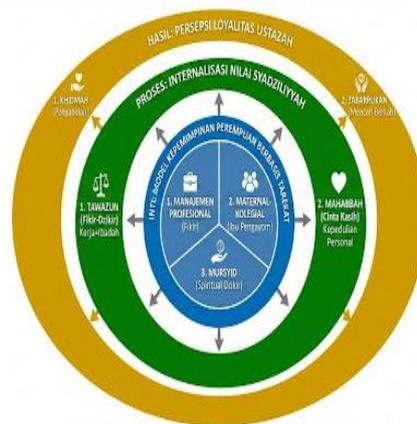
Figure 1. The Concept of Tarekat-Based Women's Leadership in Enhancing Teacher Loyalty at Al-Urwatul Wutsqo Islamic Boarding School in Jombang

These findings offer significant managerial implications that educational administrators can adapt beyond the context of tarekat institutions. First, adopting a Maternal-Humanistic Approach encourages leaders to transcend traditional supervisory roles by positioning themselves as nurturing figures in the workplace. By practicing empathetic listening and providing holistic support, such as offering moral and material aid during personal or family crises, managers can foster deep emotional bonds that significantly enhance employee retention and affective commitment.

Second, the findings suggest a necessary Transformation of the Meaning of Work through the infusion of transcendental values into organizational culture. Leaders can reorient their staff's professional vision, framing teaching not merely as an economic transaction, but as a noble mission and a form of social service. This shift in perspective serves as a strategic buffer against job burnout while elevating intrinsic satisfaction, ensuring that staff remain dedicated to the institution's long-term vision even amidst professional challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the female leadership model at Pondok Pesantren Al-Urwatul Wutsqo, Jombang, offers a unique synthesis of professional managerial roles and maternal nurturing, where the female leader *(Ibu Nyai)* effectively balances formal work demands with spiritual values. The findings indicate that applying *Sadziliyyah Tarekat* values, specifically the principles of balance (*tawazun*) and compassion (*mahabbah*), plays a crucial role in shifting staff's motivational orientation. Consequently, the resulting loyalty is not merely based on economic transactions but is transformed into a profound spiritual commitment. Within this model, work is redefined as sincere devotion (*Khidmah*) and as a means of seeking divine blessings (*Tabarrukan*). This form of loyalty proves more resilient than compliance driven by material incentives, while simultaneously offering an alternative perspective that enriches Social Exchange Theory (SET) in the context of modern management.

Despite offering significant findings, this research has several limitations that warrant academic acknowledgement. As a single qualitative case study, the findings are deeply context-bound to the organizational and theological culture of Al-Urwatul Wutsqo Islamic Boarding School in Jombang, as well as the specific doctrinal characteristics of the *Tarekat Shadhiliyya*. This limits the generalizability of the results to the broader pesantren population or to educational institutions affiliated with different Sufi orders (for example, the *Naqshabandiyah*, which may

employ different approaches to asceticism). Furthermore, the study's predominant focus on internal dynamics between Leadership and teaching staff has not fully accounted for external variables, such as macroeconomic fluctuations and national education policies, which could confound long-term loyalty among teaching staff.

Based on these findings and limitations, the future research agenda is recommended to expand its scope through multi-site comparative studies. These should compare the effectiveness of *Tarekat*-based female Leadership with male Leadership (*Kiai*) or with other *Tarekat* orders possessing different doctrines (such as *Sammaniyah* or *Qadiriyah*). Future research is also strongly encouraged to adopt quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to test the external validity of this covenantal loyalty model at a larger scale, as well as to develop empirical measurement instruments for the variables of *Tawazun* and *Mahabbah* within the context of performance management. Furthermore, longitudinal studies would be beneficial for analyzing the persistence of this spiritual loyalty amid the demographic transition of teachers into Generation Z, who may possess distinct work-value orientations.

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