



A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Meanings of Faith-Guided Business and Accounting Practices among Muslim Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Business and accounting practices are increasingly recognized not only as technical and economic activities but also as phenomena shaped by cultural, ethical, and spiritual frameworks. Within Islamic contexts, these practices reflect a unique integration of professional responsibilities and religious values, highlighting the need to examine how such principles are internalized and lived by practitioners. However, much of the existing research relies on compliance-oriented or quantitative approaches, which fail to capture the richness of subjective experiences. This study employs an interpretative phenomenological approach to explore how Muslim professionals interpret and embody Islamic values in their business and accounting practices. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve participants and analyzed thematically. Findings reveal four interrelated themes: faith-driven decision-making, ethical accountability as responsibility to God, the tension between spiritual integrity and market dynamics, and leadership grounded in moral exemplarity. These insights underscore that Islamic values function not merely as regulatory norms but as lived ethical commitments shaping professional identity and practice. By illuminating the experiential and spiritual dimensions of Islamic professionalism, this study offers a distinctive phenomenological contribution that deepens theoretical understanding and informs culturally grounded approaches to business ethics.



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INTRODUCTION

The intersection of business, ethics, and spirituality has become an increasingly significant area of scholarly attention in recent years. Within contemporary societies, economic activities are no longer understood solely as mechanisms for generating profit but also as practices deeply embedded in cultural, moral, and religious frameworks (Prawatya & Pimada, 2024). In Muslim-majority contexts, this intersection is particularly salient, as Islamic principles provide not only legal and financial guidelines but also a comprehensive worldview that informs decision-making, accountability, and organizational behavior (Ali et al., 2024). The phenomenon of integrating Islamic values into business and accounting practices thus emerges as both a professional and spiritual endeavor, reflecting the holistic nature of Islamic teachings in everyday life.

The relevance of this phenomenon extends beyond organizational outcomes, as it encompasses the subjective experiences of individuals navigating complex and often competing demands of faith, ethics, and market realities (Mumtaz, 2024). For Muslim entrepreneurs, managers, and accountants, professional practice is not experienced merely as a technical or economic responsibility, but also as an act of faith (Siswanti, Riyadh, Nawangsari, et al., 2024). This dual orientation highlights the importance of understanding how individuals internalize and translate religious principles into concrete business actions, while also negotiating challenges posed by globalization, regulatory frameworks, and diverse stakeholder expectations (Ismail, 2023). Such

experiences are central to the human dimension of business life and deserve scholarly attention to capture their richness and complexity.

Given the inherently personal and context-bound nature of these experiences, there is a pressing need to explore their meanings through approaches that privilege subjectivity and lived reality. Phenomenology provides a particularly suitable framework for such an exploration, as it allows for the uncovering of how individuals perceive, interpret, and assign significance to their professional and spiritual practices (Majid, 2024). By focusing on the essence of experience rather than abstract theorization, phenomenological inquiry offers insights that are not only academically relevant but also socially meaningful, particularly in advancing a deeper understanding of how Islamic values shape and are shaped by contemporary business practices.

Building upon the broader relevance of faith-informed business practices, research focusing on the lived experiences of individuals in such contexts has emerged as an increasingly important area of inquiry (Akhtar et al., 2023). Studies have shown that subjective dimensions such as values, perceptions, and personal meanings are central to how professionals understand and enact their roles in organizational life. In Islamic business and accounting, these dimensions become particularly significant, as individual practices are not only guided by technical standards but also deeply informed by spiritual commitments and ethical responsibilities (Haruna et al., 2024). Consequently, the phenomenological exploration of these experiences has gained prominence in advancing both theoretical and practical knowledge.

