



Leadership of Madrasah Principals in Fostering Professional Work Ethic among Educational Staff: A Case Study in Indonesian Islamic Schools

Mawardi^{1*}, Elza Eka Putri², Mona Novita³, Darma Wisata⁴

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Sarolangun, Indonesia

³Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

⁴Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Darul Ulum, Indonesia

Email: mawardimohamedamru@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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*Corresponding Author

This study aims to examine how madrasah principals enact leadership practices to foster professional work ethic among educational staff in Indonesian Islamic schools. Educational institutions are not only sites of knowledge transmission but also arenas for cultivating ethical conduct and professional discipline. In madrasah contexts, professional work ethic is inseparable from the moral legitimacy of institutions grounded in Islamic values. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was used to interpret leadership practices within their organizational and cultural contexts. The findings show that values-based leadership, enacted through moral exemplarity and ethical modeling, is a primary driver of the formation of a professional work ethic. Participatory and relational leadership strengthens organizational commitment, trust, and work discipline by fostering psychological ownership and inclusive governance. Ethical norms are institutionalized through formal routines and informal socialization, enabling the reproduction of professional standards beyond direct supervision. Leadership influence operates at micro, meso, and macro levels through exemplarity, participation, and cultural embedding. These mechanisms jointly cultivate self-regulation, accountability, and service orientation. This study contributes an integrative, culturally grounded framework for ethical leadership in faith-based education and recommends leadership development programs that emphasize ethical embodiment, participatory governance, and institutionalized routines.

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INTRODUCTION

In many societies, the quality of education is increasingly recognized as a decisive factor in shaping social cohesion, economic productivity, and moral resilience. Educational institutions function not only as sites of knowledge transmission but also as arenas where values, discipline, and professional ethics are cultivated (Kohl et al., 2022). The work ethic of educational staff plays a crucial role in determining institutional effectiveness because it influences service quality, organizational trust, and the sustainability of school performance (Hiim, 2023). Empirical studies demonstrate that schools characterized by strong ethical climates and supportive leadership tend to exhibit higher levels of staff commitment, lower turnover, and stronger professional engagement (Anwar et al., 2024). Conversely, weak professional ethics are associated with administrative inefficiency, declining institutional credibility, and diminished stakeholder trust (Getenet et al., 2024). In Islamic education contexts, schools are also expected to embody moral authority, making professional conduct a key indicator of institutional legitimacy (Abdullah et al., 2025). Therefore, investigating leadership strategies that foster a professional work ethic is essential not only for organizational improvement but also for strengthening the social function of Islamic educational institutions.

Despite the strategic role of education in social development, many educational institutions face persistent challenges related to professional work ethic among educational staff. Issues such as low organizational commitment, limited discipline, and inconsistent accountability remain prevalent in various school systems, particularly in developing contexts where leadership capacity and institutional governance are uneven (Kareem et al., 2023). In Islamic schools, including madrasahs, these challenges are intensified by the dual mandate to achieve academic excellence while upholding Islamic moral values in everyday professional practices (Trede et al., 2013). Several studies indicate that gaps between institutional norms and actual work behavior contribute to organizational inefficiency and declining stakeholder confidence (Jameel et al., 2025). Structural constraints, limited professional development opportunities, and rigid bureaucratic cultures further weaken staff motivation and ethical engagement (Saputra, 2023). Moreover, leadership that is primarily administrative rather than values-driven often fails to cultivate sustainable professional commitment (Astuti, 2024). These conditions highlight a systemic problem in aligning organizational expectations with lived professional practices, underscoring the need to examine leadership as a critical mechanism for strengthening work ethic in madrasah contexts.

Extensive research in educational leadership underscores the pivotal role of school principals in shaping organizational culture, professional commitment, and work ethic among school personnel. Transformational leadership theory

suggests that leaders who articulate a clear vision, model ethical behavior, and empower staff can foster intrinsic motivation and professional responsibility (Kamal et al., 2025). Empirical studies demonstrate that leadership practices emphasizing trust, collaboration, and moral example significantly influence teachers' and staff members' professional engagement (Merryfield, 1998). In faith-based education, leadership grounded in moral and spiritual values has been found to strengthen institutional coherence and staff alignment with organizational missions (Zengin, 2025). However, much of this scholarship is derived from Western and secular educational settings, which may not adequately capture the cultural and religious dimensions of leadership in Islamic schooling contexts (Sahin, 2024). Furthermore, existing studies often prioritize teacher performance, leaving the broader category of educational staff underexamined. This limitation constrains the applicability of prevailing leadership models to madrasah systems, where organizational dynamics are shaped by distinctive socio-religious norms.

