

## Presenting an Organizational Ethics Model Based on Nahj al-Balaghah in the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Islam, as a source of inspiration for outlining ideal governance and proper models of ruling across a wide civilizational sphere, has played a significant role in shaping governance frameworks. Within this context, the Islamic value and ethical system represents a pivotal aspect of Islam. The present study aims to develop an organizational ethics model based on Nahj al-Balagha for the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education.

**Methods:** This study is applied in terms of purpose and employs a field-based data collection approach using a mixed qualitative–quantitative methodology. In the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was conducted through two approaches: content analysis of written documents and content analysis of expert interviews. Experts were selected using snowball sampling, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews until theoretical saturation was achieved.

**Results:** Theoretical saturation was reached after conducting 14 semi-structured interviews. Ultimately, basic, organizing, and overarching themes were extracted. The analysis resulted in the identification of six dimensions (global themes), 21 components (organizing themes), and 82 indicators (basic themes) related to organizational ethics based on Nahj al-Balagha.

**Conclusions:** The findings indicate that among the identified dimensions, the behavioral context dimension, with a coefficient of 0.971, was the most significant. In contrast, among these dimensions, the ethical context dimension, with a coefficient of 0.718, showed relatively lower importance. Finally, an organizational ethics model based on Nahj al-Balagha was developed and presented.

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## Introduction

Organizations are among the most important social institutions of the contemporary era, exerting a broad and profound influence on various aspects of human life. These institutions emerge and develop within the social environment and, as complex systems, are constantly engaged in direct interaction with their internal and external environments. On the one hand, organizations seek success, survival, and transition from the current state to a desired one; on the other hand, their success depends largely on the quality of their communication and interaction with the environment. One of the key issues arising from these interactions is professional ethics, the nature of which relates to how an organization, as an entity with a distinct identity, organizes its communicative behavior with its environment (Ayer, 2018).

Ethics in the fields of management and organization has been examined under various titles, such as managerial ethics, organizational ethics, and work ethics (Alvani et al., 2020). In Iran—similar to Western countries—leading scholars in management have addressed this issue, and numerous works by international scholars on business ethics have been translated into Persian. However, it is essential to recognize that Iranian society possesses one of the richest ethical heritages of its own, namely Islam and the Shiite school of thought. Ethics and moral principles are among the key themes emphasized in Islam, to the extent that the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) described the ultimate purpose of his mission as the perfection of moral virtues. Accordingly, ethics, as a set of values, norms, obligations, and prohibitions, can play a vital role in enhancing the effectiveness of organizational management. Work discipline, compassion, justice, constructive interaction, consultation, humility, loyalty, service orientation, and tolerance are among the desirable ethical practices emphasized in Islamic teachings for organizational management. To realize these principles, the formulation and implementation of ethical charters within organizations are essential. In this regard, by establishing enforcement mechanisms and institutionalizing ethical behavior, ethical values and principles can be strengthened within organizations. Achieving these leads, on the one hand, to reduced discrimination, injustice, and dissatisfaction, as well as increased organizational morale and employee commitment, and on the other hand, to human development, organizational growth, and societal progress (Salajegheh, 2019).

The invaluable book *Nahj al-Balagha*, as one of the primary sources of Alawite thought, presents the viewpoints of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) on a wide range of issues and subjects. A significant portion of this work is devoted to practical wisdom and ethics. Examination of Imam Ali's conduct and way of life across different stages of his life and in interactions with various social groups—including friends and adversaries—demonstrates that in his value system, ethical conduct and ethical living occupy the highest and most fundamental position, taking precedence over all other considerations. Therefore, ethics can be regarded as a key concept—if not the central key—for understanding the character of Imam Ali.

One of the ethical distinctions of *Nahj al-Balagha* lies in its comprehensive nature. Like its author, the book exhibits a form of universality, addressing all dimensions of human life and providing specific ethical guidance for each domain. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) was neither a reclusive mystic detached from society and indifferent to the fate of others, nor merely a social activist or political figure whose engagement in reforming “others” caused him to neglect self-discipline and moral refinement. The multidimensional character of Imam Ali and the embodiment of ethics in his very being enable him to be presented as a moral role model in all eras. This multidimensionality and attention to various aspects of individual and social life compel us to emphasize that ethical living in the modern world—particularly among the people and managers of today's society—has a profound need for a figure such as Imam Ali and a work such as *Nahj al-Balagha* (Mir-Mohammad Tabar et al., 2013).

