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DIVERGENT PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE: A CONTINGENT MODEL OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT FOR HALAL TOURISM IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

Tetty Yuliaty^{1*}, Yeni Absah², Nor Asmalina Mohd Anuar³

¹Universitas Sumatera Utara, Email: tettyjuliaty@usu.ac.id, Associate Professor (Senior academic lecturer)
Orcid Id: 0000 0001 9296 4971

²University of North Sumatra, Email: yeni.absah@usu.ac.id, Professor, Orcid Id: 0000 0003 3887 9324

³Universiti Teknologi Mara Email: noras288@uitm.edu.my, Associate Professor (Senior academic lecturer),
Orcid Id: 0000 0002 8178 012X

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Corresponding Author: Tetty Yuliaty
(tettyjuliaty@usu.ac.id)

ABSTRACT

The global growth of halal tourism necessitates human resources (HR) that embody ethical values, professional skill, and technological agility. While Indonesia and Malaysia are market leaders, their strategies for developing such resilient and future-oriented HR remain underexplored in a comparative light. This study investigates the contingent integration of three critical HR development pillars—spiritual leadership, technical competence, and digital adaptability—within the distinct institutional contexts of Indonesia and Malaysia. Employing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, data were collected via focus group discussions with 25 industry stakeholders, followed by a survey of 268 practitioners in both countries. Quantitative results reveal a significant divergence: Indonesian respondents place stronger emphasis on spiritual leadership ($p < .01$), whereas Malaysian counterparts prioritize technical competence and digital adaptability ($p < .001$). Qualitative findings contextualize this divide, revealing Indonesia's reliance on spiritual leadership as an informal governance mechanism, contrasted with Malaysia's formal, regulation-driven competency framework. Despite different entry points, digital adaptability emerges as a convergent strategic priority for future readiness. The study contributes a novel contingent integration model to tourism HR literature, demonstrating that the pathway to resilience is not universal but shaped by institutional context. For practitioners, it offers actionable guidance: Indonesia must formalize and scale its spiritual capital through certification, while Malaysia should focus on innovating spiritual-digital tourist experiences to sustain its competitive edge.

KEYWORDS: Halal Tourism; Human Resource Development; Spiritual Leadership; Digital Adaptability; Institutional Theory; Mixed-Methods; Indonesia-Malaysia Comparison.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'halal' has evolved from a dietary code to a comprehensive lifestyle paradigm, fueling the rapid expansion of the global halal economy. Tourism, as a core sector within this ecosystem, faces a unique imperative: to deliver services that are not only compliant with Islamic principles but also competitive within the modern, experience-driven, and digitally-transformed global tourism marketplace. Indonesia and Malaysia, as Muslim-majority nations consistently ranked top in the Global Muslim Travel Index, are at the forefront of this development. However, their leadership is increasingly challenged not by a lack of demand, but by a critical supply-side constraint: the availability of human resources (HR) who can authentically bridge the spiritual ethos of 'halal' with the professional and technological standards of 21st-century tourism.

Existing research on halal tourism has predominantly focused on tourist motivation, satisfaction, or the certification of products and facilities. While vital, this stream of work often treats HR as a passive operational element rather than the active carrier and translator of core value. Consequently, a significant gap exists in understanding how to systematically develop HR that is both resilient capable of upholding ethical integrity amidst commercial pressures and future oriented proactively adaptable to digital disruption and shifting generational expectations and insuring its continued (Asante,et,al, 2025). Addressing this gap requires moving beyond siloed approaches to spiritual or technical training, towards an integrated framework. This study posits that such resilience and future-orientation are cultivated through the synergistic development of spiritual leadership, technical competence, and digital adaptability. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate and compare how Indonesia and Malaysia, with their distinct socio-institutional landscapes, conceptualize and implement this triad in their halal tourism HR development strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The sustainable development of halal tourism presents a unique managerial paradox: delivering services that are authentically rooted in immutable spiritual principles within a rapidly evolving, technology-driven, and competitive global marketplace. Bridging this paradox requires shifting attention beyond physical infrastructure and

certification mechanisms toward human resources as strategic actors who operationalize ethical and service values within tourism organizations (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Abror et al., 2020). This review synthesizes literature across three interrelated domains to build an integrated framework for developing resilient and future-oriented HR in halal tourism.

