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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Factors Influencing the Merit System through Spiritual Motivation in the Riau Islands Province

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the determinants of the merit system through the mediating role of talent management at the Regional Secretariat of the Riau Islands Province. Specifically, it examines the effects of spiritual motivation, innovative behavior, competence, and work culture on the merit system, both directly and indirectly through talent management. The research employs Structural Equation Modeling using AMOS (SEM-AMOS) to analyze data collected from 160 respondents selected based on the Slovin formula. The findings indicate that spiritual motivation, innovative behavior, and work culture exert a significant positive effect on the merit system, whereas competence demonstrates a positive but statistically insignificant direct effect. All four independent variables significantly influence talent management, which subsequently mediates their relationships with the merit system. The mediation analysis confirms that talent management plays a significant intermediary role, as spiritual motivation, innovative behavior, competence, and work culture each positively and significantly affect the merit system through this mechanism. Additionally, the simultaneous effect of these variables on the merit system via talent management is statistically significant. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) values demonstrates strong explanatory power, with 0.790 for talent management and 0.886 for the merit system. These results underscore the strategic importance of spiritual motivation, innovative behavior, and work culture in strengthening the merit-based governance of civil servants, particularly when integrated through structured talent management practices. Practically, the study highlights the necessity of embedding cultural and spiritual values, promoting innovation, and enhancing professional competence within public sector human resource management frameworks.

**Keywords:** Talent Management, Innovative Behavior, Competence, Work Culture, Spiritual Motivation, Merit System

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The vision of the Riau Islands Province is “The Realization of the Riau Islands as the Mother of the Malay Land that is Prosperous, Noble, Environmentally Friendly, and Superior in the Maritime Sector.” This vision is operationalized through its Ninth Mission, namely “Developing Clean and Accountable Governance, Professional and Disciplined Bureaucratic Apparatus with a High Work Ethic, and the Provision of Quality Public Services.” In alignment with this mandate, Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning the State Civil Apparatus



requires all government institutions to implement a Merit System to ensure the development of a professional and merit-based civil service (Ridwan et al., 2024).

The merit system is intended to guarantee that positions within the government bureaucracy are filled by competent and qualified individuals based on meritocratic principles (Oliveira et al., 2024; Yudiatmaja & Samnuzsari, 2014). It aims to cultivate civil servants who demonstrate professionalism, integrity, adaptability, and collaboration, while upholding core values and professional ethics. Furthermore, the system seeks to ensure that the bureaucracy operates free from political intervention, corruption, collusion, and nepotism, and remains resilient against radical influences in the execution of public services, governance, and development functions.



**Figure 1:** Global Talent Competitiveness Index (2023) in ASEAN

Based on the background outlined above, several critical issues can be identified within the Regional Secretariat. First, there is a lack of spiritual motivation among civil servants (ASN), which limits their readiness to develop themselves as future leaders capable of supporting world-class government institutions. Second, innovative behavior remains insufficient, particularly in the preparation of policy materials and decision-making processes related to their official responsibilities. Third, existing competency development initiatives are not fully aligned with identified competency gaps, as training programs tend to be routine rather than needs-based and strategically structured. Fourth, the prevailing work culture continues to reflect a rigid and bureaucratic administrative orientation, characterized by limited flexibility and the persistence of political intervention. Finally, the implementation of talent management as a strategic human resource management approach within the merit system framework has not yet been optimized, thereby constraining its effectiveness in supporting professional and performance-based governance (INSEAD, 2023).

The research seeks to examine a series of direct and indirect relationships among talent management, innovative behavior, competence, work culture, spiritual motivation, and the merit system at the Regional Secretariat of the Riau Islands Province. Specifically, this study investigates whether talent management, innovative behavior, competence, work culture, and spiritual motivation each exert a direct effect on the merit system. In addition, it analyzes whether talent management, innovative behavior, competence, and work culture have direct effects on spiritual motivation. Furthermore, the study evaluates the indirect effects of talent management, innovative behavior, competence, and work culture on the merit system

through spiritual motivation as a mediating variable. By examining these structural relationships simultaneously, the research aims to provide a comprehensive empirical model explaining how organizational and individual factors contribute to strengthening the merit system within public sector governance (Brewer et al., 2022; Ferede et al., 2025).