In previous centuries, expectations of the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education differed significantly from those of today; however, due to scientific and technological advancements, these expectations have gradually evolved. Educational systems—particularly in medical sciences—are now regarded as key contributors to the formulation of economic, cultural, and healthcare development policies (Spaulding & Lowery, 2019). Within this context, the health, treatment, and medical education system plays a vital and strategic role in national development by training and preparing competent, qualified, and skilled human resources in medical and healthcare sciences to respond effectively to the real needs of society (Beauchamp, 2023). One of the primary objectives of the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education is to safeguard and promote individuals' physical and mental health. Achieving this objective is not possible

without attention to ethical considerations, as education and ethics are inherently interconnected and inseparable (Gamanova & Watine, 2015).

The dominance of organizational ethics within an organization significantly contributes to reducing tensions, facilitating success in achieving objectives, and enhancing organizational accountability (Norbakhsh, 2014). Today, professional ethics is recognized as a competitive advantage for organizations (Safar-Mohammadlou et al., 2019). Adherence to organizational ethics enhances organizational capability in business operations while reducing costs for both the organization and society (Hadavi-Nejad et al., 2011). Public administration scholars consider ethical principles in educational systems to be among the prerequisites of sound strategic management. Public managers are not only responsible for developing employees' professional skills but are also accountable for their ethical education (Molaei, 2016). Officials in public institutions are expected to adhere to higher ethical standards than others, commit to ethical behavior and principled decision-making, and consistently model standards of integrity, respect, responsibility, trust, and care within educational environments and society at large (Cherioulas, 2019).

In the research domain, even a brief quantitative comparison between studies conducted in industrialized countries and those published by domestic researchers indicates a relative knowledge gap regarding organizational ethics. International research likewise highlights growing concerns in the field of organizational ethics, particularly with respect to one of its key dimensions—human dignity—which remains a major challenge.

A review of previous studies reveals that, especially in domestic research, limited work has been conducted on organizational ethics, with most studies being theoretical in nature. Despite the critical importance of the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education, no comprehensive and extensive research has been carried out to identify the dimensions and components of organizational ethics based on Nahj al-Balagha. Given the significant influence of managers on the internal and external environments of the Ministry, the importance of adhering to organizational ethics is further intensified. Nevertheless, no study has specifically examined the factors influencing organizational ethics based on Nahj al-Balagha within the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education.

If an ethical society is to be realized, it must begin with ethically oriented organizations. An ethical Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education depends on ethical managers and employees. In fact, societal ethical expectations cannot be fulfilled unless organizational ethics are firmly established within this Ministry. Despite awareness of this issue, insufficient attention has been paid to ethical charters within the Ministry. Although a limited number of conferences focusing on ethics in management indicate growing interest in the topic, significant gaps remain—particularly regarding the ethical challenges faced by employees. Given that Iran is an Islamic society in which understanding professional ethical principles is of great importance, attention to ethical principles derived from Nahj al-Balagha—the second most important Shiite text, distinguished by its comprehensiveness and sustained emphasis on ethics—is both appropriate and valuable.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to conduct a comprehensive examination of organizational ethics among managers of the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education by identifying the dimensions and components influencing organizational ethics based on Nahj al-Balagha. The study ultimately aims to propose an organizational ethics model grounded in Nahj al-Balagha for the Ministry, thereby taking a meaningful step toward improving managerial performance and enhancing ethical standards within the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education. In doing so, the study seeks to answer the following question: What is the appropriate model for organizational ethics based on Nahj al-Balagha in the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education?

### Material and Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods design (qualitative and quantitative). In the qualitative phase, initial components were identified through semi-structured interviews using thematic analysis. The study participants consisted of experts in the fields of educational management, philosophy of education, human resources, and Islamic seminary studies, holding relevant academic qualifications and/or possessing scholarly outputs such as journal articles, books, authored works, and teaching experience in these areas, as well as managers from the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education.

