Religiosity, Spirituality, and Job Performance among Local Government Employees: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement

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Abstract: *This study examines the effects of religiosity and spirituality on employee's job performance, with the mediating effect of work engagement. Using a sample of 345 public servants within local government employees in Indonesia, this study reveals that employee performance is partially mediated by work engagement in its relationship only to religiosity. Work engagement is not only dispensable in enhancing employee performance but also mediates the effect of religiosity on job performance in the public sector. However, it does not work in the relationship between spirituality and job performance. The findings of this study contribute to the research body on employee performance in local government by improving the understanding of the influences of religiosity, spirituality, and work engagement on job performance. This study also offers an important policy insight for policymakers in the local governments to increase job performance among their employees.*
Keywords*: Religiosity; Spirituality; Work Engagement; Job Performance.*

Introduction

In recent decades, there have been rapid paradigm shifts in public administration. This is possible because of the development of theories and practices of governance around the world. Several scholars of public administration have theorized them. Denhardt and Denhardt (2007) argued that the paradigm of public administration transforms from the old public administration (OPA) to the new public management (NPM) and from the NPM to the new public service (NPS). Farazmand (2004, 2012) suggested sound governance, a perspective that underlies the role of national and international actors in the governing process. More currently, Drechsler (2022) appeared with a non-Western public administration. In the last paradigm, a recognition exists to accommodate a non-western principle in governing processes, including religious values.

Religiosity and spirituality have become an interesting debate in the study of public administration, at least in the last two decades (Ongaro & Tantardini, 2024). Some scholars have noted the important role of these concepts and their implications for the public organization (Hassan et al., 2021, 2022). Ball & Haque (2003) stated that after the tragedy of the World Trade Center, the government accommodated the Islamic religious practices reflected by the government employees. Analyzing the data of the General Social Survey (GSS), Houston, Freeman, & Feldman (2008) pointed out that government employees have a greater religiosity and possess less secular attitudes than private employees in the U.S. In line with the study, Pfaff et al. (2021) found that public servants have a greater attachment to their religious communities and are more involved.

Bason and Austin (2022) argued that religious perspectives play an important role in the delivery of public services and in informing policymaking.

Yudiatmaja et al. (2018) noted that religiosity is related to the individual's intrinsic aspects, including religious consciousness, affect, and belief in human life. Obregon et al. (2022) argued that spirituality could be defined as a personal experience of humans to understand the mystical questions about the meaning of their life and their relationship to the sacred power outside their imagination obtained from an active quest by conducting religious rituals both in their personal and public interactions. Religiosity and spirituality are the universal values contained within all religions worldwide. The values, like believing in God, attach to all religions, such as Islam, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, Jews, etc. Thus, religiosity and spirituality are not the same as religion because they are only representative values of religion (Litalien et al., 2022).

Religiosity and spirituality have various consequences for employees in the workplace, either physical or non-physical effects (Abbas et al., 2024). They can create a positive influence on the employees, for instance, coping with stress, job attitudes, and commitment to improve their career (Narsa & Wijayanti, 2021; Nwachukwu et al., 2022) and benefit in handling the tasks, having a relationship with the colleagues, reducing negative emotions, and taking spiritual attachments at the work setting (Dar et al., 2023). Prior works indicated that religiosity and spirituality impact job performance. For example, Yudiatmaja et al. (2021) found the significant role of religiosity in shaping job performance

among government employees. Jena (2022) revealed that spirituality positively influences employee performance in manufacturing industries and that its relationship is mediated by organizational citizenship behavior. Several studies have also shown that work engagement affects employee performance. Shin and Hur (2021) asserted that work engagement was crucial in influencing the job performance of service sector employees in South Korea. Like Shin and Hur (2021), Yao et al. (2022) also explained that work engagement increased employees' job performance through psychological capital in China's IT industries. Surprisingly, few studies link religiosity, spirituality, work engagement, and job performance, especially in the public sector. The purpose of this study is to fill the gap in the recent literature on job performance by investigating religiosity and spirituality in the workplace in the public sector in Indonesia. This study is, therefore, intended to examine the effect of religiosity and spirituality on the performance of employees. It also investigates whether the relationships are mediated by work engagement.