Although leadership in Islamic educational institutions has received growing scholarly attention, most studies focus on curriculum leadership, instructional supervision, or student outcomes rather than on the professional work ethic of educational staff (Moslimany et al., 2024). Work ethic is frequently conceptualized as an individual attribute shaped by personal religiosity or professional competence, with limited attention to how leadership practices construct collective professional norms within organizational settings (Asari, 2024). Moreover, many empirical investigations rely on quantitative surveys that prioritize variable measurement over contextual understanding, thereby overlooking the everyday interactions through which leadership is enacted (Matović & Ovesni, 2023). The specific role of madrasah principals in cultivating professional work ethic among diverse categories of educational staff such as administrative personnel and support staff remains under-theorized and under-researched. This gap is significant because these actors are central to institutional effectiveness and service quality. Consequently, there is a strong need for in-depth qualitative case studies that explore how leadership practices shape ethical climates and professional work cultures in Indonesian madrasahs.

Contemporary leadership research increasingly conceptualizes leadership as a relational, context-sensitive, and values-driven practice embedded within specific cultural and institutional environments (Astuti, 2024). Recent studies emphasize the importance of culturally responsive leadership models that account for local belief systems and organizational traditions (Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2024). Building on this trajectory, the present study advances the field by situating leadership practices within Indonesian madrasahs and foregrounding the professional work ethic of educational staff rather than focusing exclusively

on teachers. This focus represents a conceptual novelty because it expands the scope of leadership analysis to include non-teaching personnel as integral contributors to institutional quality. Methodologically, the use of a qualitative case study design enables a nuanced examination of leadership enactment in everyday organizational life, addressing limitations of prior survey-based studies (Kareem & Kummitha, 2025). Theoretically, the study integrates leadership theory with Islamic educational values, offering a contextualized framework for understanding how ethical and professional norms are cultivated in faith-based schooling environments.

This study addresses the central research problem of how madrasah principals enact leadership to foster a professional work ethic among educational staff within Indonesian Islamic schools. Drawing on values-based and transformational leadership perspectives, this study argues that leadership effectiveness in madrasahs is not solely determined by formal authority or managerial competence but by the consistent enactment of ethical exemplarity, participatory governance, and relational trust (Wicaksono et al., 2025). It is proposed that principals who embed Islamic ethical values into organizational routines and professional interactions are more likely to cultivate sustainable work ethic among educational staff. Such leadership practices are expected to strengthen organizational commitment, enhance service quality, and reinforce institutional legitimacy (Rahmah et al., 2025). This argument positions leadership as a mechanism of professional socialization, through which ethical norms are internalized and reproduced within organizational culture (Kamal et al., 2025). By articulating this perspective, the study contributes to leadership theory by demonstrating how culturally grounded ethical leadership operates within faith-based educational institutions.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its effort to contextualize leadership and work ethic within the socio-religious framework of Islamic education. By examining leadership practices in madrasahs, the research extends dominant leadership theories into culturally specific educational environments, thereby enhancing their explanatory relevance beyond secular institutional settings. Practically, the findings offer actionable insights for policymakers, school leaders, and leadership training institutions seeking to strengthen the professional work ethic in Islamic schools. The study identifies leadership practices that can be institutionalized to enhance organizational culture, including ethical role modeling, participatory supervision, and value internalization through daily routines. These contributions are particularly relevant to educational reform initiatives in Muslim-majority societies, where integrating professional standards with religious values remains a strategic priority. Moreover, the study provides a conceptual foundation for developing

leadership development programs that emphasize ethical competence and culturally responsive management in faith-based educational institutions.

