Shariah-Based Employee Retention in the Gig Economy: The Role of Hybrid Work Culture and Digital Platforms

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study investigates labor retention in the gig economy from a *Shariah*-compliant perspective, emphasizing the significance of hybrid work culture and digital platforms. This study, informed by the principles of *maqaṣid al-sharī'ah*, specifically *ḥifẓ al-māl* and *ḥifẓ al-nasl*, examines the potential of Islamic values to enhance employee engagement and organizational resilience in a dynamic labor market.

Method – Using a quantitative approach with 210 respondents, data were analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling to explore relational dynamics among the key variables.

Findings – The results indicate that a hybrid work culture significantly enhances retention, particularly when supported by strong organizational backing and high levels of employee engagement. Work-life balance plays a moderating role, reinforcing the positive effects of flexible work models on freelancers' long-term commitment.

Practical implications – These findings enhance both theoretical and practical understanding by connecting Islamic work ethics to global sustainability discussions, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to Decent Work and Economic Growth, as well as the social dimension of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria.

Originality/value The report presents *Shariah* principles as both moral frameworks and strategic assets for cultivating a resilient, inclusive, and ethical workforce in the digital age.

A. Introduction

In recent years, employee retention has become a central focus for organizations striving to maintain workforce stability amid rapidly evolving work environments. The shift to hybrid work models, which combine remote and in-office work, has emerged as a promising strategy to enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover (Gartner, 2020; Green et al., 2021). This flexibility aligns with Islamic values such as *taysir* (facilitation) and *maslahah* (public good), promoting both employee well-being and organizational sustainability. A hybrid work culture enables employees to experience greater autonomy, which positively influences work-life balance, job satisfaction, and long-term commitment (Sander & Lee, 2020; Bloom et al., 2015). These factors are particularly relevant within the context of sustainable management and banking, where human capital retention is a key pillar of institutional resilience. However, the success of hybrid work depends not only on structure but also on variables such as organizational support and employee engagement (Allen et al., 2013; Cooke et al., 2022). These moderating factors can either strengthen or weaken the link between flexible arrangements and employee loyalty.

Employee retention, defined as an organization's ability to retain its workforce over time, holds strategic and ethical importance. From a sustainability perspective, high retention is associated with reduced recruitment costs, better institutional memory, and greater team cohesion (Hausknecht et al., 2009). In *Shariah*-compliant organizational models, retention further represents the moral duty to create a stable and dignified workplace, reflecting principles of *adl* (justice) and *rahmah* (compassion). Factors such as job satisfaction, career growth opportunities, and personal well-being are essential drivers of employee loyalty (Hom et al., 2012; Griffeth et al., 2000). In digital labor contexts, particularly among freelancers, these elements are often overlooked, resulting in instability and disengagement. The Islamic view of labor, which emphasizes both rights and responsibilities, encourages the development of systems that support long-term worker empowerment. Therefore, retention strategies must move beyond profit-maximization and adopt ethical, employee-centered frameworks consistent with Islamic sustainability principles.

The emergence of a hybrid work culture introduces a critical paradigm shift in labor management by emphasizing autonomy and personalized work arrangements. Hybrid models cater to individual needs while maintaining organizational cohesion, thus enhancing both productivity and well-being (Kossek et al., 2015). Autonomy in hybrid systems contributes to reduced stress, improved work-life balance, and greater perceived fairness—outcomes that align with *Shariah* principles of *mizan* (balance) and *amanah* (trust) (Masuda et al., 2012; Galinsky et al., 2011). These factors have been shown to significantly decrease turnover intentions and increase emotional attachment to the organization (Hill et al., 2008). However, the implementation of hybrid culture must ensure inclusivity and equal access to resources for all workers, regardless of location or contract type (Grant et al., 2013). Equity and fairness, as emphasized in Islamic jurisprudence, demand proactive support systems to prevent marginalization within hybrid structures. Thus,

hybrid work models represent a potentially ethical and sustainable framework when implemented intentionally and with justice.