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, addressing the limited empirical studies that simultaneously examine spiritual motivation, innovative behavior, competence, work culture, and the merit system within the framework of talent management (Houston & Freeman, 2025; Yudiantmaja et al., 2018, 2023). Unlike previous studies that analyze these variables separately, this study develops a comprehensive structural model that positions spiritual motivation and talent management as strategic mechanisms in optimizing merit system implementation (Usmanova et al., 2023; Yudiantmaja et al., 2024; Zhang & Yang, 2021). The proposed model offers a measurement framework that can be utilized to enhance merit-based governance practices and serves as a strategic reference for supporting the Vision and Mission of Regional Heads as well as the broader national agenda toward Golden Indonesia 2045.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical Underpinning

Theories related to spiritual motivation, innovative behaviour, competence, work culture, talent management, and merit systems are examined to gain an understanding that can be applied to the research being conducted.

The merit system emphasises rewards based on performance, competence, and integrity, rather than personal affiliation. According to Dessler et al. (2015), the merit system enhances fairness, motivation, and employee professionalism. This system aims to ensure that positions in the government bureaucracy are occupied by employees who meet the qualification and competency requirements (Vijay & Nair, 2022). Furthermore, the implementation of the merit system in ASN management, according to KASN, aims to conduct open recruitment, selection, and promotion, implement ASN rights and obligations fairly, and regulate all matters related to rewards and punishments for ASN based on high Behavior and integrity to develop ASN performance.

Spiritual motivation is an intrinsic drive born from religious values or spiritual beliefs, influencing employee dedication and work ethics (Fry, 2003). According to Fry (2017) spiritual motivation increases the sense of meaning of work, involvement, and employee loyalty. According to Bandhu et al. (2024) motivation is a force that drives a person to do an action or not which is essentially internally and externally positive or negative, work motivation is something that creates a drive/work enthusiasm/driver of work enthusiasm, with indicators namely: 1) salary, for employees salary is an essential factor to meet the needs of themselves and their families.

Innovative behavior refers to an individual's ability to generate, introduce, and implement new ideas. Scott and Bruce (1994) stated that innovative behavior supports organizations in adapting and developing in a dynamic environment. According to Farr and Ford, innovative work behavior is a form of behavior aimed at achieving the initiation and introduction of new ideas, processes, procedures, or products that are useful for the organization (Kwon & Kim, 2020). According to Inkeles (1983), it is defined as part of the modernization process that is linked to innovative work behavior as part of the process of change in people's lives, followed by changes in attitudes, characteristics, and lifestyles of individuals in society.

Competence encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to perform tasks effectively. Spencer and Spencer (2008) emphasize competency as a predictor of individual performance within an organization. Acquiring superior and professional human resources capable of competing in the 4.0 industrial revolution era is not easy. Funds spent on human resource development often end up being wasted because they fail to produce the expected

output. Therefore, various studies on human resource competency are fascinating and sought after in research, even becoming a trend from 1993 until now.

Work culture is a system of shared values, norms, and practices that influence employee behavior. Schein (1983) argues that a positive work culture supports collaboration, productivity, and innovation. Employees or workers are expected to develop good habits so that their work results also meet expectations. This is because habits at work will impact employee or worker performance (Makumbe & Washaya, 2022). The work success of employees or workers is rooted in the values they hold and the behaviors they habitually practice (Quinn et al., 2025).

## 2.2. Conceptual Framework dan Hypothesis

A conceptual framework is a synthesis of various theories and research results that show the scope of one or more variables being studied, a comparison of the values of one or more variables in different samples or times, the relationship between two or more variables, a comparison of the Influence between variables in different samples and the form of structural relationships.