The inclusion criteria comprised: (1) experts with a minimum of three years of university-level experience in educational management, philosophy of education, human resources, or Islamic seminary studies; (2) specialists holding at least a doctoral degree in educational management, philosophy of education, human resources, Islamic studies, or related fields; and (3) managers of the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education. Purposive sampling was used to select participants in the qualitative phase.

For quantitative data collection, a matrix-based questionnaire was administered to examine the influencing and influenced variables using the Decision-Making Trial and Evaluation Laboratory (DEMATEL) method. The statistical population consisted of 21 experts, who were selected using the snowball sampling technique.

Data collection took place during the summer and autumn of 2023. Interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings, email correspondence, and telephone conversations, with an average duration of 73 minutes per interview. Following transcription, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis concurrently with data collection. Initially, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Subsequently, a copy of the extracted codes was sent to each interviewee for member checking and confirmation. Similar initial codes were grouped into categories, leading to the formation of preliminary categories. These categories were then merged and refined to generate overarching themes.

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the data, prolonged and in-depth engagement with the data was maintained. From the first interview onward, themes and subcategories began to emerge, and data reduction continued across all units of analysis (themes) until the final themes were fully developed. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Qualitative content analysis was performed using MAXQDA version 12 software.

In the quantitative phase, after constructing the pairwise comparison matrix for the questionnaire dimensions, the instrument was distributed to the same 21 experts who had participated in the qualitative interviews and were familiar with the research topic. The completed questionnaires were converted into Excel format and prepared for DEMATEL analysis. In the first step, the data were aggregated using the arithmetic mean to form the initial matrix. In the second step, the matrix was normalized. In the third step, the normalized matrix was inverted, and finally, in the fifth step, the total relation matrix was obtained.

Ethical considerations in this study included obtaining informed consent, ensuring the confidentiality of participants' identity information, and maintaining integrity and accuracy in the transcription and reporting of interview content.

## Results

For the qualitative phase of data collection, 14 experts, specialists, and informed individuals in the field of organizational ethics, as well as managers of the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education, participated in semi-structured interviews. The overall demographic characteristics of the interviewees are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Participants in the Qualitative Phase

| Variable         | Category  | Frequency | Variable        | Category        | Frequency | Variable | Category       | Frequency |
|------------------|---|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|----------|----------------|-----------|
| Place of Service | Managers of the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education  | 6         | Education Level | Master's degree | 0         | Age      | Under 39 years | 1         |
|                  | Faculty members in Educational Management, Philosophy of Education, Human Resources, and Islamic Seminary Studies | 8         |                 | PhD             | 14        |          | 40–45 years    | 2         |
| Gender           | Female  | 2         |                 |                 |           |          | 46–50 years    | 6         |
|                  | Male  | 12        |                 |                 |           |          | Over 50 years  | 5         |
| Work Experience  | Less than 10 years  | 2         |                 |                 |           |          |                |           |
|                  | 11–20 years   | 2         |                 |                 |           |          |                |           |
|                  | More than 20 years  | 10        |                 |                 |           |          |                |           |

Following the analyses conducted, 28 indicators of organizational ethics derived from Nahj al-Balagha were extracted. These indicators, along with their sources, conceptual interpretations, frequencies, and corresponding codes, are presented in Table 2.