Beyond its empirical focus, this study offers broader implications for understanding leadership in value-based educational institutions across diverse cultural contexts. The madrasah setting provides an important lens for examining how leadership mediates the relationship between organizational effectiveness and moral legitimacy. As educational systems worldwide confront challenges related to professionalism, accountability, and ethical governance, insights from Islamic schooling contexts contribute to comparative discussions on leadership and organizational ethics. The study highlights the importance of aligning leadership practices with locally grounded value systems to foster sustainable professional cultures. This alignment is particularly relevant in pluralistic societies, where educational institutions function not only as centers of learning but also as sites of moral and civic formation. Ultimately, the findings reinforce the view that educational leadership is inherently value-laden and culturally embedded, and that effective leadership requires sensitivity to the ethical foundations of the communities served.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore how madrasah principals enact leadership practices in fostering professional work ethic among educational staff. A qualitative case study is appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts, allowing for in-depth and holistic understanding of leadership processes as they unfold in institutional settings (Miller et al., 2023a). This design enables the researcher to capture meanings, interpretations, and organizational dynamics that cannot be adequately represented through quantitative measures alone (Mtisi, 2022). Furthermore, case study research is well-suited to examining leadership practices as socially constructed processes embedded in specific cultural and institutional environments (Chen & Hu, 2024). Given the study's focus on leadership enactment in a single madrasah, the case study design allows for rich contextualization and analytical depth that supports theory development rather than statistical generalization (Miller et al., 2023a).

The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Sarolangun, a public Islamic senior secondary school in Jambi Province, Indonesia. This site was selected purposively because it represents a typical madrasah that integrates formal national curriculum requirements with Islamic educational values, making it an appropriate context for examining values-based leadership and professional work ethic. The madrasah also demonstrates organizational complexity in its leadership structure and staff roles, providing a fertile setting

for examining how leadership influences professional conduct. Moreover, the site's accessibility and the institution's openness to research participation enabled prolonged engagement, which is essential for achieving depth and credibility in qualitative inquiry (Miller et al., 2023b). The contextual characteristics of MAN 1 Sarolangun offer analytical insights that are transferable to similar Islamic educational institutions facing comparable leadership and professionalism challenges.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews with the principal, vice principals, teachers, and administrative staff enabled exploration of participants' perspectives on leadership practices and the development of a professional work ethic, while maintaining flexibility to probe emerging themes (Arif et al., 2025). Participant observation was conducted during staff meetings, daily administrative routines, and school activities to capture leadership enactment and work ethic practices in natural settings (Gretschel et al., 2023). Document analysis of institutional regulations, work guidelines, performance reports, and internal communications was employed to contextualize leadership practices within formal organizational structures. The combination of these methods enabled data triangulation and strengthened the depth and credibility of findings, as recommended in qualitative case study research (Miller et al., 2023).

Data analysis followed an iterative thematic process involving data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and interpretive synthesis. Transcribed interviews, observation notes, and documents were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns related to leadership practices and professional work ethic. Themes were refined through constant comparison across data sources to enhance analytic rigor and internal coherence (Chand, 2025). The analytic process moved from descriptive coding toward more interpretive categorization, allowing leadership practices to be understood as relational and culturally embedded phenomena (Hartini & Garnasih, 2025). This approach facilitated the development of analytically grounded themes that reflect both participants' lived experiences and the broader theoretical framing of leadership in educational organizations.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed strategies addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents was used to enhance credibility and reduce single-source bias (Miller et al., 2023). Member checking was conducted by returning preliminary interpretations to selected participants for validation, thereby minimizing misinterpretation of participants' meanings (Vella, 2024). An audit trail

documenting methodological decisions and analytic procedures was maintained to strengthen reliability, while reflective memos supported the researcher's reflexivity throughout the research process (Miller et al., 2023). These strategies ensured that the findings were grounded in systematic qualitative procedures and met the standards of rigor expected in high-quality case study research (Strijker et al., 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the study's core findings, highlighting how madrasah principals' leadership practices shape the professional work ethic of educational staff. The results are organized into three interrelated themes that capture the dynamics of values-based leadership, participatory-relational practices, and the institutionalization of ethical norms within organizational routines and everyday professional interactions.