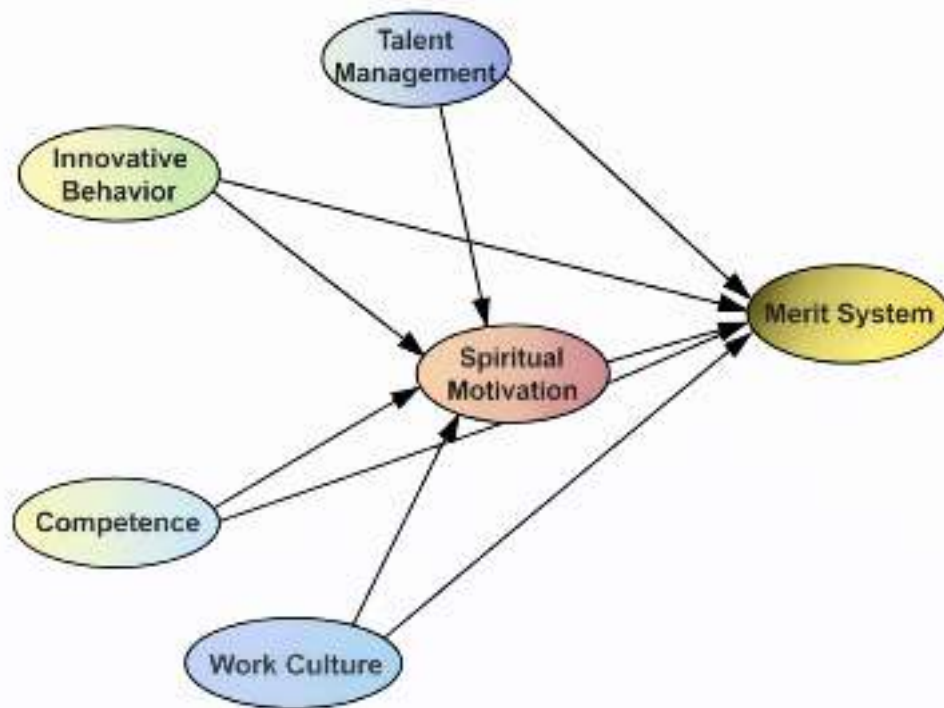


Figure 2: Conceptual Model of the Research

This study examined every domain of the entrepreneurial competencies to investigate whether each of the competencies would be directly affecting the women micro-entrepreneurs business success. The investigation is based on the following hypotheses:

- H1: Strategic competency is significantly and positively related to business success among women micro-entrepreneurs.
- H2: Commitment competency is significantly and positively related to business success among women micro-entrepreneurs.
- H3: Conceptual competency is significantly and positively related to business success among women micro-entrepreneurs.
- H4: Opportunity competency is significantly and positively related to business success among women micro-entrepreneurs

### 3. Research Method and Materials

In this study, the variables are divided into independent variables, namely the determining variables, consisting talent management, innovative behaviour, competence, and work culture. Another variable is the dependent variable, which is the variable that is determined or that is the result of the independent variable. In this study, there are two dependent variables: the intervening variable, spiritual motivation, and the dependent variable merit system.

This research uses quantitative approach, a research approach that testing several variables through hypotheses (Lim, 2025). The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling. It included measurement model and structural model assessment. Measurement model was utilized to evaluate validity and reliability of the data, while structural model was used to assessed hypothetical model (Collier, 2020).

In this study, the population was 262 civil servants at the Regional Secretariat of the Riau Islands Province. A sample is a subset of the population's size and characteristics. The sample size will be adjusted to suit the research needs. Sampling technique is a method used to determine samples. Several methods can be used, and for this research, the census method was used, namely, examining the entire population (Cash et al., 2022).