2.1. *Spiritual Leadership: The Bedrock of Ethical Resilience*

Spiritual leadership, defined as a leadership approach that fosters a sense of transcendent meaning, purpose, and membership within an organization (Fry, 2003), is particularly salient in value-centric industries like halal tourism. Fry's (2003) model posits that effective spiritual leadership comprises vision (defining a transcendent journey), hope/faith (belief in the vision), and altruistic love (genuine care for stakeholders). Spiritual leadership enhances meaningful work perception and organizational commitment, which subsequently strengthens adaptive capability and service sustainability in dynamic environments (Bekele et.,al, 2024; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2021). positioning leaders as central figures in organizational learning (OL) processes (Milani et,al, 2026). spiritual leadership in meeting the comprehensive needs of academics and emphasises the relevance of professional ethics in improving job performance (Sharmin et,al, 2025) to maintain performance quality during crisis conditions (Baum,2015). In an Islamic organizational context, leadership extends beyond managerial supervision to a developmental role that nurtures employees' ethical awareness, spiritual values, and moral responsibility alongside performance outcomes (Fry, 2003; Karakas, 2010). The importance of developing leadership theories attuned to and adaptable to distinct cultural realities (Okpanum,et.al, 2026). This form of leadership cultivates *intrinsic motivation* and *ethical resilience*—the capacity to uphold halal principles consistently, even under commercial pressure. It establishes an organizational culture where compliance is driven by internal conviction rather than external monitoring, forming the non-negotiable ethical core of service delivery. Thus, we posit:

Proposition 1 (P1): Spiritual leadership is the foundational pillar that instills ethical resilience and intrinsic motivation, ensuring the authentic internalization of halal principles within the tourism workforce.

2.2. Technical Competence: The Operational Bridge to Trust and Quality

Nevertheless, ethical commitment must be supported by professional expertise to ensure effective service implementation. Technical competence encompasses industry-specific knowledge and practical skills required to operationalize halal compliance and sustain service excellence within tourism organizations (Buhalis & Law, 2008). These competencies include expertise in halal supply chain practices, sanitation standards, Sharia-compliant service delivery, and intercultural communication skills. Within the resource-based view framework, human capital competence functions as a strategic asset that strengthens service quality perceptions and builds customer trust in tourism services (Barney, 1991; Abror et al., 2020). It acts as the critical *operational bridge* that translates spiritual values into consistent, measurable, and certifiable actions. Without it, there exists a "values-action gap" where good intentions fail to materialize into quality experiences, eroding tourist confidence (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2021; Zeithaml et al., 2018).

Proposition 2 (P2): Technical competence serves as the essential mediating pillar that translates the ethical foundation provided by spiritual leadership into reliable, high-quality, and trustworthy halal tourism services.

2.3. Digital Adaptability: The Engine for Future Relevance and Innovation

In the era of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0, competitiveness is increasingly tied to digital integration. Digital adaptability is the capacity of individuals and organizations to learn, adopt, and leverage new technologies to enhance performance and innovation (Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2025; Morrison & Buhalis, 2024; Vial, 2019). For halal tourism, this spans digital marketing, smart destination management, contactless service platforms, and using data to personalize Muslim-friendly experiences. Digital adaptability acts as a *future-proofing engine*. It amplifies the reach and efficiency of the other two pillars for instance, by using digital platforms to transparently communicate halal credentials (enhancing trust built on competence) or to facilitate spiritual tourism experiences (e.g., prayer time apps, virtual tours of Islamic heritage). The transformation of the tourism industry encourages organizations to develop workforce capabilities that are adaptive to digital innovation and smart tourism systems. (Gretzel et al., 2022; Buhalis et al., 2015; Law et al., 2022).

Proposition 3 (P3): Digital adaptability is the forward-oriented pillar that enhances, scales, and innovates the delivery of spiritually-grounded and technically-proficient services, ensuring long-term market relevance.