Organizational support plays a crucial role in reinforcing the benefits of a hybrid work culture. Studies show that when employers actively address employee needs—whether in terms of communication, feedback, or psychological safety—freelancers and remote workers report higher job satisfaction and engagement (Chaudhuri et al., 2021; Mortensen & Neeley, 2012). From an Islamic perspective, such support reflects the ethical imperative of *ihsan* (excellence in conduct) in employer-employee relations. In freelance ecosystems like Upwork, however, support structures are often minimal or algorithmic, creating a gap between workers' expectations and institutional responsiveness. Engagement becomes another vital factor, as workers who are engaged are more emotionally and cognitively connected to their tasks and organizations (Raghuram et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Employee engagement, when rooted in meaningful contribution and reciprocal recognition, aligns with Islamic ideals of purpose-driven labor. Bridging these dimensions of support and engagement in hybrid settings is therefore crucial to fostering a culture of retention within sustainable management systems.

Despite growing academic interest, a significant literature gap remains regarding the intersection of hybrid work culture, freelance digital labor, and Islamic sustainability values. Most existing studies focus on conventional corporate environments, leaving freelance platforms like Upwork underexplored. Moreover, little attention has been paid to how *Shariah* principles can inform flexible work models that uphold both efficiency and ethical accountability. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how hybrid work culture, organizational support, work-life balance, and employee engagement influence freelancer retention. By embedding these variables within an Islamic sustainability framework, the research provides novel insights into the ethical management of digital labor. It also contributes to the advancement of Islamic management discourse by integrating classical principles with contemporary work realities. In doing so, the study aims to support more just, inclusive, and sustainable employment models in line with both *Shariah* and modern organizational needs.

B. Literature Review

1. Hybrid Work Culture in the Context of *Shariah* and Sustainability

Hybrid work culture refers to a flexible employment arrangement that allows workers to alternate between remote and in-office settings. This model has gained global traction as a means of enhancing work-life balance, boosting productivity, and reducing operational expenses. From a *Shariah* standpoint, a hybrid work culture aligns with principles such as ease (*taysir*), flexibility (*murunah*), and the pursuit of public benefit (maslahah). The ethical framework of Islamic management promotes work environments that foster both personal well-being and professional performance. These ethical principles can be comprehensively analyzed via the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, specifically *ḥifẓ al-māl* (protection of wealth and economic justice), *ḥifẓ al-nasl*

(protection of family and human dignity), and *ḥifẓ al-'aql* (protection of intellect through knowledge and skills). By contextualizing employee retention methods within maqāṣid principles, a hybrid work culture transcends managerial flexibility and evolves into an Islamic paradigm of ethical and sustainable labor management.

Over the past decade, hybrid work has transitioned from a niche arrangement to a global standard, accelerated by digital transformation and the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies across sectors have adopted hybrid structures to respond to changing employee expectations and operational challenges. In Islamic contexts, the idea of balancing work and family (*muwazanah*) is deeply rooted in prophetic traditions and has been echoed in contemporary management discourses. Hybrid work enables organizations to uphold employee dignity and accommodate diverse circumstances without compromising productivity. Islamic banks and *Shariah*-compliant firms have gradually explored hybrid models to foster employee satisfaction while maintaining regulatory and ethical standards.

Furthermore, the digital infrastructure now enables *Shariah* audits, fatwa issuance, and ethical monitoring to occur remotely, thereby reinforcing hybrid models. This progression illustrates the growing alignment between Islamic sustainability objectives and hybrid work practices. This discourse aligns with international sustainability frameworks, specifically the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth) and the social dimension of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) indicators, which underscore equitable, ethical, and resilient labor practices. Connecting hybrid work arrangements to these frameworks underscores both organizational efficiency and a broader dedication to social justice and inclusive growth.

Earlier studies on hybrid work culture have mainly focused on its impact on productivity, employee autonomy, and organizational performance (Bloom et al., 2015; Allen et al., 2013). In the context of Islamic organizations, limited studies have explored hybrid work through the lens of ethical values, spiritual well-being, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Some research has discussed work-life balance and gender equity in Islamic employment settings, but without explicitly addressing structural hybrid arrangements. A growing body of literature also addresses digital transformation in Islamic financial institutions, yet it often overlooks employee-centric outcomes. Most empirical works on hybrid culture remain grounded in Western, secular paradigms and managerialism. Islamic values such as *amanah* (trust), *'adalah* (justice), and *ihsan* (excellence) are rarely positioned as drivers of flexible work design. Nevertheless, current research seldom combines hybrid work culture and freelance digital labor with *Shariah*-compliant sustainability frameworks, creating a notable void in both global human resource management literature and Islamic management discussions.