Despite this growing interest, methodological challenges remain in capturing the essence of subjective experiences (Maulina et al., 2025). Many existing studies on Islamic business practices rely heavily on quantitative surveys or structured metrics, which, while useful in identifying general patterns, often fail to capture the richness and complexity of personal meanings. Such approaches tend to reduce lived experiences into measurable variables, overlooking the nuanced ways in which individuals interpret and embody their professional and spiritual responsibilities. This limitation underscores the need for approaches that go beyond surface-level data to reveal the depth of personal engagement with faith-based business practices.

The reliance on conventional methodologies has therefore left significant gaps in the ability to fully understand the phenomenon (Siswanti, Riyadh, Cahaya, et al., 2024). Quantitative measures and even some qualitative case studies have provided valuable descriptive insights, but they remain insufficient to uncover the essential structures of meaning that shape how individuals experience and interpret their roles. Phenomenological approaches, by contrast, offer a pathway to address this limitation by prioritizing the voices of participants and exploring the lived realities that conventional methods often miss (Bansal et al., 2025). This focus allows for a more holistic and authentic understanding of how Islamic values are internalized, practiced, and negotiated in contemporary business settings.

Much of the existing scholarship addressing Islamic business, management, and accounting has relied on practical approaches grounded in established frameworks of compliance, governance, or performance measurement (Memon et al., 2024). These approaches have provided useful guidance for practitioners and have contributed to the institutionalization of Islamic principles within organizational systems. However, they remain largely focused on procedural or structural dimensions, offering prescriptive solutions without fully engaging with the lived experiences of those who practice within these frameworks.

The limitation of such approaches lies in their inability to capture the depth of meaning through which individuals interpret and embody their professional roles. While practical models can describe what is done and how it is done, they often neglect the more profound question of why individuals act in particular ways and how faith-based values are subjectively internalized (Memon et al., 2024). As a result, the existing body of knowledge provides only a partial understanding of the phenomenon, overlooking the nuanced tensions, negotiations, and personal commitments that shape participants' experiences in real contexts.

This gap underscores the need for a methodological shift. A phenomenological approach offers an alternative pathway, as it prioritizes subjective experience and seeks to uncover the essence of phenomena as lived by individuals (Yusof et al., 2025). By moving beyond surface-level practices and examining the meanings participants ascribe to their professional and spiritual engagements, phenomenology provides a more holistic and authentic understanding of the phenomenon. Addressing this gap is crucial not only for advancing theoretical discussions in Islamic business and accounting but also for informing practice in ways that resonate more deeply with the lived realities of Muslim professionals.

Previous research on Islamic business and accounting has highlighted the importance of ethical frameworks, governance models, and compliance with sharia principles (F. R. Khan et al., 2023). These studies have contributed valuable insights into institutional practices but often fall short in capturing the lived realities of individuals who navigate these frameworks daily. A smaller number of qualitative works have attempted to address personal experiences, yet their focus has been limited to surface-level narratives or case-specific contexts. Theoretical perspectives such as spiritual leadership or ethical accountability have been discussed, but they remain detached from the authentic voices of practitioners (Daryono et al., 2025). This gap underscores the need for a method capable of uncovering the deeper layers of meaning embedded in subjective experience.

To address this limitation, this study employs a phenomenological approach that emphasizes lived experience as the primary source of knowledge. Phenomenology allows for an exploration of how individuals interpret and give meaning to their professional and spiritual roles in business and accounting (Qizam et al., 2025). By focusing on subjective accounts, this method provides a more holistic understanding of how Islamic values are internalized, practiced, and sometimes contested. The approach responds directly to the knowledge gap identified, moving beyond descriptive models to uncover the essence of participants' experiences. In doing so, it positions this research as both a theoretical contribution and a practical reflection of real-world dynamics.