2.4. A Contingent Integration Model: The Role of National Context

While P1-P3 argue for the universal necessity of all three pillars, we propose that their relative emphasis and mode of implementation are contingent on national institutional contexts. Institutional theory suggests that organizational practices are shaped by regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars (Scott, 2008). A country with a strong regulative pillar (e.g., comprehensive federal halal laws, mandatory certification) may institutionally prioritize technical competence as the primary, formalized entry point for HR development. Conversely, in a context where formal regulation is less centralized but the normative-cultural pillar is strong (e.g., deep-rooted Islamic social norms), spiritual leadership may emerge organically as the dominant, informal mechanism for ensuring compliance and guiding HR behavior (Fry et al., 2011; Scott, 2008). This leads to our core conceptual model and final proposition:

Proposition 4 (P4): National institutional configurations moderate the strategic prioritization of spiritual leadership, technical competence, and digital adaptability in HR development for halal tourism, leading to divergent yet potentially complementary national pathways.

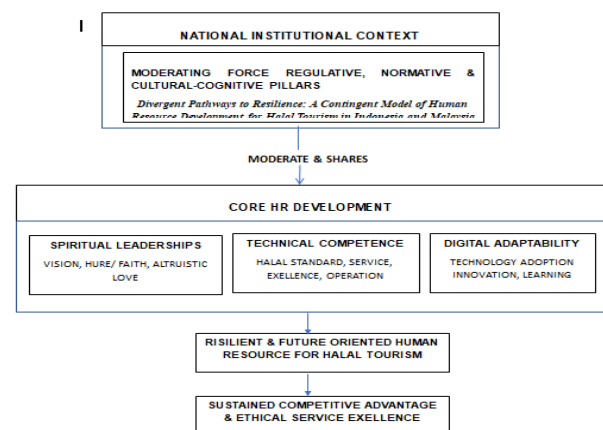


Figure 1. A Contingent Integration Model for Halal Tourism HR Development

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

This two-phase approach began with an initial qualitative phase (Focus Group Discussions) to explore the landscape and key issues of HR development in halal tourism. Insights from this phase were then used to inform and refine the instruments for the subsequent quantitative phase (survey). The quantitative data provided generalizable patterns, which were then further explained and contextualized by returning to the qualitative insights. This design allowed for a comprehensive understanding that neither method could achieve alone.

3.2. Phase 1: Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

3.2.1. Participants and Procedure: We conducted four semi-structured Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)—two in Indonesia (Medan and Jakarta) and two in Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur and Penang)—between May and July 2025. Participants were purposively sampled to represent key stakeholders in the halal tourism ecosystem (see Table 1). Each FGD lasted 90-120 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and facilitated by a moderator using a protocol centered on the three research pillars.

3.2.2. Analysis: All transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. To ensure trustworthiness, we employed analyst triangulation (two researchers coded independently) and member checking by sharing summaries with selected participants.

Table 1. FGD Participant Profile

STAKEHOLDER CATEGORY	INDONESIA (N=13)	MALAYSIA (N=12)
Government Tourism Agency	3	2
Halal Certification Body	1	2
Hotel Restaurant Management	3	3
Travel Agency	3	3
Academia	3	2

3.3. Phase 2: Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

3.3.1. Survey Development and Measures: The survey was developed based on themes from the FGDs and adapted from established scales. Spiritual Leadership

4.2. Comparative Analysis of the Three HR Development Pillars

Table 2. Comparison of Mean Scores on Key Constructs: Indonesia vs. Malaysia

Construct (Cronbach's α)	Indonesia Mean (SD)	Malaysia Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Spiritual Leadership (0.92)	4.32 (0.54)	4.05 (0.61)	+0.27	3.81	< 0.001
Technical Competence (0.88)	3.98 (0.67)	4.41 (0.48)	-0.43	-6.12	< 0.001
Digital Adaptability (0.90)	3.85 (0.72)	4.28 (0.55)	-0.43	-5.55	< 0.001

Note: SD = Standard Deviation. All items measured on a 5-point scale. Bold indicates the significantly higher mean for each construct.

was measured using a 10-item scale adapted from Fry (2003) (e.g., "My leader inspires a sense of higher purpose in our work"). Technical Competence used a 12-item scale developed from halal tourism standards literature (e.g., "I am proficient in implementing halal SOPs for food handling"). Digital Adaptability was measured with an 8-item scale based on Zuñiga-Collazos *et al.* (2025) (e.g., "I am confident in learning to use new digital tools for tourism services"). All items used a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).