The current study contributes to human resources management in four ways. First, this research extends Yudiatmaja et al.'s (2021) and Jena's (2022) works by considering work engagement as a buffering factor in the relationship between religiosity, spirituality, and job performance. By incorporating work engagement in the model, we can understand how religiosity and spirituality affect job performance. Neuber et al. (2022) argued that work engagement, in terms of vigor, dedication, and absorption, directly and indirectly affects job performance. Second, we expand Shin and Hur's (2021) and Yao et al.'s (2022) studies by linking religiosity

and spirituality as preceding variables of the relationship between work engagement and job performance. Several studies reported that religiosity and spirituality encourage work-related attitudes, including employee engagement and performance (David & Iliescu, 2022; Salem et al., 2023). Third, this study is novel because we apply self-determination theory to analyze the link between religiosity, spirituality, work engagement, and job performance among public employees. Prior research proved that performance among employees in the public sector is predisposed by religiosity and spirituality (Ke et al., 2022; Yudiatmaja et al., 2021). Furthermore, we also investigate the mediating role of employee engagement in these connections. In sum, we test the hypothesis indicating that religiosity and spirituality enhance work engagement and, in turn, increase job performance. Finally, this study contributes to the practice of human resources management in the setting of public organizations.

The remainder of this paper is organized into four sections. The following section is a literature review discussing theoretical foundations and relationships among the variables. The methodological standpoint depicts study design, data collection, and analysis. Results and discussion illuminating research findings follow behind this part. The last section describes a summary of this study.

We use self-determination theory (SDT) to explain the role of antecedent variables in shaping job performance. Job performance refers to the employees' ability to fulfill their tasks and responsibilities, as expected by the organization (Sudha et al., 2023). It covers contextual, task, adaptive, and counterproductive performance (Platania et al., 2024). SDT is a motivational theory

rooted in social psychology (Ryan & Deci, 2017), ordinarily used to assess job performance (Battaglio et al., 2022; Good et al., 2022). SDT assumes that employees are naturally motivated by various psychological needs, personalities, and circumstances around them (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Many SDT scholars believe that religiosity, spirituality, and work engagement are psychological and social factors that strengthen diverse work-related outcomes, including job performance (Gagné et al., 2022).

Religiosity refers to the degree of an individual's commitment to and involvement in religious beliefs, practices, and values (Yudiatmaja et al., 2021). The relationship between religiosity and job performance can be understood from the SDT lens. Religiosity often fosters a strong sense of purpose and moral obligation, aligning an individual's values with their professional responsibilities (David & Iliescu, 2022). This alignment enhances autonomy, as employees perceive their work as a meaningful expression of their beliefs (Nwachukwu et al., 2021). Additionally, the ethical principles and discipline promoted by religiosity can boost competence, encouraging diligence, accountability, and mastery of tasks. Religiosity also strengthens relatedness by emphasizing community, empathy, and collaboration, fostering positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Babar et al., 2022). Together, these factors lead to greater work engagement, as employees feel more connected, motivated, and invested in their roles, which translates into higher job performance.

Spirituality constitutes a transcendental connection with a higher entity, guiding us towards consciousness and self-engagement, so empowering us to help others for the greater purpose of society (Makkar & Singh, 2021). Spirituality can significantly enhance work engagement and job performance when viewed through SDT. Spirituality encourages employees to view their work as purposeful and aligned with their inner values, fostering a sense of autonomy (Bantha et al., 2024; Obregon et al., 2024). This intrinsic alignment motivates individuals to engage deeply with their tasks. Moreover, spirituality promotes personal growth and resilience, enhancing competence as employees strive to perform their duties with excellence and integrity. The relational aspect of spirituality, which emphasizes interconnectedness and compassion, nurtures relatedness by fostering positive relationships and collaboration within the workplace (Alqhaiwi & Luu, 2023). By satisfying these core psychological needs, spirituality not only increases work engagement by deepening emotional and mental investment in tasks but also drives improved job performance through motivated, ethical, and intentional effort (Jayakumar & Vinodkumar, 2023; Ke et al., 2022).