The structure of this article is designed to guide readers through a systematic exploration of the phenomenon (Salehi et al., 2024). The introduction outlines the general and specific background, the knowledge gap, and the rationale for the study. The methodology section explains the phenomenological design, participant selection, and procedures for data collection and analysis. The results section presents themes derived from participants' narratives, illustrated with direct quotations to highlight authentic voices (Syah & Rahmadani, 2024). Finally, the discussion and conclusion provide interpretive insights, theoretical implications, and practical recommendations for advancing both scholarship and practice in Islamic business and accounting.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences and meanings ascribed by participants within the context of Islamic business, management, and accounting. Phenomenology was selected because it emphasizes the exploration of subjective experiences and provides a framework for uncovering the essence of phenomena as perceived by individuals. The approach enables an in-depth understanding of how participants interpret and internalize values, ethics, and decision-making processes in their professional practices. An interpretative phenomenological perspective was adopted, allowing for the examination of not only descriptive accounts of experiences but also the meanings embedded within those experiences, shaped by social, cultural, and religious contexts.

Participants

Participants consisted of individuals actively engaged in Islamic business and accounting practices, selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the phenomenon under investigation. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least three years of experience in roles directly related to Islamic entrepreneurship, management, or financial reporting aligned with sharia principles. Exclusion criteria applied to individuals lacking direct involvement in decision-making

processes or those without practical exposure to faith-based business challenges. A total of 12 participants were involved, representing diverse backgrounds including entrepreneurs, managers, and accountants. Their demographic characteristics, such as age (ranging between 28 and 47 years) and gender (seven male, five female), provided a varied perspective that enriched the exploration of the phenomenon.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol designed to elicit detailed descriptions of experiences and perceptions. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in settings chosen by participants to ensure comfort and openness, with each session lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Open-ended questions were employed to encourage participants to articulate their experiences fully, while probing techniques were used to clarify and deepen responses when necessary. To ensure confidentiality and authenticity, no identifying details were included in the transcripts.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic phenomenological analysis, following systematic steps of identifying meaning units, clustering them into categories, and synthesizing them into overarching themes. The process involved repeated readings of the transcripts to gain familiarity, segmentation of text into significant statements, and reduction to essential meanings. These meanings were then grouped into thematic structures representing the core aspects of the phenomenon. NVivo software was utilized to facilitate coding and organization of data, although interpretive insights were derived inductively from the narratives themselves. This analytical process enabled the extraction of essential themes that reflected participants' lived experiences while remaining grounded in their contextual realities.

RESULTS

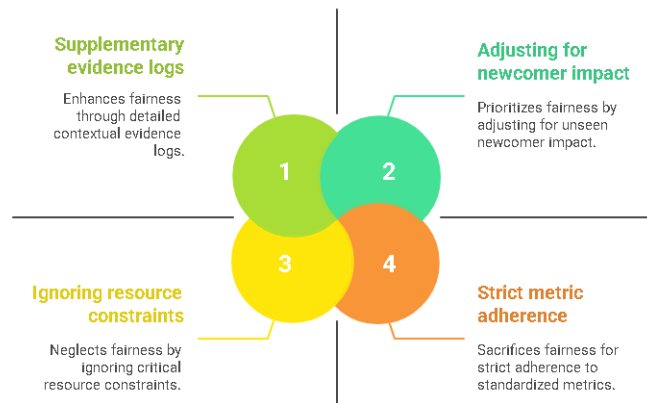
Integrating Faith into Business Practices

Participants consistently described the central role of faith in shaping their business decisions. The integration of Islamic principles was not perceived as an external obligation but as an intrinsic motivation guiding everyday practices. For example, one entrepreneur emphasized:

“For me, running a business is not only about profit; it is about fulfilling amanah (trust) from Allah. Every decision I make has to be aligned with syariah principles, even if it sometimes costs me financially.”

This theme highlights the inseparability of spirituality and entrepreneurship, where faith-based considerations become a compass for ethical decision-making. Beyond thematic observation, this finding reveals how faith operates as an internalized epistemic framework through which participants construct meaning in their professional conduct. The act of “integrating faith” thus represents not merely religious compliance, but an ontological orientation—an awareness that business is a moral vocation rather than an economic function.