3.3.2. Data Collection and Sample: An online questionnaire was distributed through tourism industry associations and professional networks in both countries from August to October 2025. We received 315 responses. After screening for completeness and attention checks, **268 valid responses were retained** (Indonesia: n=161; Malaysia: n=107), yielding a usable response rate of 85.1%.

3.3.3. Quantitative Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using SPSS 28.0. We conducted:

- 1. Reliability Analysis:** Assessed internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha for each construct.
- 2. Descriptive Statistics:** Calculated means and standard deviations for all items.
- 3. Inferential Statistics:** Independent samples t-tests were performed to compare the mean scores of Indonesian and Malaysian respondents on each of the three key constructs, testing for statistically significant differences between the two national contexts.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the lead author's institution. All participants provided informed consent, were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and were free to withdraw at any time.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Preliminary Tests and Descriptive Statistics

Reliability analysis confirmed that all multi-item constructs exhibited good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.85$). The composite scores for each construct were calculated for subsequent analysis.

As shown in Table 2, Independent samples t-tests revealed statistically significant differences between Indonesian and Malaysian respondents across all three constructs. Indonesian practitioners reported a significantly higher perception of the importance and practice of Spiritual Leadership (M_ID=4.32, M_MY=4.05, $p<.001$). Conversely, Malaysian respondents scored significantly higher on both Technical Competence (M_MY=4.41, M_ID=3.98, $p<.001$) and Digital Adaptability (M_MY=4.28, M_ID=3.85, $p<.001$).

4.3. Explaining the Divergence: Insights from Qualitative Data

The quantitative divergence is vividly explained by the themes emerging from the FGDs.

4.3.1. Theme 1 (Indonesia): Spiritual Leadership as Informal Governance.

In the absence of uniformly enforced national halal tourism standards, FGD participants highlighted that ethical service delivery heavily relies on personal and religious integrity. A hotel manager from Medan stated: "*The government's rules are broad... What ensures our cooks don't use non-halal ingredients is not just a certificate, but their own fear of God (taqwa) and the owner's constant reminders.*" Leadership is seen as a moral exemplar, creating an organizational culture where compliance is internally driven.

4.3.2. Theme 2 (Malaysia): Technical-Digital Proficiency within a Formal Ecosystem.

Malaysian participants operated within a well-defined regulatory framework. A tourism officer from Kuala Lumpur explained: "*We have JAKIM standards, training modules from MOTAC... Our challenge isn't knowing what to do, but excelling at it and integrating it with new booking apps or Muslim-friendly guide platforms.*" Here, competence is systematized and certified, providing a baseline from which digital innovation is pursued as a competitive necessity.

4.3.3. Convergent Priority: The Non-Negotiable Nature of Digital Adaptability.

Despite different starting points, participants from both countries unanimously emphasized digital skills as critical for future survival. An Indonesian travel agent noted: "*Our pilgrims (jemaah umrah) now book everything online and want live updates via WhatsApp. If we're slow with technology, we're out of business,*" echoing the sentiment of a Malaysian hotelier who prioritized investment in smart room features for Muslim

families.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Discussion

This study set out to investigate how the integrated development of spiritual leadership, technical competence, and digital adaptability fosters resilient and future-oriented human resources (HR) in halal tourism, and how this integration is shaped by different national contexts. Our findings from Indonesia and Malaysia not only validate the proposed triad but, more importantly, reveal a contingent implementation model that answers the "how" and "why" behind each country's strategic priorities.