Work engagement can be defined as a psychological state that reflects how dedicated and motivated an individual is toward their job and organization (Neuber et al., 2022). The relationship between work engagement and job performance can be effectively explained using SDT. Work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in tasks, arises when these needs are met, creating a strong sense of intrinsic motivation (Abualigah et al., 2021). Employees who feel autonomous in their roles are more likely to take initiative and find personal meaning in their work, while those who experience competence gain confidence from their ability to meet challenges and achieve goals (Yao et al., 2022). Similarly,

a sense of relatedness, built through supportive relationships and a collaborative environment, fosters emotional investment and commitment (Al Badi et al., 2023; Naqshbandi et al., 2024). These factors collectively enhance an employee's focus, effort, and persistence, resulting in higher-quality outputs and improved job performance. SDT thus provides a robust framework for understanding how work engagement drives employees to perform at their best by nurturing their intrinsic motivation.

We also posit the mediating role of work engagement in the effect of religiosity and spirituality on job performance. Religiosity and spirituality, by fostering a sense of purpose, ethical values, and connection, can deeply enhance work engagement. Employees who integrate their religious or spiritual beliefs into their professional lives may find their work more meaningful and aligned with their inner values, satisfying the need for autonomy (van Zyl et al., 2021). Additionally, these beliefs often encourage personal growth, resilience, and ethical conduct, which bolster competence in completing tasks. The communal aspects of religiosity and spirituality further strengthen relatedness by promoting empathy and collaboration (Nwachukwu et al., 2021). As these psychological needs are fulfilled, employees become more engaged,

demonstrating vigor, dedication, and focus in their roles. This heightened work engagement serves as a mediator, translating the motivational and value-driven benefits of religiosity and spirituality into improved job performance.

The research model is developed based on SDT and a review of prior research, such as Li and Murphy (2018). Using structural equation modeling, this study comprises four latent variables, specifically two predictors, one mediating, and one outcome variable. The predictor variables are religiosity and spirituality. The mediating variable is work engagement. Lastly, the outcome variable is employee performance. From these variables, we link five direct and two indirect relationships, yielding seven hypotheses: Religiosity significantly influences job performance (H1), and spirituality significantly affects job performance directly (H2). Religiosity influences work engagement (H3), and spirituality also impacts work engagement (H4). Work engagement positively and significantly increases job performance (H5). In the other case, work engagement corroborates not only the relationship between religiosity and job performance (H6) but also the relationship between spirituality and job performance (H7). The hypothesized model of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
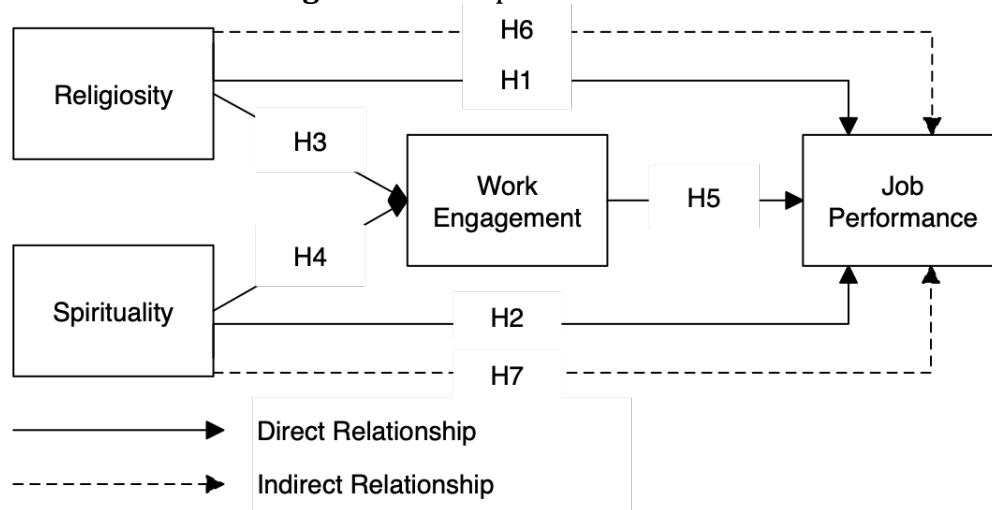
Method