The Synergy of Faith and Business Ethics



Ethical Accountability Beyond Compliance

Another dominant theme concerned participants’ understanding of accountability, which extended beyond regulatory compliance. Instead, accountability was framed as a moral responsibility to God, society, and stakeholders. An accountant working in a family-owned company explained:

“When I prepare financial reports, I don’t just think about the regulator. I ask myself: is this honest in front of Allah? Because in the end, it is not only shareholders who will ask, but also God.”

This perspective indicates a unique orientation toward accountability, positioning Islamic ethics as a higher benchmark than formal governance standards. Analytically, this redefinition of accountability illustrates a shift from external enforcement to internalized moral consciousness. It reframes professional responsibility as taqwa-driven integrity, aligning technical accuracy with spiritual truthfulness. This interpretive stance underscores how Islamic accountability transcends procedural ethics by embedding divine oversight within professional judgment.

Navigating Tensions in Modern Business Environments

Participants frequently mentioned challenges when aligning Islamic principles with contemporary market demands. While the commitment to faith was unwavering, dilemmas emerged in negotiations, partnerships, and financial strategies. One participant noted:

“Sometimes investors push us to adopt practices that are common in the market but clearly against Islamic law. It’s difficult to balance competitiveness with our religious values, but we cannot compromise on halal integrity.”

The theme demonstrates the lived tension between maintaining authenticity to Islamic values and adapting to globalized business pressures. This tension reveals the dialectical negotiation between faith and modernity, where participants continuously reinterpret Islamic ideals to sustain ethical agency within capitalist constraints. Rather than viewing these conflicts as binary oppositions, the data suggest that such negotiations foster moral resilience and adaptive spirituality—indicating that faith-based entrepreneurship is not static but dynamically responsive to structural pressures.

Transformational Leadership Rooted in Islamic Values

A further theme identified was the role of leadership in shaping organizational culture. Leaders described their style as transformational, aiming to inspire through religiously grounded values rather than authority. A manager from a halal start-up remarked:

“I believe my role is not only to supervise but also to motivate my team spiritually. If they see me practicing what I say praying together, avoiding riba (usury) then they will follow not because of my position but because they trust my sincerity.”

This indicates that Islamic business leadership is perceived as a moral model that combines personal example with collective motivation. Analytically, this pattern reflects the concept of imān-centered leadership, in which authority derives from ethical authenticity rather than positional power. The interpretive insight here lies in understanding leadership as a performative embodiment of faith—

where leaders enact spirituality as praxis, cultivating organizational cultures rooted in trust, sincerity, and moral exemplarity.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that Islamic values are not only integrated into business practices but are also experienced as spiritual and moral commitments guiding decision-making, accountability, and leadership (Al-Zubi & Alsheikh, 2024). These findings directly address the central research question by uncovering the essence of how Muslim professionals navigate the intersection of faith and modern business environments.

Contribution of Findings to the Research Question

The findings provide clear answers to the overarching research question by demonstrating that the lived experiences of Muslim entrepreneurs, managers, and accountants cannot be separated from their spiritual orientations (Disli & Jalaly, 2024). The themes of faith integration, ethical accountability, tensions with market realities, and transformational leadership illustrate how Islamic principles shape both individual and organizational practices (M. S. Khan et al., 2024). Unlike prior studies that emphasized compliance frameworks or governance structures, the results highlight the meaning-making process of participants, showing how professional roles are internalized as acts of faith and service to God. This contribution advances the understanding of Islamic business practices as a lived reality, enriching the theoretical discourse with empirical insights into the spiritual foundations of economic life.