Values-Based Leadership as the Primary Driver of Professional Work Ethic Formation

In this study, values-based leadership is operationally defined as the madrasah principal's consistent enactment of Islamic ethical values such as integrity (*amanah*), discipline (*istiqamah*), responsibility (*tanggung jawab*), and moral exemplarity (*uswah hasanah*) within daily leadership practices and organizational routines. At the field level, this construct was identified through observable leadership behaviors, including punctuality in attending school activities, transparency in administrative decisions, fairness in staff supervision, and the integration of ethical reminders into formal meetings and informal interactions. Professional work ethic among educational staff was operationalized as the manifestation of disciplined work habits, accountability in task completion, service orientation toward students and stakeholders, and internalization of institutional values in professional conduct. This sub-finding thus captures the relational process through which the principal's ethical enactment becomes a normative reference that guides staff behavior and professional identity formation within the madrasah organizational culture.

One administrative staff member stated, "The principal always arrives before office hours and personally checks the readiness of each unit. This makes us feel uncomfortable if we come late or leave tasks unfinished, because we see his example every day." This narrative indicates that moral exemplarity operates as a powerful symbolic mechanism in shaping professional conduct. The informant's emphasis on daily visibility suggests that ethical leadership is not transmitted primarily through formal instructions but through routine embodied

practices that implicitly regulate staff behavior. The researcher interprets this as evidence that values-based leadership operates through modeling, in which the leader's consistency establishes moral standards that staff members internalize. Such modeling fosters self-regulation rather than compliance driven by surveillance, thereby strengthening intrinsic professional motivation.

A vice principal further noted, "When problems occur, the principal does not immediately blame individuals. He invites us to reflect on our responsibilities and the values we agreed upon as an institution. This makes us more willing to improve our performance." This statement illustrates that ethical leadership is enacted through reflective and dialogical practices rather than coercive control. The researcher interprets this approach as reinforcing a professional work ethic by linking performance expectations to shared institutional values. By framing accountability as a collective moral commitment, the principal cultivates a psychologically safe environment that encourages ethical self-improvement. This relational mode of leadership enhances staff commitment and strengthens their professional identity as moral agents within the institution, rather than mere executors of administrative orders.

Observational data revealed that the principal consistently embedded ethical reminders into routine organizational activities. During staff meetings, brief reflections on integrity, responsibility, and service to students preceded administrative briefings. The principal also demonstrated punctuality and transparency in decision-making processes, particularly in task allocation and performance evaluation. The researcher interprets these practices as institutional mechanisms for routinizing ethical values into organizational life. Such routinization transforms values-based leadership from an individual attribute into an organizational norm, thereby reinforcing professional work ethic through repeated symbolic and procedural enactment. The consistency of these practices across different organizational settings indicates that ethical leadership was not episodic but structurally embedded within the madrasah's daily governance.

Taken together, the interview and observational data demonstrate that the principal's values-based leadership served as the primary driver of professional work ethic formation among educational staff. Ethical exemplarity, reflective accountability, and the routinization of moral values within organizational practices created a shared normative framework that guided staff behavior. Professional work ethic was strengthened not through formal authority alone, but through the internalization of ethical standards modeled and consistently enacted by the principal. This finding affirms that leadership effectiveness in the madrasah context is deeply rooted in moral credibility and symbolic influence rather than managerial control.

Table 1. Ideal Influence of Values-Based Leadership on Professional Work Ethic

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal (School Head)	"I try to be present earlier than others to show that discipline starts from me."	Moral exemplarity; punctuality
Vice Principal	"He invites us to reflect on our shared values when problems arise."	Reflective accountability; shared values
Administrative Staff	"Seeing his consistency makes us ashamed to neglect our duties."	Internalization of ethical norms
Student Affairs Officer	"He treats everyone fairly, even when mistakes happen."	Fairness; ethical supervision

The table demonstrates that values-based leadership operates through multiple behavioral indicators that collectively shape professional work ethic. The principal's punctuality and moral exemplarity function as symbolic anchors that set behavioral expectations for staff. Reflective accountability practices transform performance management into a moral learning process, fostering ethical self-awareness rather than fear-based compliance. Fairness in supervision further reinforces trust and legitimacy, which strengthens staff willingness to align their professional conduct with institutional values. The convergence of these indicators suggests that ethical leadership exerts influence through a combination of symbolic modeling, relational engagement, and procedural fairness.