This research utilized a quantitative approach through a survey among employees in the Government of Kepulauan Riau Province, Indonesia. Using convenience sampling, a sample of 400 respondents was selected from organizations as respondents in the survey. The questionnaires were provided to participants irrespective of their religious affiliations, as religiosity and spirituality in this study did not need to be linked to a particular religion (Yudiatmaja et al., 2018, 2021). Out of the total questionnaires distributed, 350 were returned, with 5 being incomplete, resulting in 345 questionnaires utilized for statistical analysis. The response rate for this research was 86.3%.

All constructs of this study have valid scales documented in the literature. Consequently, this study utilized pre-validated scales to assess the construct. Religiosity was assessed via ten scales adapted from Hunjra et al. (2021) and Yudiatmaja et al. (2018) with various adjustments. Employee engagement was measured using Schaufeli et al. (2006) a nine-teen-item Utrecht Work and Engagement Scale (UWES-9). To measure spirituality, we used a 9-item workplace spirituality questionnaire developed by Makkar and Singh (2021). Job performance was assessed using Na-Nan et al. (2018), consisting of 10 questions. Participants were instructed to respond to all topics on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Participants also were asked to answer questions on sex, age, length of service, type of employee, and education. Sex was coded as a binary variable (1 = male and 2 = female). The employee type was encoded as a binary variable (permanent employee = 1; non-permanent employee = 2). Age and years of service were assessed with a seven-point scale. Education was assessed via a four-point scale.

Data were analyzed using partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). It was applied because of several reasons for this study, including non-parametric tests, theory exploration, and complexity of the model (Hair et al., 2019). We were assisted by SmartPLS 4 software to run the data. Following Hair et al. (2022), we conducted two-step

approaches to analyze our hypotheses, measurement, and structural model assessment. Using SmartPLS 4, the measurement model was analyzed through the PLS Algorithm procedure, while the structural model was computed employing the bootstrapping procedure.

Result and Discussion
Descriptive Results

The total number of participants responding to this survey is 345 government employees. The number of male employees is 61.6% of the total of the respondents. This means the population of female employees in the Indonesian regional government is greater than male employees. The majority of the age of the employees is between 26-40 years old. This age is a golden period for the employees to contribute to their organization. The data shows the category of the employees is permanent employees, which is not surprising because the profession of public servants still has become a pride of Indonesian citizens. The largest educational background of the employees is undergraduate.

Measurement Model

As a first section in data analysis, we examine the measurement model to ensure the data is free from reliability and validity issues. Multiple steps were adopted in the measurement model assessment. Because the research model used reflective measurement, several procedures were conducted. Following Hair et al. (2022), we tested reliability using the indicator and internal consistency. Indicator reliability was measured using factor loadings among indicators, while internal consistency was checked using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). Validity was assessed by checking convergent and discriminant validity. While convergent validity was identified using average variance extracted (AVE), discriminant validity was checked using Fornell & Larcker and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