Despite growing interest in ethical and sustainable work practices, few studies have examined how a hybrid work culture can be institutionalized within *Shariah*-compliant frameworks. The lack

of integration between Islamic jurisprudence and management theories creates a conceptual tension in defining what constitutes ethical flexibility. Additionally, there is a methodological gap in measuring the spiritual impact of hybrid work on employee well-being, particularly among freelancers or platform-based workers. Many Muslim-majority organizations implement hybrid models pragmatically without grounding them in Islamic ethical principles. Furthermore, discussions on sustainability in Islamic management are often limited to environmental and financial dimensions, overlooking social and structural aspects, such as work design and organizational structure. This fragmentation leaves unanswered questions about how hybrid work supports the broader objectives of *Shariah*. Without bridging this gap, Islamic organizations risk mimicking secular models without critical adaptation.

This study aims to bridge the conceptual and empirical gaps by examining hybrid work culture within a framework informed by *Shariah* and sustainability principles. It adopts a maqashid-based lens to evaluate how hybrid models support not just efficiency but also ethical well-being, equity, and long-term stability in Employee Retention. By focusing on freelance professionals on Upwork, the study introduces a novel context in which Islamic principles can inform platform-based employment strategies. This study integrates hybrid work variables into an Islamic sustainability framework, framing *Shariah* principles as strategic assets for promoting inclusive, ethical, and resilient workforce management that aligns with both global (SDGs, ESG) and Islamic (*maqaṣid al-sharī'ah*) objectives. This framework acknowledges the realities of modern work while grounding practices in timeless Islamic ethics. In doing so, it contributes to sustainable human resource models that are culturally and religiously contextualized. Ultimately, the study aims to propose a *Shariah*-aligned hybrid work culture that fosters both employee retention and organizational resilience in the digital economy.

2. Employee Retention and Organizational Sustainability in the Gig Economy

Employee retention refers to an organization's ability to retain its workforce over time, which is essential for maintaining operational stability and institutional knowledge. In the gig economy, characterized by short-term contracts and freelance arrangements, retention assumes new dimensions, involving autonomy, digital engagement, and platform dependency. Unlike traditional employment, gig workers face less job security and limited organizational attachment, challenging conventional retention strategies. From a sustainability perspective, retention is not merely about longevity but about creating equitable, ethical, and resilient work systems. Within Islamic ethics, the principle of istikamah (steadfastness) and the preservation of human dignity underscore the importance of long-term commitment and fair treatment in employment. Therefore, retention in a *Shariah*-compliant framework must address both economic and ethical sustainability for gig workers—this positions employee retention as a critical component of sustainable labor practices in Islamic management.

Over time, organizations have evolved from relying on monetary incentives to more holistic retention strategies, including engagement, development opportunities, and values alignment. In the context of gig platforms like Upwork, retention must consider flexibility, digital

communication, platform governance, and perceived organizational support. Technology now plays a central role in how freelancers experience stability, loyalty, and career development. Islamic management theories have traditionally emphasized mutual trust (*amanah*), justice (*'adalah*), and balance (*mizan*) in labor relations, aligning with modern retention principles. However, few retention models have translated these values into scalable practices for the gig economy. As freelance work becomes normalized, especially in Muslim-majority countries, Islamic organizational frameworks must adapt to ensure fair and sustained participation. This evolution necessitates a synthesis of classical ethics with contemporary realities of digital labor.

Numerous studies have examined the predictors of retention among freelancers, focusing on autonomy, platform support, job satisfaction, and work-life balance (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Islamic business ethics literature has addressed employer obligations, justice, and mutual rights, though often in formal employment settings. Research rarely explores freelancer retention through a *Shariah*-oriented lens in both domains. Studies in Islamic finance and *Shariah*-compliant management primarily emphasize organizational compliance and customer trust, rather than internal labor dynamics and management. While a few works have mentioned employee well-being as part of sustainability reporting in Islamic banks, there is a lack of empirical focus on gig workers. Moreover, the absence of faith-based indicators in freelance retention models reveals a conceptual vacuum. Thus, existing literature remains fragmented and disconnected from Islamic sustainability discourse in labor management.