Across informant positions, a consistent pattern emerges: leadership influence is mediated by the internalization of ethical norms rather than by external enforcement. Informants describe feelings of moral obligation, personal responsibility, and shared commitment to institutional values, indicating that the professional work ethic is constructed as a collective moral practice. This thematic convergence supports the interpretation that values-based leadership creates a moral ecology within the madrasah, where ethical standards are socially reproduced through daily interactions and shared reflections.

The data reveal a coherent pattern in which values-based leadership operates through three interrelated mechanisms: (1) symbolic modeling by the principal that establishes ethical benchmarks; (2) reflective accountability that links performance expectations to shared moral commitments; and (3) organizational routinization of values that embeds ethical norms into daily practices. These mechanisms collectively produce a sustainable professional work ethic characterized by self-regulation, responsibility, and service orientation. The pattern indicates that professional ethics in the madrasah are not imposed through hierarchical control but cultivated through relational leadership and institutionalized moral practices.

Participatory and Relational Leadership Strengthened Organizational Commitment and Work Discipline

In this study, participatory and relational leadership is operationally defined as leadership practices through which the madrasah principal actively involves educational staff in decision-making processes, collaborative problem-solving, and routine performance reflection, while maintaining open, respectful, and dialogical communication. At the field level, this construct was identified through regular consultative meetings, inclusive forums for staff input, and relational interactions characterized by approachability, empathy, and mutual respect. Organizational commitment was operationalized as staff members' affective attachment to the institution, willingness to contribute beyond formal role expectations, and loyalty to institutional goals. Work discipline was operationalized as consistent adherence to schedules, timely completion of tasks, and voluntary compliance with institutional regulations. This sub-finding captures the relational mechanisms through which inclusive leadership practices translate into strengthened commitment and disciplined professional conduct among educational staff.

A senior administrative officer explained, "When new policies are planned, the principal always invites representatives from each unit to discuss them. Even if the final decision is not exactly what we propose, we feel respected and more willing to implement it." This account illustrates how participatory decision-making fosters psychological ownership and reduces resistance to institutional policies. The researcher interprets this practice as transforming policy implementation from a top-down mandate into a collectively endorsed commitment. The informant's emphasis on being "respected" indicates that relational recognition functions as a motivational resource, strengthening affective commitment and encouraging disciplined compliance with institutional regulations. This suggests that work discipline is reinforced not merely by formal rules but by the perceived legitimacy of leadership processes.

A support staff member stated, "The principal often asks about our difficulties and invites us to find solutions together. Because of that, we feel responsible to complete our tasks properly and on time." This narrative demonstrates how relational leadership practices cultivate reciprocal responsibility. The researcher interprets this interaction as producing a moral contract between the leader and staff, in which leadership care and empathy are reciprocated by enhanced work discipline and professional dedication. The dialogical problem-solving approach also repositions staff as co-constructors of institutional solutions rather than passive recipients of directives. This relational dynamic strengthens organizational commitment by affirming staff agency and dignity within institutional governance.



Figure 1. Process Flow of the Sub-Theme and Interpretation

The process flow illustrates that participatory leadership initiates relational trust and psychological ownership among staff. These relational conditions strengthen affective organizational commitment, which, in turn, manifests as disciplined work behavior and voluntary engagement beyond formal job descriptions. The researcher interprets this flow as evidence that leadership influence operates through socio-psychological mechanisms rather than hierarchical enforcement. Trust and ownership function as mediators, translating inclusive leadership practices into sustained professional discipline and collaborative engagement.

Observational data revealed that staff meetings were conducted in a dialogical format, with the principal allocating time for open discussion and collective reflection on institutional challenges. During these meetings, staff members openly expressed concerns regarding workload distribution and procedural inefficiencies, which were addressed collaboratively. The principal's non-defensive responses and willingness to revise certain procedures based on staff input were consistently observed. The researcher interprets these practices as institutionalizing participation within organizational routines, thereby normalizing collaborative governance. This participatory climate reduced hierarchical distance and fostered mutual trust, which was reflected in improved punctuality, task coordination, and peer accountability among staff members in daily work practices.