This method was used because in this study, the sample size was adjusted to the analysis model used, namely the Structural Equation Model (SEM). SEM analysis required a minimum of 100 subjects, 20-25 latent variables, and 4-5 observed variables (question items) (Lund, 2023). In this study, the number of respondents was 262, so this number was calculated using the Slovin Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Information:

n = sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error (used 5% or 0.05)

$n = 262 / (1 + (262 \times 0.05^2)) = 158.3081571$  rounded up to 160 respondents.

So the suggested sample size for a population of 262 with a margin of error of 5% is 160 people.

### 4. Results and Discussion [11pt, Garamond, Bold, Justified]

#### 4.1. Results

Based on the test criteria, including Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), Relative Chi-square ( $\chi^2/Df$ ), RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, TLI, and CFI, as well as the Goodness of Fit value from Amos processing results, the following Table can be prepared, as shown in the figure above. By paying attention to the cut-off value and goodness of fit model results, the Table above shows that the seven criteria were met, and eight criteria were used. The criteria that are met are the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), Relative Chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ ), RMSEA, GFI, TLI, AGFI, and CFI. Because seven of the eight criteria are met, the model can be expressed as a appropriate model (Shi et al., 2022).

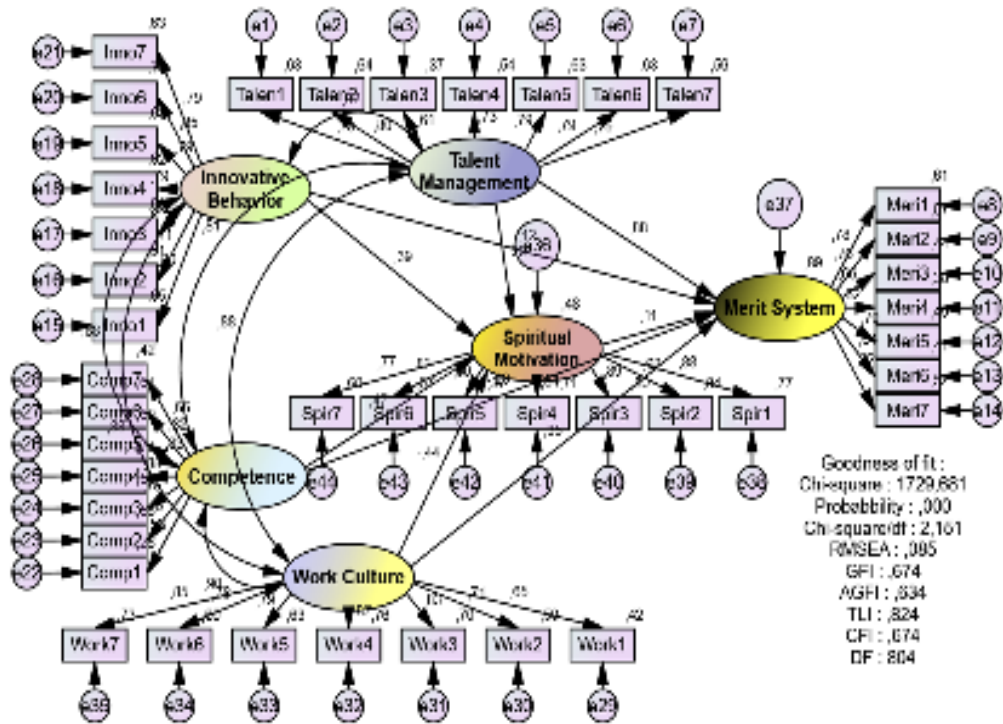


Figure 3. Full Model

Table 1: Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
SPIR	<---	TALE	.214	,127	4.120	***	par_1
SPIR	<---	INNO	.229	,085	4.550	***	par_2
SPIR	<---	COMP	.565	,092	6,174	***	par_4
SPIR	<---	WORK	.836	,198	4.218	***	par_8
MERI	<---	TALE	.812	,143	5.672	***	par_3
MERI	<---	SPIR	.200	,051	3,909	***	par_5
MERI	<---	COMP	.251	,149	1.679	.093	par_6
MERI	<---	INNO	.150	,056	2.685	.007	par_7
MERI	<---	WORK	.630	,092	6,834	***	par_9