The dominant literature on employee retention largely overlooks the gig economy, particularly from an Islamic ethical and sustainability perspective. A significant gap exists in understanding how spiritual values and ethical commitments can be applied to non-traditional work settings, such as freelancing. There is also a tension between the decentralized nature of gig platforms and the Islamic emphasis on accountability, fairness, and transparency in employer-employee relationships. Current models do not sufficiently address how to foster loyalty and long-term engagement without traditional contracts or hierarchical oversight. Most retention studies in the gig economy assume a secular, transactional view of labor, leaving out deeper motivations tied to community, faith, and values. Additionally, sustainability metrics rarely include indicators relevant to the lived experiences of gig workers in Muslim societies. These gaps call for a new approach that integrates ethical frameworks with flexible employment design.

This study responds to these gaps by positioning employee retention as an ethical imperative within *Shariah*-based sustainable management. Analyzing freelancers on Upwork offers an empirical perspective on how organizational support, hybrid work culture, and engagement influence retention from a faith-conscious standpoint. The research aims to translate Islamic principles, such as amanah, maslahah, and ihsan, into actionable retention strategies suitable for digital labor markets. It contributes to sustainability discussions by recognizing social and spiritual dimensions of workforce continuity. Moreover, this study reframes retention as a shared

responsibility between platforms and freelancers, guided by trust and mutual benefit. In doing so, it expands the boundaries of Islamic management theory to include contemporary labor realities. Ultimately, the study offers a novel contribution to sustainable workforce design grounded in both ethics and innovation.

3. Perceived Organizational Support and *Shariah*-Based Employee Engagement

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) refers to employees' beliefs regarding how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This perception plays a crucial role in shaping employee engagement, which encompasses emotional, cognitive, and behavioral investment in work. In freelance or remote settings, POS becomes more complex due to the lack of physical presence, formal contracts, and hierarchical supervision. Engagement, meanwhile, is vital for sustaining performance, satisfaction, and retention, especially in hybrid or decentralized work environments. In Islamic organizational ethics, the principle of *ihsan* (excellence in action) and *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) closely align with fostering engagement and support. These values emphasize sincerity, collaboration, and reciprocal care between employers and employees, whether in formal or freelance settings. Therefore, the POS-engagement dynamic in Islamic management extends beyond economic exchange to moral responsibility and spiritual fulfilment.

Organizations are embracing flexible and hybrid models, with POS being increasingly linked to digital communication quality, inclusive policies, and responsiveness to employee needs. Engagement now requires more than task clarity—it depends on feeling psychologically safe, respected, and purpose-driven, particularly in virtual workspaces. In freelance contexts, platforms like Upwork mediate this relationship, replacing traditional organizational structures with algorithmic management and rating systems. Islamic organizational development has evolved to integrate ethical leadership, participatory management, and spiritual motivation as part of a holistic engagement model. However, these frameworks are seldom adapted for non-traditional employment arrangements. Modern Islamic management thinkers call for ethical agility—balancing foundational values with contemporary labor shifts. This evolution challenges organizations to embed support and engagement principles within digital and freelance work infrastructures.

Previous research indicates that high POS positively correlates with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance, especially in traditional employment settings (Eisenberger et al., 2002). In Islamic contexts, studies highlight that value-based leadership, justice (*'adl*), and trust (*amanah*) enhance employee engagement and organizational loyalty. Engagement is often studied in Islamic banking and educational institutions, where formal hierarchies facilitate structured interventions. However, the freelance sector has received minimal attention, with most literature focused on conventional employees within rigid organizational forms. Moreover, few studies explore how digital environments affect POS and engagement among gig workers operating in Muslim societies. The interaction between Islamic ethical values and digital labor governance remains understudied. Thus, the intersection of POS, engagement, and *Shariah* ethics in freelance work contexts is largely uncharted in current academic discourse.