Table 1 summarizes the results of the validity and reliability analysis. Items with weak factor loadings (less than 0.7) were deleted from the construct, as suggested by Hair et al. (2022). Because the loading factors were under the threshold, three items of religiosity and job performance were removed from the model. The results of the analysis show that factor loadings of the final items are higher than 0.7. It has fulfilled the convergent validity criteria (Cheah et al., 2018). Following Yudiatmaja et al. (2022, 2023), Cronbach's alpha and CR values for all constructs were sufficient because they are greater than 0.7. The statistical results show that Cronbach's alpha and CR range are above 0.7, hence appropriate. The AVE of the constructs was accepted because it ranged from 0.596 to 0.698 (greater than the accepted value of 0.50) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

We analyze discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker and HTMT procedures. Fornell-Larcker (1981) criteria were checked by comparing the square root of AVE and its correlations with other constructs. Fornell-Larcker's (1981) criteria show satisfactory mode if the square root of AVE (diagonal values) is greater than its correlations with other constructs (vertical values). The results reveal that the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criteria show a good fit, as shown in Table. 2.

We also calculated discriminant validity by computing HTMT. Hair et al. (2022) recommended that the value of HTMT should be lower than 0.85 for conceptually different constructs. Table 3

shows that all constructs indicate acceptable discriminant validity because the value of HTMT ranges from 0.337 to 0.742.

Table 1: Validity and Reliability

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Religiosity	REL1	0.750	0.917	0.895	0.612
	REL2	0.706			
	REL6	0.716			
	REL7	0.817			
	REL8	0.835			
	REL9	0.859			
	REL10	0.780			
Spirituality	SPR1	0.755	0.930	0.916	0.596
	SPR2	0.749			
	SPR3	0.800			
	SPR4	0.784			
	SPR5	0.762			
	SPR6	0.758			
	SPR7	0.817			
	SPR8	0.763			
	SPR9	0.757			
Work engagement	WE1	0.826	0.944	0.934	0.654
	WE2	0.824			
	WE3	0.848			
	WE4	0.767			
	WE5	0.832			
	WE6	0.805			
	WE7	0.845			
	WE8	0.798			
	WE9	0.726			
Job performance	JP1	0.840	0.942	0.928	0.698
	JP2	0.865			
	JP3	0.841			
	JP5	0.820			
	JP6	0.827			
	JP7	0.838			
	JP8	0.814			

Table 2: Fornel-Larcker (1981)

Construct	1	2	3	4
1 Religiosity	0.782			
2 Spirituality	0.680	0.772		
3 Work engagement	0.417	0.328	0.809	
4 Job performance	0.419	0.361	0.513	0.835

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

1 Religiosity				
2 Spirituality	0.742			
3 Work engagement	0.432	0.337		
4 Job performance	0.445	0.377	0.533	

Structural Model

We applied multiple steps to assess the structural model relationship, as suggested by Hair et al. (2022). First, collinearity was tested using variance inflation factors (VIF) using PLS-SEM through SmartPLS 4 software. Second, we examined the structural relationships of our model by employing the bootstrapping procedure. Finally, we checked explanatory power using the coefficient of determination ($R2$) and effect sizes ($f2$).

Before running path analysis, we calculated collinearity. Hair et al. (2022) suggested that the VIF value of each predictor should be lower than 0.5. The results show that collinearity is not a crucial issue in the research because the VIF value ranges from 1.216 to 2.016. Furthermore, we analyzed the structural model using bootstrapping with 5,000 iterations. We identified the path coefficient (β), t-value, and significant level (p) to stipulate the hypothesized model. The results of the statistical analysis reveal that religiosity influences job performance ($\beta = 0.178$, $t = 2.611$, $p = 0.009$) and work engagement ($\beta = 0.359$, $t = 5.570$, $p < 0.001$), thereby H1 and H3 are supported. Work engagement positively and significantly increases job performance ($\beta = 0.404$, $t = 8.722$, $p < 0.001$), so H5 is accepted. Meanwhile, spirituality has no significant influence on job performance and work engagement. Thus, H2 and H4 are refused.