Table 2: Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 – Default model)

			Estimate
SPIR	<---	TALE	.220
SPIR	<---	INNO	.195
SPIR	<---	COMP	.577
SPIR	<---	WORK	.732
MERI	<---	TALE	.882
MERI	<---	SPIR	.204
MERI	<---	COMP	.278
MERI	<---	INNO	.677
MERI	<---	WORK	.347

Table 3: Standardized Indirect Effects (Group number 1 - Default model)

	WORK	COMP	INNO	SPIR	TALE	MERI
SPIR	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
MERI	.646	.017	.098	.104	.000	.000

Table 4: Squared Multiple Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate
SPIR	.790
MERI	.886



#### 4.2. Discussion

The influence of spiritual motivation on the merit system has a standardized estimate (regression weight) of 0.204 with a CR (Critical ratio = identical to the calculated t-value) of 3.909 at probability = \*\*\*, a CR value of  $3.909 \geq 2.00$  and probability =  $*** \leq 0.05$  indicate that the influence of spiritual motivation on the merit system is significantly positive.. In theory, spiritual motivation influences employee work behaviour through values such as sincerity, trustworthiness, and responsibility. This supports the formation of a merit system based on competence and integrity.

The influence of innovative behavior on spiritual motivation has a standardized estimate (regression weight) of .195 with a CR (critical ratio = identical to the t-count value) of 4.550 at probability = \*\*\*. The CR value of  $4.550 \geq 2.00$  and probability =  $*** \leq 0.05$  indicates that the influence of innovative behavior on spiritual motivation is significantly positive.. In theory, innovative behavior is an individual's ability to create and implement new ideas that are useful in increasing organisational effectiveness, including in strengthening the merit system. The theory of organisational creativity states that innovation is the key to the sustainability of bureaucratic reform.

The influence of competence on the merit system has a standardized estimate (regression weight) of .278 with a CR (Critical ratio = identical to the t-count value) of 1.679 at probability = .093. The CR value of  $1.679 \leq 2.00$  and Probability = .093  $\geq 0.05$  indicates that the influence of Competence on the Merit System is positive and not significant. Arguments why competence is not significant on the merit system. It shows that competence does not automatically have an impact on the merit system if:

- Not supported by a fair and transparent promotion system.
- There is still a dominant political and organisational cultural intervention.
- Weak implementation of the merit system in the field, even though the HR apparatus is competent.

In theory, competency encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to perform a job effectively. However, if competency is not integrated into the selection, promotion, and placement systems, its impact on the merit system is weakened.

Influence work culture on merit system has a standardised estimate (regression weight) of .630 with CR (Critical ratio = identical to the t-count value) of 6.834 at Probability = \*\*\* CR value of  $6.834 \geq 2.00$  and Probability =  $*** \leq 0.05$  indicates that the influence of work culture on merit system is positive and significant. In theory, an organisational work culture that supports openness, collaboration, and accountability is an important prerequisite in the implementation of a merit system. Organisational culture theory (Schein, 2010) emphasises that collective values and norms shape structural Behaviour.

The influence of talent management on the merit system has a standardised estimate (regression weight) of .882 with a CR (Critical ratio = identical to the t-count value) of 5.672 at Probability = \*\*\*. The CR value of  $5.672 \geq 2.00$  and Probability =  $*** \leq 0.05$  indicates that the Influence of Work Culture on the Merit System is significantly positive. The repetition of these results shows the consistency of the role of work culture as a normative force that supports meritocracy in public organisations.