Overall, the findings indicate that participatory and relational leadership practices strengthened organizational commitment and work discipline among educational staff by cultivating trust, psychological ownership, and affective attachment to the institution. Staff members were more willing to comply with institutional regulations and to engage in collaborative work because leadership processes were perceived as inclusive, transparent, and respectful. Work

discipline emerged not as coerced compliance but as a voluntary expression of commitment to collectively defined institutional goals.

Table 2. Ideal Influence of Participatory and Relational Leadership on Organizational Commitment and Work Discipline

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal	"We discuss major decisions together so everyone feels responsible for the outcomes."	Participatory decision-making; shared ownership
Vice Principal	"Staff are more disciplined when they feel their voices matter."	Psychological ownership; work discipline
Senior Administrative Officer	"Being involved makes us more committed to implementing policies."	Affective commitment; policy compliance
Support Staff	"When the principal listens, we try harder to complete our tasks on time."	Relational trust; punctuality

The table demonstrates that participatory leadership functions as a catalyst for psychological ownership, which in turn reinforces organizational commitment and work discipline. Informants consistently link involvement in decision-making with increased responsibility for outcomes, indicating that inclusion transforms compliance into commitment. Relational trust emerges as a mediating indicator that strengthens punctuality and task completion. This suggests that disciplined professional behavior is socially produced through inclusive governance practices rather than imposed through hierarchical control alone.

Across informant roles, a convergent pattern is evident: staff members who experience recognition and inclusion exhibit stronger affective attachment to the institution and greater willingness to adhere to organizational rules. Thematic integration of these indicators supports the interpretation that participatory and relational leadership constructs a collaborative moral economy within the madrasah, where professional discipline is sustained by mutual respect and shared responsibility.

The data reveal a coherent pattern in which participatory and relational leadership operates through three interlinked mechanisms: (1) inclusive decision-making, which generates psychological ownership; (2) relational trust, which legitimizes leadership authority; and (3) affective commitment, which translates into disciplined and voluntary professional engagement. This pattern indicates that organizational commitment and work discipline are socially cultivated outcomes emerging from relational leadership processes, rather than solely products of formal control structures.

Institutionalization of Ethical Norms through Organizational Routines and Informal Socialization

In this study, the institutionalization of ethical norms is operationally defined as the embedding of professional ethical standards into formal organizational routines (e.g., staff meetings, performance monitoring systems, administrative procedures) and informal socialization processes (e.g., peer mentoring, collegial reminders, and everyday ethical discourse). At the field level, this sub-finding was identified through the routinization of ethical expectations within institutional procedures and the normalization of ethical behavior through peer-based interactions. Professional work ethic was operationalized as sustained disciplined conduct, integrity in task performance, and collective responsibility that persisted beyond direct leadership supervision. This sub-finding captures how ethical leadership becomes structurally embedded in organizational systems and culturally reproduced through everyday social interactions among educational staff.

Table 3. Empirical Evidence Table (Interview-Based Indicators)

Interview Excerpt	Indicator	Informant
“Ethical reminders are always part of our weekly coordination meetings.”	Routinization of ethical norms	Vice Principal
“Senior staff usually remind us if someone forgets procedures.”	Peer regulation; collegial accountability	Junior Administrative Staff
“We are used to reflecting on our responsibilities before starting major tasks.”	Ethical reflection embedded in routines	Subject Coordinator
“New staff learn the work culture from their peers, not only from formal rules.”	Informal socialization of professional norms	Senior Teacher

The table indicates that ethical norms are no longer treated as abstract leadership directives but have been routinized into everyday organizational procedures. The repeated inclusion of ethical reminders in formal meetings reflects a process of institutional embedding, whereby moral expectations become part of the organizational infrastructure rather than episodic moral appeals. The researcher interprets this as evidence of normative stabilization: ethical standards are reproduced through formal organizational scripts that structure daily work practices. This routinization reduces dependency on the personal presence of the principal and transforms ethical leadership into an organizational property, thereby enhancing the sustainability of professional work ethic.