To examine whether work engagement mediates the influence of religiosity and spirituality on job performance, we perform a procedure to test indirect effects, as recommended by Hair et al. (2022). Instead of using the Sobel test, Hair et al. (2022) suggested three procedures for assessing mediating effects by checking the indirect and direct effects and path directions as well. Findings show that work engagement has a partial mediation in the relationship between religiosity and job performance ($\beta = 0.145$, $t = 4.532$, $p < 0.001$), implying H6 is supported. However, work engagement has no mediating role in the association between spirituality and job performance ($\beta = 0.034$, $t = 1.343$, $p = 0.179$), indicating H7 is rejected. The results of hypotheses testing are presented in Table 4 and Figure 2.

The explanatory power of the predictor variables on the outcome variables is measured by identifying $R2$ and $f2$. Statistical analysis shows that $R2$ of

work engagement and job performance are 17.7% and 32%, respectively (Figure 2). According to Hair et al. (2022), these results indicate that religiosity and spirituality can predict work engagement and job performance adequately. The effect size ($f2$) of the relationship between endogenous and exogenous variables is lower than 0.35, indicating a small effect (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Beta	t Statistics	p Value	Decision
1 Religiosity → Job performance	0.178	2.611	0.009	Supported
2 Spirituality → Job performance	0.107	1.640	0.101	Not Supported
3 Religiosity → Work engagement	0.359	5.570	0.000	Supported
4 Spirituality → Work engagement	0.084	1.352	0.176	Not Supported
5 Work engagement → Job performance	0.404	8.722	0.000	Supported
6 Religiosity → Work engagement → Job performance	0.145	4.532	0.000	Supported
7 Spirituality → Work engagement → Job performance	0.034	1.343	0.179	Not Supported

Figure 2: Structural Model
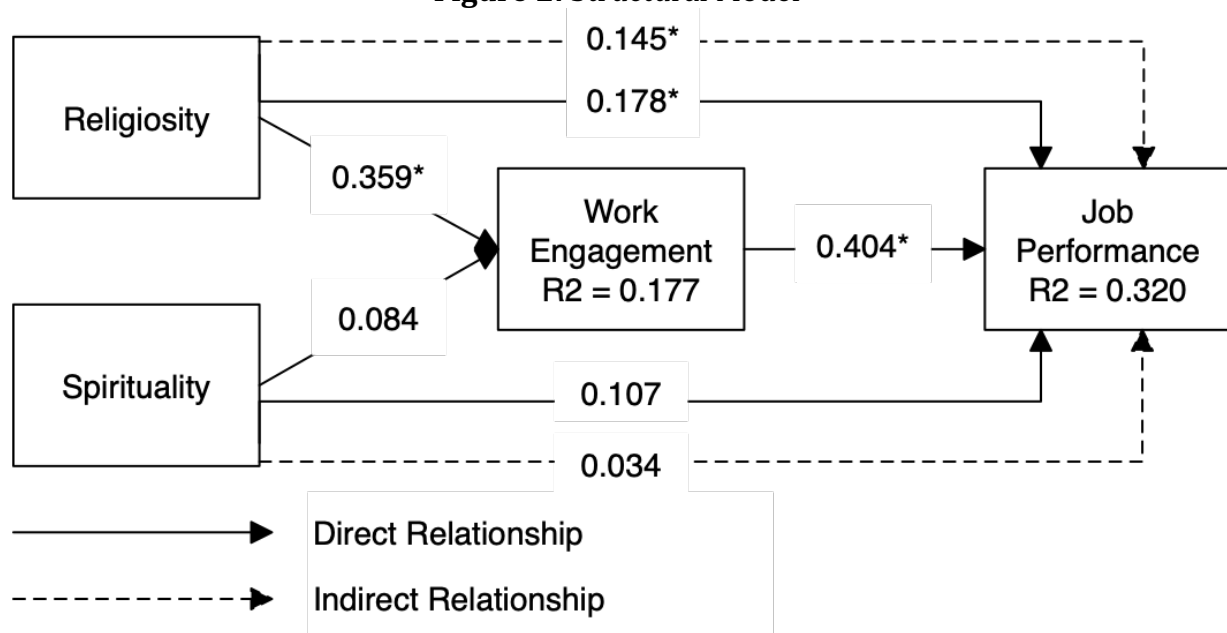
The results show that the performance of the public servants is strongly influenced by religiosity and work engagement. We also found that work engagement increases employee performance. As a mediating variable, this study also found that work engagement fully and significantly mediates the relationship between religiosity and employee performance. Meanwhile, the mediating role of work engagement in the effect of spirituality on employee performance did not exist. This study confirms SDT in establishing the