The influence of talent management on spiritual motivation has a standardized estimate (regression weight) of .220 with a CR (Critical ratio = identical to the t-count value) of 4,120 at probability = \*\*\* The CR value of  $4,120 \geq 2.00$  and Probability =  $*** \leq 0.05$  indicates that the influence of talent management on spiritual motivation is significantly positive. Spiritual motivation forms a spirit of achievement and long-term commitment to self-development. This encourages the success of a talent management system that seeks individuals with high integrity.

The influence of innovative behaviour on talent management has a standardised estimate (regression weight) of 0.195 with a Critical Ratio (CR) of 4,550, which is identical to the t-count value, at a probability of \*\*\*. The CR value of 4,550 is greater than 2.00. Probability = \*\*\* ≤ 0.05 indicates that the influence of innovative behaviour on talent management is positive and significant. Theoretically, spiritual motivation forms a spirit of achievement and long-term commitment to self-development. This encourages the success of a talent management system that seeks individuals with high integrity.

The influence of competence on spiritual motivation has a standardized estimate (regression weight) of .577 with a CR (Critical ratio = identical to the t-count value) of 6.174 at probability = \*\*\*. The CR value of 6.174 ≥ 2.00 and Probability = \*\*\* ≤ 0.05 indicates that the influence of Competence on Spiritual Motivation is significantly positive. Empirical Qualitative Argument: Qualitative data shows that the competency assessment system serves as a benchmark for training and promotions. Employees with superior competencies are directed to specific career paths (succession plans).

The influence of work culture on spiritual motivation has a standardized estimate (regression weight) of .732 with a Cr (critical ratio = identical to the t-count value) of 4.218 at probability = \*\*\*. The CR value of 4.218 ≥ 2.00 and Probability = \*\*\* ≤ 0.05 indicates that the influence of work culture on spiritual motivation is significantly positive. Theoretical Argument: A work culture that supports development, innovation, and teamwork encourages the implementation of talent management effectively.

The indirect effect formula is = Path Coefficient 1 × Path Coefficient 2. Indirect Effect (X → Y via M) = (X → M) × (M → Y)

**Table 5:** Standardized Indirect Effects (Group number 1 - Default model)

	WORK	COMP	INNO	SPIR	TALE	MERI
SPIR	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
MERI	.646	.017	.098	.104	.000	.000

The influence of talent management on the merit system through spiritual motivation is calculated using the indirect effect formula  $(X \rightarrow Y \text{ via } M) = (X \rightarrow M) \times (M \rightarrow Y) = 0.000 \times 0.000 = 0.000 < 0.050$ , thus the influence of talent management on the merit system through spiritual motivation is significantly positive. Spiritual motivation indirectly influences the merit system through the talent management process, where individuals with high spiritual values tend to excel and receive recognition in the career development system.

The influence of innovative behavior on the merit system through spiritual motivation is calculated using the indirect effect formula  $(X \rightarrow Y \text{ through } M) = (X \rightarrow M) \times (M \rightarrow Y) = 0.000 \times 0.098 = 0.000 < 0.050$ , thus the influence of innovative behavior on the merit system through spiritual motivation is significantly positive. Innovative behaviour provides an indirect contribution to the merit system because innovative talents are easier to identify and develop. This strengthens the merit system based on potential and achievement.

The influence of competence on the merit system through spiritual motivation is calculated using the indirect effect formula  $(X \rightarrow Y \text{ through } M) = (X \rightarrow M) \times (M \rightarrow Y) = 0.000 \times 0.017 = 0.000 < 0.050$ , thus the influence of competence on the merit system through spiritual motivation is significantly positive. Technical and behavioural competencies are the basis of the talent management system, which then impacts the successful implementation of the merit system. Thus, the effect is indirect.