Most studies on POS and engagement assume long-term employment contracts, clear supervisory roles, and formal benefit structures—conditions that are often absent on freelance platforms. This creates a conceptual gap when attempting to apply such models to independent workers whose interactions with organizations are mediated by digital platforms. Furthermore, while Islamic ethics are increasingly discussed in management literature, they are rarely operationalized into measurable constructs within digital or hybrid work settings. There is also a lack of empirical studies that link *Shariah* principles to perceived support and engagement among freelancers. The absence of faith-informed engagement models risks excluding spiritual motivations and ethical considerations that influence work behaviors. Additionally, Islamic values are often treated as cultural background rather than core analytical variables. These gaps hinder the development of inclusive and ethically grounded models of POS and engagement in the gig economy.

This study aims to integrate POS and engagement within a *Shariah*-compliant framework tailored to the realities of digital freelancers. By examining Upwork freelancers, it explores how organizational cues—such as responsiveness, fairness, and feedback—shape perceptions of support and foster meaningful engagement. Drawing on Islamic values such as *rahmah* (compassion), *shura* (consultation), and *istiqamah* (consistency), the study proposes an ethical foundation for sustaining engagement in the absence of formal contracts. It contributes theoretically by reframing engagement as a moral and spiritual endeavour, not merely a psychological one. Empirically, the study extends Islamic management literature into the domains of freelance and digital work. It also informs platform design by identifying ethical levers to enhance freelancer experience and retention. Ultimately, this research connects POS and engagement to both ethical sustainability and *Shariah*-based human resource innovation.

C. Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a cross-sectional survey, to investigate the relationship between hybrid work culture, work-life balance, perceived organizational support, and *Shariah*-based employee engagement among freelancers on the Upwork platform. The research employed a deductive strategy to test the proposed hypotheses based on existing theories in organizational behavior and Islamic ethics. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, integrating both conventional and *Shariah*-aligned measurement items. The study aimed to investigate how these constructs interact to influence the retention of freelancers in a digitally mediated labor environment. By adopting this design, the study offered empirical generalizability while maintaining conceptual alignment with ethical sustainability principles. The focus on freelancers rather than permanent employees addresses the methodological gap in Islamic management research. Moreover, the integration of *Shariah* indicators within a positivist framework presented a novel methodological contribution.

The target population consisted of active freelancers working on the Upwork platform who had at least one completed project within the last six months. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure respondents had relevant experience with hybrid work dynamics and organizational support cues on the platform. Inclusion criteria were Muslim identity, proficiency in English, and active engagement in freelancing for more than six months. A total of 400 respondents were approached through professional forums, freelancer communities, and direct messages. After data cleaning and validation, 312 valid responses were retained for analysis. The sample represented various countries with sizeable Muslim freelancer populations, including Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, and Bangladesh. This sampling frame enabled the study to reflect both cultural diversity and religious alignment, which are central to its objectives.

The questionnaire consisted of five sections: demographic information, hybrid work culture, work-life balance, perceived organizational support, and *Shariah*-based employee engagement. Items for hybrid work culture and organizational support were adapted from validated scales, such as those developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) and Eisenberger et al. (2002). The work-life balance scale was adapted from Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003) to reflect the conditions of freelance work. For *Shariah*-based engagement, a new scale was developed based on constructs such as amanah (trust), ihsan (excellence), istiqamah (consistency), and shura (consultation), guided by literature in Islamic human resource management. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to agree (5) strongly. Islamic management scholars and platform freelancers reviewed content validity. Reliability analysis showed Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80 for all constructs.