5.1.1. Reconciling the Paradox: Explaining the National Pathways

The significant quantitative divergence (Table 2), richly contextualized by the qualitative themes, strongly supports our Proposition 4. Indonesia's path, characterized by a spiritual leadership-first approach, can be interpreted through the lens of institutional theory (Scott, 2008). In a context where top-down, formal regulations (the *regulative pillar*) for halal tourism are still evolving, the strong *normative-cultural pillar* of Islamic society fills the governance gap. Spiritual leadership emerges as a powerful, informal institution that motivates ethical conduct and ensures compliance from within (Fry, 2003). Conversely, Malaysia's technical-digital proficiency pathway reflects a mature institutional ecosystem. A strong regulative pillar (e.g., JAKIM standards, structured training by MOTAC) has established technical competence as the baseline. This allows the industry to focus on layering digital innovation and service excellence on top of a solid compliance foundation. Thus, the core managerial paradox of halal tourism is reconciled through different institutional logics: one leveraging cultural-spiritual capital and the other leveraging regulatory-technical capital.

5.1.2. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three key contributions to the literature. First, it moves beyond the prevalent siloed approach in halal tourism research (which studies certification, motivation, or marketing separately) by proposing and empirically validating an integrated HR triad. We demonstrate that spiritual leadership, technical competence, and digital adaptability are not substitutes but synergistic complements. Second, we advance theory by introducing

contingency into this model. We extend Fry's spiritual leadership theory and competency-based frameworks by showing that their operational primacy is not absolute but is moderated by the institutional environment. This provides a theoretical explanation for observed national differences, framing them as contextually rational strategies rather than developmental deficiencies.

Third, we bridge the ethics-technology divide in future skills literature. By positioning digital adaptability as the engine that future-proofs ethically-grounded services, we offer a nuanced perspective for developing "future-oriented" HR in value-sensitive industries, countering the often purely technocratic discourse (Wang et al., 2024; Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2025).

5.1.3. Practical and Policy Implications

The contingent model offers actionable, context-specific guidance:

- **For Indonesian Stakeholders:** The priority is to formalize and scale its spiritual capital. Policymakers and industry bodies should develop national competency standards and certification schemes that *codify* the ethical principles currently transmitted informally. Leadership training programs should equip managers to be both *murabbi* (spiritual mentors) and professional coaches, bridging the values-action gap identified in technical competence scores.
- **For Malaysian Stakeholders:** The challenge is to innovate and deepen its technical-regulatory advantage. The focus should shift from basic compliance to innovating premium "spiritual-digital" tourist experiences (e.g., AR-enhanced Islamic heritage tours, AI-driven halal travel concierges). Continuous upskilling in digital tools and data analytics is crucial to maintain its competitive edge.
- **For Cross-Border Collaboration:** Our findings reveal complementary strengths. A structured

Indonesia-Malaysia Halal Tourism Talent Exchange and Innovation Alliance could be transformative. Indonesia can learn from Malaysia's technical and regulatory frameworks, while Malaysia can incorporate Indonesia's nuanced approach to spiritual hospitality into its service design, creating a powerful regional value proposition.

5.1.4. Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations that point to future research avenues. First, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at one point in time; longitudinal studies are needed to trace the evolution of these HR capabilities. Second, the sample, while representative, is not exhaustive; future research could include more granular regional comparisons within each country. Third, the model should be tested in other Muslim-majority and minority contexts (e.g., the UAE, Turkey, or Japan) to assess its generalizability and uncover new contingent variables.

5.2. Conclusion

In conclusion, building resilient and future-oriented HR for halal tourism is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. This research demonstrates that while the integrated development of spiritual leadership, technical competence, and digital adaptability is universally critical, the pathway is nationally contingent. Indonesia and Malaysia exemplify two distinct but coherent models shaped by their unique institutional landscapes. For the global halal tourism industry to thrive sustainably, it must embrace this nuanced understanding, developing strategies that leverage local institutional strengths while systematically addressing gaps through the synergistic triad proposed here. The future of halal tourism lies not just in building halal-friendly facilities, but in cultivating halal-inspired human capital that is both ethically steadfast and dynamically adaptive.

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