The influence of work culture on the merit system through spiritual motivation is calculated using the indirect effect formula  $(X \rightarrow Y \text{ through } M) = (X \rightarrow M) \times (M \rightarrow Y) = 0.000 \times 0.646 = 0.000 < 0.050$ , thus the influence of work culture on the merit system through spiritual motivation is significantly positive. Work culture supports the implementation of effective talent management, thus contributing to the merit system indirectly. Cultural values such as collaboration, appreciation, and learning strengthen the merit ecosystem.

## 5. Conclusion

This study reveals several main findings. The results indicate that talent management, innovative behavior, work culture, and spiritual motivation each have a significant positive direct effect on the merit system. In contrast, competence shows a positive but statistically insignificant direct effect on the merit system. Furthermore, talent management, innovative behavior, competence, and work culture each exert a significant positive direct influence on spiritual motivation.

With respect to indirect effects, the analysis confirms that talent management, innovative behavior, competence, and work culture significantly and positively influence the merit system through spiritual motivation as a mediating variable. Additionally, the simultaneous effect of talent management, innovative behavior, competence, and work culture on the merit system through spiritual motivation is statistically significant, indicating the robustness of the integrated structural model.

The square multiple correlation ( $R^2$ ) values demonstrate strong explanatory power (Johannesson et al., 2023). Spiritual motivation has an  $R^2$  value of 0.790 (79.00%), while the merit system has an  $R^2$  value of 0.886 (88.60%). These results indicate that the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in both spiritual motivation and the merit system, with the remaining variance attributable to other factors not included in this study.

Based on the conclusions obtained, this section presents strategic recommendations aimed at strengthening organizational governance and guiding future research. These recommendations emphasize reinforcing factors that have been empirically proven to significantly influence talent management and the merit system, while also addressing areas that require further optimization. Accordingly, the suggestions are intended to serve as both a practical reference for policymakers and a theoretical contribution to the advancement of subsequent studies.

First, it is recommended that Malay cultural values—such as *adat bersendikan syarak*, *syarak bersendikan Kitabullah* (tradition founded upon Islamic law and the Qur'an), politeness, deliberation (*musyawarah*), and mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*)—be systematically integrated into merit system indicators and the development of civil servants' spiritual motivation. Strengthening spiritual motivation can be pursued through structured spiritual development programs, regular religious studies, and professional ethics training grounded in Qur'anic principles aligned with Malay cultural identity.

Second, innovative behavior should be enhanced by combining digital transformation initiatives with the Malay tradition of courteous, community-oriented public service. Third, professional competencies must be developed through contextual education tailored to the strategic potential of the Riau Islands Province, including maritime affairs, cross-border trade, and cultural tourism. Fourth, a collaborative work culture should be reinforced through leadership exemplarity, promoting togetherness, mutual respect, and consensus-based decision-making.

Fifth, the digitization of the merit system and talent management processes should incorporate measurable indicators reflecting the application of cultural values in performance assessment. Sixth, empirical findings—particularly the  $R^2$  values—should inform succession planning, the strategic redistribution of human resources, and long-term workforce development policies. Seventh, reward and recognition mechanisms should consider cultural sensitivity, including the use of Malay honorary distinctions and traditional symbols of appreciation.

Furthermore, leadership capacity should be strengthened through experiential programs, such as leadership camps in archipelagic environments, to cultivate resilience and adaptability. Synergy among local government, academics, and traditional leaders is essential to ensure that human resource policies are evidence-based and culturally grounded. Performance indicators should explicitly assess the integration of cultural and spiritual values in public service

delivery. Cross-generational mentoring programs are also recommended to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and traditional values between senior and junior civil servants.

Finally, internal communication strategies rooted in local wisdom should be optimized to foster organizational cohesion and minimize conflict. Work ethic development may incorporate inspirational narratives of prominent Malay figures into training programs. Regular evaluation of cultural, spiritual, and innovation initiatives is necessary to ensure sustainability and relevance. Training modules for civil servants should therefore integrate technical expertise, soft skills, and a comprehensive understanding of Malay cultural values to support the long-term strengthening of a merit-based governance system.

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