Beyond formal routines, the table highlights the role of informal socialization mechanisms in sustaining ethical conduct. Peer-based reminders and mentoring indicate that professional norms are culturally transmitted

through everyday interactions. The researcher interprets this as a form of distributed ethical governance, where responsibility for maintaining standards is collectively shared among staff members. Informal socialization functions as a subtle yet powerful regulatory mechanism, normalizing disciplined behavior through social expectations rather than coercive control. This peer-based ethical regulation reinforces professional identity and contributes to the internalization of work ethic as a shared cultural norm.

Observational data revealed that ethical discourse was consistently integrated into routine organizational activities. For instance, staff meetings began with brief ethical reflections on professionalism and accountability, and performance evaluations included behavioral indicators related to integrity and discipline. Informal observations in staff offices and administrative units showed that peers frequently offered reminders regarding procedural compliance and punctuality in a collegial manner. The researcher interprets these practices as evidence that ethical norms have been normalized within both formal and informal institutional spaces. This normalization indicates that professional work ethic is maintained through a dense web of organizational routines and peer-mediated social controls, reducing reliance on direct supervision by leadership.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that professional work ethic in the madrasah is sustained through the institutionalization of ethical norms within organizational routines and informal socialization processes. Ethical leadership has been translated into structural procedures and cultural practices that continuously reproduce disciplined and responsible professional behavior, even in the absence of direct leadership intervention.

Table 4. Ideal Influence of Institutionalized Ethical Norms on Professional Work Ethic

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal	“Ethical standards must be part of daily routines, not only formal speeches.”	Ethical routinization
Vice Principal	“We include ethical reflection in every coordination meeting.”	Institutional embedding of ethics
Senior Teacher	“New staff learn professionalism from daily interaction with colleagues.”	Informal socialization of norms
Administrative Officer	“Colleagues remind each other to follow procedures and be punctual.”	Peer regulation; collective discipline

The table illustrates that the institutionalization of ethical norms operates through both formal and informal mechanisms. Ethical routinization embeds moral expectations into organizational procedures, while informal socialization ensures the intergenerational transmission of professional norms among staff members. This dual mechanism enables ethical leadership to outlast individual

leadership tenures, as the professional work ethic becomes anchored in institutional memory and collective practice.

The convergence of formal routinization and informal peer regulation suggests that the professional work ethic is sustained through a hybrid governance model that combines structural control with cultural reproduction. This hybrid model strengthens the durability of ethical norms by distributing leadership influence across organizational systems and social networks. Consequently, professional discipline is not merely enforced but culturally internalized as a shared institutional value.

The data reveal a consistent pattern in which ethical norms are reproduced through the interaction of organizational routines and informal socialization processes. Formal procedures institutionalize ethical expectations, while peer-based interactions normalize and reinforce these standards in everyday practice. This patterned interaction produces a self-reinforcing ethical climate in which the professional work ethic is sustained through collective regulation rather than dependence on individual leadership charisma alone.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the centrality of values-based leadership in shaping professional work ethic within Islamic educational institutions, aligning with scholarship that positions moral exemplarity and ethical modeling as primary mechanisms through which leaders influence followers' conduct and professional identity (Astuti, 2024). Consistent with research on ethical leadership in educational settings, the principal's embodiment of integrity, punctuality, and accountability functioned as a symbolic anchor that structured normative alignment between institutional ideals and daily practices (Prasetya & Zaakiyyah, 2024). However, this study extends prior work by demonstrating that in madrasah contexts, ethical leadership is not merely instrumental for compliance but is culturally grounded in Islamic moral frameworks, thereby strengthening the internalization of professional norms. This nuance complements studies that emphasize the contextual embeddedness of leadership effectiveness in faith-based institutions (Anwar et al., 2024), suggesting that values-based leadership operates most powerfully when it resonates with shared religious-ethical repertoires.