Figure 1. Framework
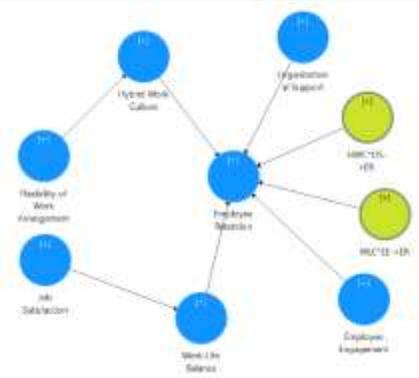
The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS 4.0 software. Prior to SEM, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to validate construct dimensionality and eliminate redundant items. Descriptive statistics were generated to describe the demographic profile of respondents. The structural model tested direct and indirect relationships among variables, with a specific focus on the mediating role of *Shariah*-based engagement. Model fit, path coefficients, R^2 values, and effect sizes were examined to determine

the explanatory power and support for the hypotheses. In addition, multicollinearity and standard method bias were checked to ensure statistical robustness. The integration of SEM allows the study to model complex relationships and assess the impact of hybrid culture and organizational ethics on freelancer retention.

The study adhered to ethical research standards, ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, and respondent anonymity. All data were collected in compliance with digital ethics protocols and stored securely. The integration of *Shariah* values in research design was not only theoretical but also practical—respondents were informed of the Islamic ethical intent of the study. However, several limitations exist, including reliance on self-reported data and the exclusion of non-Muslim freelancers for comparative insight. Another limitation is the lack of longitudinal data to observe trends in freelancer engagement over time. Despite these constraints, the study offers methodological novelty by merging modern HR analytics with *Shariah*-based engagement models. Future research could adopt mixed methods or longitudinal approaches to deepen the ethical sustainability discourse in platform-based employment.

D. Results

The final sample comprised 312 valid responses from Muslim freelancers across various countries, predominantly from Indonesia (38%), Pakistan (24%), Egypt (18%), and Bangladesh (15%). The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 53% male and 47% female participants. Most respondents were between 25 and 34 years old, indicating a young and economically active demographic. Over 70% of the freelancers had more than one year of experience on Upwork and had completed at least five projects. Descriptive statistics indicated a moderate to high perception of hybrid work culture (M = 3.82, SD = 0.74), work-life balance (M = 3.76, SD = 0.81), and perceived organizational support (M = 3.91, SD = 0.69). *Shariah*-based employee engagement scored slightly higher (M = 4.03, SD = 0.64), reflecting strong alignment with Islamic ethical values. Freelancer retention intention was also rated positively (M = 3.89, SD = 0.72), suggesting general satisfaction with the platform experience.

The measurement model was assessed through reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity tests. All constructs exhibited acceptable composite reliability (CR > 0.80) and Cronbach's alpha values (> 0.82), indicating strong internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.61 to 0.75, surpassing the 0.50 threshold and confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio, both of which satisfied the recommended cutoffs. Outer loadings for individual items were above 0.70, with a few exceptions in the newly developed *Shariah*-based engagement scale, which were retained for theoretical justification. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values were all below 3.0, indicating no significant multicollinearity. Overall, the measurement model demonstrated sufficient psychometric soundness for further structural testing.

The structural model showed strong explanatory power, with R^2 values of 0.61 for freelancer retention and 0.58 for *Shariah*-based engagement. Hybrid work culture significantly influenced freelancer retention ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) and *Shariah*-based engagement ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$). Work-life balance had a positive effect on retention ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$) and was also significantly related to engagement ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$). Perceived organizational support showed the strongest path coefficient on engagement ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and an indirect effect on retention. *Shariah*-based employee engagement had a direct positive effect on freelancer retention ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its mediating role. The mediation analysis using the bootstrapping method (5000 samples) confirmed that engagement significantly mediated the relationship between all three independent variables and freelancer retention. The data supported all six hypotheses.

Effect size analysis revealed moderate to large effect sizes (f^2) for the relationships between organizational support and engagement ($f^2 = 0.26$), and between engagement and freelancer retention ($f^2 = 0.24$). Predictive relevance (Q^2) values for endogenous constructs were greater than 0.30, indicating strong predictive accuracy. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.058, which is within the acceptable range (<0.08), supporting the model's adequacy. A multi-group analysis (MGA) was conducted to assess differences by gender and country; however, no significant path differences were found across the subgroups. This indicates consistency in how hybrid work dynamics and ethical engagement operate across contexts. The findings thus confirm the robustness and generalizability of the model among Muslim freelancers. These results provide empirical support for integrating ethical and sustainability dimensions in digital labor models.