Relationship with Previous Literature and Theory

The results align with prior discussions on Islamic ethical business practices, which emphasized the centrality of spirituality in organizational decision-making (e.g., Beekun & Badawi, 2005; Ali, 2015). However, this study extends existing literature by illustrating how accountability is experienced as a higher moral responsibility to God, rather than as mere compliance with regulatory standards (Rajendran et al., 2024). The theme of negotiating tensions with modern business pressures also complements findings from research on faith-based leadership, showing the unique struggles of balancing global competitiveness with religious integrity. Moreover, the emphasis on transformational leadership rooted in Islamic values resonates with theories of spiritual leadership, yet this study adds depth by demonstrating how such leadership emerges through lived practice and personal example rather than abstract models (Alqsass et al., 2024). These connections position the findings as both supportive and corrective to earlier theoretical claims, offering a richer phenomenological account of the phenomenon.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study carry both scientific and practical implications for understanding the intersection of Islamic values and professional practice. Scientifically, they highlight that spirituality and faith are not peripheral but central to how individuals construct meaning in their professional roles, offering an enriched perspective for theories of organizational behavior and ethics (Amani, 2024). Practically, the results suggest that Muslim entrepreneurs, managers, and accountants operate within a framework where decision-making is guided by religious integrity, which has significant implications for leadership training, business education, and policy design in Muslim-majority societies (Alsayed, 2024). The themes also reveal how accountability is framed as a moral obligation to God, which can inform the development of ethical standards that go beyond compliance. More broadly, the findings provide insights that may resonate with other faith-based or value-driven professional contexts, indicating the relevance of this phenomenon across diverse social and cultural settings.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting these findings. The study was conducted with a relatively small group of participants, which, while appropriate for phenomenological inquiry, limits the extent to which results can be generalized across larger

populations (Laila et al., 2023). The participants were selected from specific professional contexts within Islamic business and accounting, and therefore the findings may not capture the full diversity of experiences in other sectors or regions (Nik Azman et al., 2025). Furthermore, reliance on self-reported narratives may introduce subjectivity, as participants might frame their experiences in ways that reflect personal or cultural ideals. These limitations do not diminish the value of the study but rather clarify the scope within which the findings should be understood (Chowdhury et al., 2025). Recognizing these constraints also points to the need for further research that expands both the demographic and contextual range of inquiry.

Prospective Directions for Future Research

Future studies can build on these findings by exploring comparative perspectives across different industries, cultural settings, or religious traditions to examine how spiritual values influence professional practices more broadly (Mughtar et al., 2025). Longitudinal designs may also be employed to investigate how lived experiences evolve over time, especially as Muslim professionals encounter shifting global business environments and technological advancements. Another promising direction involves integrating phenomenological insights with other qualitative methods, such as narrative or ethnographic approaches, to enrich the depth and diversity of data (Tawfik et al., 2025). Additionally, cross-cultural studies could shed light on how Islamic business ethics intersect with or diverge from other value-based frameworks, fostering dialogue across traditions. Such future research would extend the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, while continuing to emphasize the importance of lived experience in understanding professional and organizational life.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the lived experiences of Muslim professionals in business, management, and accounting to understand how Islamic values shape their practices. The findings revealed that participants consistently integrated faith into decision-making, framed accountability as a moral responsibility to God, and embraced leadership styles rooted in spiritual integrity. These insights address the limitations of previous studies that relied primarily on compliance-based or quantitative approaches, offering a richer understanding of the phenomenon. Rather than merely confirming the presence of faith in professional life, the study demonstrates how spirituality operates as a dynamic interpretive framework that redefines ethical reasoning, reshapes organizational conduct, and reframes the meaning of success.

Theoretically, this research advances the phenomenological study of Islamic business by linking lived experience with moral ontology—showing that professional identity is not only value-informed but spiritually constituted. Practically, it provides a framework for cultivating faith-integrated leadership and accountability systems that move beyond compliance toward ethical consciousness. The study's originality lies in articulating a phenomenological model of Islamic professionalism that situates faith as an epistemic and moral foundation of business life. By doing so, it bridges gaps between spirituality, ethics, and management scholarship, offering a culturally grounded paradigm for future inquiry. Future studies may extend this model by comparing how such faith-based orientations manifest across cultural, sectoral, or generational contexts, and by tracing their longitudinal evolution in response to global market transformations.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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