The evidence that participatory and relational leadership strengthened organizational commitment and work discipline corroborates extensive leadership literature highlighting the motivational effects of inclusion, trust, and dialogical governance on employee commitment and discretionary effort (Shahriari et al., 2023). The reduction of hierarchical distance and the cultivation of psychological ownership observed in this study echo findings that

participatory leadership fosters affective commitment and mitigates resistance to organizational change (Maisuroh et al., 2024). Yet, this study contributes a context-specific insight by showing that participatory practices in madrasahs operate synergistically with religious-ethical norms, producing a hybrid leadership configuration that integrates relational governance with moral authority. This challenges technocratic models of school leadership that prioritize managerial efficiency over relational legitimacy (Arif et al., 2025), indicating that professional work ethic is sustained not only through formal structures but through socially legitimized leadership practices.

The institutionalization of ethical norms through organizational routines and informal socialization aligns with organizational culture and institutional theory, which posit that routinization and socialization processes stabilize norms and render leadership influence durable beyond individual actors (Asari, 2024). The findings resonate with research demonstrating that ethical climates are sustained when moral expectations are embedded in organizational systems and peer-mediated practices (Sen et al., 2023). Moreover, the reproduction of professional norms through informal peer regulation parallels evidence that communities of practice and collegial networks function as powerful vehicles of professional socialization in educational organizations (Rofiq, 2025). The present study extends this literature by empirically demonstrating how ethical leadership becomes distributed through culture in madrasah settings, thereby reducing dependence on charismatic authority and enhancing the sustainability of the professional work ethic.

Theoretically, this study contributes to leadership and organizational ethics scholarship by integrating values-based, participatory-relational, and institutional ethics into a coherent explanatory framework for the formation of a professional work ethic in faith-based schools. The findings support the argument that leadership influence is multi-level, operating simultaneously through moral exemplarity (*micro*), participatory governance (*meso*), and cultural-institutional embedding (*macro*) (Al Doghan & Sundram, 2024). In practice, the study suggests that leadership development programs for madrasah principals should move beyond managerial competencies to emphasize ethical embodiment, participatory governance skills, and the design of organizational routines that institutionalize professional norms. Policymakers and educational administrators should thus prioritize leadership training that integrates ethical leadership with participatory school governance models, ensuring that professional discipline is cultivated through legitimacy and shared ownership rather than coercive control.

Finally, the convergence of these findings underscores that sustainable professional work ethic in madrasahs emerges from the alignment of ethical leadership, relational participation, and institutionalized cultural practices. While prior studies have often examined these dimensions in isolation (Gökçek,

2023), this research demonstrates their interdependence in producing durable organizational commitment and disciplined professional conduct. The practical implication is that reform initiatives focused solely on performance monitoring or regulatory enforcement are likely to be insufficient without parallel investments in ethical leadership and participatory culture-building. Future research may build on this integrative model by examining how these leadership mechanisms interact longitudinally and across diverse Islamic educational contexts, thereby refining theory on the cultural sustainability of professional ethics in faith-based schooling.

CONCLUSION

The most important insight of this study is that professional work ethic in madrasahs is most effectively cultivated through the convergence of values-based leadership, participatory–relational practices, and the institutionalization of ethical norms within organizational routines and peer-based socialization. The findings demonstrate that ethical exemplarity by principals functions as a moral reference point that shapes staff self-regulation, while participatory governance and relational trust transform compliance into affective organizational commitment. Moreover, the routinization of ethical values and informal professional socialization ensures the sustainability of professional conduct beyond individual leadership presence. The key lesson from this research is that leadership effectiveness in faith-based educational institutions is not primarily derived from formal authority or managerial control, but from the leader’s capacity to embody shared moral values, foster inclusive professional relationships, and embed ethical standards into everyday organizational life.

The scholarly contribution of this study lies in its integrative framework that bridges values-based leadership, participatory–relational leadership, and institutionalized ethics within the socio-religious context of Islamic education, thereby extending dominant leadership theories into culturally grounded educational environments. Methodologically, the qualitative case study approach offers nuanced empirical insights into leadership enactment among diverse categories of educational staff, a group often underexamined in leadership research. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its single-case design, which constrains broader generalization, and by its focus on one institutional setting within a specific regional and cultural context. Future research is encouraged to adopt comparative and longitudinal designs across multiple madrasahs or faith-based schools to examine the durability of ethical leadership practices over time, as well as to explore how organizational culture mediates leadership influence in diverse educational and socio-cultural environments.

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