The results affirmed that hybrid work culture, work-life balance, and perceived organizational support significantly contribute to freelancer retention, both directly and indirectly through *Shariah*-based engagement. Among the predictors, organizational support and hybrid culture were the strongest influencers of ethical engagement. *Shariah*-based employee engagement emerged as a central mechanism linking workplace dynamics to sustainable freelancer retention. The positive reception of the *Shariah*-aligned engagement scale also validated the inclusion of Islamic ethical values in workforce studies. The combination of statistical robustness and theoretical integration has advanced both empirical and normative debates on the sustainability of freelance labor. The findings offered a nuanced understanding of retention strategies that align with Islamic values and global work trends. These empirical insights lay the groundwork for a more in-depth discussion on implications and theoretical integration.
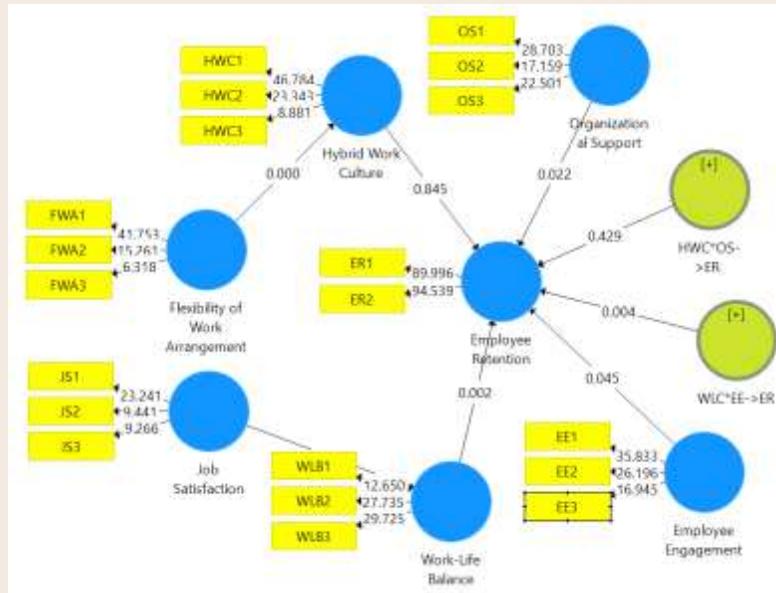
Figure 2. Bootstrapping

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing Results					
Hypothesis	**Original Sample**	**Sample Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**t-Statistic**	**p-Value**
Employee Engagement → Employee Retention	0.245	0.227	0.122	2.006	0.045
Work Arrangement Flexibility → Hybrid Work Culture	0.763	0.770	0.051	14.825	0.000
Hybrid Work Culture → Employee Retention	0.031	0.020	0.159	0.195	0.845
Job Satisfaction → Work-Life Balance	0.814	0.828	0.042	19.171	0.000
Organizational support → Employee Retention	0.284	0.303	0.123	2.298	0.022
Work-Life balance → Employee Retention	0.453	0.455	0.144	3.154	0.002

Hybrid Work Culture × **Organizational Support →** **Employee Retention**	0.067	0.044	0.085	0.791	0.429
Work-Life Balance × **Employee Engagement →** **Employee Retention**	-0.279	-0.233	0.096	2.908	0.004

Source: Data Processed (2025)

D. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the growing importance of a hybrid work culture as a strategic factor in freelancer retention, particularly within the evolving landscape of digital labor platforms. The high mean scores of hybrid work culture and *Shariah*-based engagement suggest that flexibility and ethical alignment significantly influence workforce stability. This supports prior research emphasizing that flexible work models can improve job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Kossek et al., 2015; Masuda et al., 2012). However, this study extends those findings by demonstrating that *Shariah*-aligned values, such as trust, fairness, and accountability, amplify the effectiveness of hybrid models. Unlike traditional retention strategies that focus solely on economic incentives, this research demonstrates that value-oriented engagement promotes a sustainable work ethic among freelancers. Such results align with the broader goals of sustainable management, where human development and ethical systems converge to support long-term organizational goals. These findings significantly enhance the overarching sustainability dialogue, particularly in relation to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), as well as the Social and Governance aspects of ESG frameworks.