relationship between religiosity, work engagement, and job performance. SDT also recognizes the indirect effect of work engagement in the connection between religiosity and job performance.

The present study offers new input to the literature on employee performance by enhancing religiosity and work engagement in the context of the public sector. It has extended prior studies, such as Yudiatmaja et al. (2021), Jena (2022), Shin and Hur (2021), and Yao et al. (2022), by providing empirical evidence of the crucial role of religiosity in strengthening work engagement and job performance. More interestingly, this study improves understanding in the field by finding that work engagement plays a role as an intervening variable from religiosity to employee performance. It is the strong point of this study.

This study has several limitations. Thus, we should mention the weakness of this study as well. First, the research design only examines employee performance based on the evaluation as reported by the public servants during the process of filling out the questionnaire. It is only sight from the employee's side. Meanwhile, as asserted by Rahman et al. (2022), the researchers should have examined employee performance by reporting from either the employees or the customers of the organization. Therefore, to address the limitations, future studies can consider accommodating the customers and supervisors of the employees to balance the responses of the respondents. The second weakness of this study is that the present study only uses a single method, namely the survey approach, in examining the influence of religiosity and spirituality on work performance. It is the methodological weakness of this study because the approach cannot catch the phenomena of religiosity comprehensively (Koburtay et al., 2023; Obregon et al., 2022). Future studies may include more approaches or a combination of two approaches in determining these variables.

There are some practical implications of this study. Managers should be more concerned about religiosity in the workplace because it can evoke cultural implications for the people and their organizations (Dik et al., 2024). They should fulfill the religious and spiritual needs of their subordinate, whether applying, enabling, or incorporating spiritual practices in organizations results in an enhancement in performance was a very complex and controversial issue (Vasconcelos, 2023). Spirituality becomes a crucial factor in increasing organizational competitive advantage. Hence, the management field and organizations should pay greater attention to this issue.

At the organizational level, the regional government should proactively accommodate religious and spiritual values in the context of the work process to elevate the productivity, commitment, and performance of the employees (Raza et al., 2024). Work engagement also should receive special attention from both the organization and the managers because work engagement also plays an important role in achieving employee performance by applying connection and dedication among the employees. Engaged workers have strong efforts to transform their work environment, are more open to new ways, are more productive, and are more willing to take the extra responsibilities in their workplace (Dishon-Berkovits et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The present study aims to analyze the impact of religiosity and spirituality on

work engagement and job performance. It also examines the mediating effect of work engagement in the connections. Data were collected from 345 local government employees in Indonesia and analyzed using PLS-SEM. The findings show that religiosity and work engagement positively and significantly predict job performance. Furthermore, the relationship between religiosity and job performance is strengthened by work engagement. However, spirituality has no significant impact on work engagement and job performance. These results corroborate previous work, such as Yudiatmaja et al. (2021), Neuber et al. (2022), David & Iliescu (2022), and Salem et al. (2023). This study underscores significant contributions to the theory and practice of human resources management in the public sector.

Acknowledgement

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