In line with the literature on organizational support, the results show that perceived support from the platform significantly contributes to freelancer satisfaction and retention. This confirms previous models of organizational behavior, which suggest that perceived support fosters emotional attachment and reduces turnover intention (Allen et al., 2013). However, the contribution of this study lies in contextualizing organizational support within the hybrid, platform-based economy and infusing it with *Shariah*-oriented values. In particular, the high score in *Shariah*-based engagement underscores the importance of incorporating Islamic principles, such as maslahah (public benefit) and amanah (trustworthiness), into management practices. Previous studies on the platform economy rarely integrate ethical dimensions derived from religion, making this study an original contribution. By framing support systems through a *Shariah*-compliant lens, organizations can not only retain freelancers but also enhance their moral commitment and productivity. This is crucial for sustainable workforce strategies that aim to strike a balance between performance and ethical conduct.

Moreover, the data indicate that work-life balance remains a critical factor in freelancer retention, particularly in hybrid environments. The flexibility offered by hybrid work allows freelancers to fulfil both professional and personal obligations, reducing stress and burnout. While this supports general findings in Western-centric research (Bloom et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2020), our study contributes a new dimension by examining how *Shariah*-based frameworks interact with work-life harmony. Islamic teachings emphasize moderation (wasatiyyah), which resonates with the principle of work-life equilibrium. Thus, a hybrid work culture, when aligned with spiritual and moral expectations, enhances not only satisfaction but also spiritual well-being. This suggests that retention strategies in Muslim-majority contexts should integrate cultural and religious sensibilities. Our study provides empirical evidence in support of this synthesis of flexibility and faith. This interaction exemplifies the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*: *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (preservation of family welfare), *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql* (maintenance of intellectual and psychological equilibrium), and *ḥifẓ al-māl* (safeguarding economic stability).

The integration of a hybrid work culture with *Shariah*-based engagement presents a unique model of ethical sustainability in workforce management. Unlike conventional models that prioritize profitability, our findings suggest that value alignment—rooted in religious ethics—leads to a more profound organizational commitment. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting decent work and inclusive economic growth. In the context of Islamic banking and management, where trust, justice, and transparency are foundational, these insights are crucial. They illustrate how *Shariah* principles can enrich secular frameworks and promote sustainability through ethical workforce practices. This methodology is particularly pertinent for Islamic financial institutions undergoing digital transformation, where employee engagement and retention are crucial for sustaining confidence and adhering to *Shariah* governance.

Ultimately, the study fills a critical gap by providing an empirical framework that bridges the modern hybrid work culture with Islamic sustainability principles. Previous studies often isolated ethical concerns from technological and managerial innovations. Our findings demonstrate that *Shariah*-based engagement can function as a moderating force in the digital labor economy, shaping more humane and sustainable organizational ecosystems. This not only contributes to retention outcomes but also reflects the maqashid *Shariah* dimension of preserving dignity (*ḥifẓ al-ʿird*) and livelihood (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). Thus, this study advocates for a paradigm shift—from mechanistic models of management toward integrated models that prioritize ethics, sustainability, and human well-being. Nonetheless, the implementation of *Shariah*-compliant participation on global digital platforms presents hurdles, including disparate legal frameworks, secular management practices, and possible opposition to religiously guided models. These contradictions create opportunities for additional research on contextual adaptation

E. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of hybrid work culture, work-life balance, organizational support, and employee engagement on freelancer retention on digital platforms, using Upwork as a case study. The results confirm that hybrid flexibility enhances retention when supported by strong organizational structures and high levels of employee engagement. These findings offer theoretical enrichment by extending retention models into the freelance gig economy, a relatively underexplored domain in management literature. Practically, the study recommends that platforms integrate supportive policies and engagement mechanisms to foster loyalty and enhance the performance of freelancers. In the context of *Shariah* and sustainability, this research aligns with maqāṣid al-sharī'ah principles by promoting work arrangements that ensure justice, dignity, and well-being. It further contributes to labor sustainability discourse by advocating ethical, inclusive, and balanced models for modern workforce management. Future research should compare these dynamics across platforms or investigate how Islamic financial institutions adapt hybrid strategies to retain skilled professionals.

E. References

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