**Table 2.** Categorization and Clustering of Concepts and Codes Extracted from *Nahj al-Balagha*

| Statement   | Speaker       | Source                         | Extracted Concept                                | Frequency     | Code |
|---|---------------|--------------------------------|--|---------------|------|
| "I advise you to fear God and to maintain order in your affairs."   | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2014                   | Orderliness and discipline in work and education | 3             | E1   |
| "The most deserving of forgiveness are those who are most capable of punishment."   | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2006: 657              | Rejection of revenge                             | 5             | E2   |
| "Be aware that the Qur'an contains knowledge of the future, lessons from the past, a cure for your ailments, and order for your lives." | Imam Ali (AS) | Fayz al-Islam, 1986            | Learning from the Qur'an                         | 3             | E3   |
| Optimism is among the greatest virtues and finest gifts; it brings peace of heart and soundness of faith.                               | Imam Ali (AS) | Amadi, 1994: 253               | Optimism and inner peace                         | 5             | E4   |
| "The instrument of leadership is forbearance."  | Imam Ali (AS) | Chenari, 2016: 105             | Forbearance as a requirement of management       | 1             | E5   |
| "The greatest ignorance is a person's ignorance of their own worth."  | Imam Ali (AS) | Amadi, 1994                    | Self-awareness and recognition of dignity        | 3             | E6   |
| "No inheritance is better than good manners, and no support is better than consultation."   | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2006: 637              | Emphasis on collective reasoning                 | 3             | E7   |
| "Be kind and compassionate to people; let your heart be a source of mercy for your subordinates."                                       | Imam Ali (AS) | Delshad Tehrani, 2009          | Compassion toward others                         | 1             | E8   |
| "By God, if I face enemies alone, I will not fear them."  | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2006: 42               | The value of courage                             | 2             | E9   |
| Learning from the past and organizing life through divine guidance  | Imam Ali (AS) | Fayz al-Islam, 1986            | Learning lessons from the past                   | 2             | E10  |
| Ignorance as a result of self-neglect   | Imam Ali (AS) | Amadi, 1994                    | Self-neglect as ignorance                        | 3             | E11  |
| "Leaders are more deserving than others to conceal people's faults."  | Imam Ali (AS) | Ghasempour Khoshroudi, 2015: 8 | Confidentiality and ethical upbringing           | 2             | E12  |
| "The foundation of religion is knowing God."  | Imam Ali (AS) | Shari'atmadari                 | Knowledge of God as the basis of religiosity     | 3             | E13  |
| Optimism as a valuable blessing   | Imam Ali (AS) | Amadi, 1994: 253               | Optimism as a moral asset                        | 2             | E14  |
| "The fruit of courage is moral integrity."  | Imam Ali (AS) | Amadi, 1994: 328               | Courage and moral zeal                           | 2             | E15  |
| Trust in God  | Imam Ali (AS) | Shari'atmadari                 | Reliance on God (Tawakkul)                       | 2             | E16  |
| "Whoever does not oppose wrongdoing is like a dead person among the living."  | Imam Ali (AS) | Kulayni, 1986: 181             | Rejection of immoral behavior                    | 2             | E17  |
| "Nothing builds people's trust like benevolence from their ruler."  | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2006                   | Encouragement of benevolence                     | 3             | E18  |
| Forgiveness and kindness as moral values  | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2006: 657              | Value of forgiveness                             | 3             | E19  |
| Inner self-control based on piety   | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2006: 42               | Internal moral control                           | 2             | E20  |
| "Whoever believes in divine reward is generous."  | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2006: 659              | Generosity and belief in divine reward           | 2             | E21  |
| Ethical guidance and feedback in ethical challenges   | Imam Ali (AS) | Ghasempour Khoshroudi, 2015    | Ethical feedback and guidance                    | 3             | E22  |
| Avoidance of authoritarian behavior   | Imam Ali (AS) | Delshad Tehrani, 2009          | Avoiding authoritarian leadership                | 2             | E23  |
| Preserving respect for subordinates   | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2006                   | Respect for individuals                          | 2             | E24  |
| Commitment to justice and truth   | Imam Ali (AS) | Dashti, 2014                   | Commitment to righteousness                      | 3             | E25  |
| Integrity   | Imam Ali (AS) | Kulayni, 1986                  | Uprightness                                      | 1             | E26  |
| Optimism and soundness of faith   | Imam Ali (AS) | Amadi, 1994                    | Optimism and religious well-being                | 2             | E27  |
| Awareness of the future through divine guidance   | Imam Ali (AS) | Fayz al-Islam, 1986            | Foresight and moral education                    | 3             | E28  |
| Total extracted codes   | 1 speaker     | 7 sources                      | 28 concepts                                      | 72 references | 28   |



In the final stage of analysis, all conceptually related components were grouped under broader categories referred to as dimensions. As a result, for organizational ethics based on Nahj al-Balaghah, a total of 82 indicators, 21 components, and 6 dimensions were identified and extracted.

### Qualitative Analysis: Thematic Structure

Following the semi-structured interviews and the processes of open, axial, and selective coding, the extracted concepts were organized into basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes. This process resulted in a comprehensive ethical framework derived from Nahj al-Balaghah and supported by contemporary theoretical perspectives. The findings are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Basic, Organizing, and Global Themes Extracted from Semi-Structured Interviews

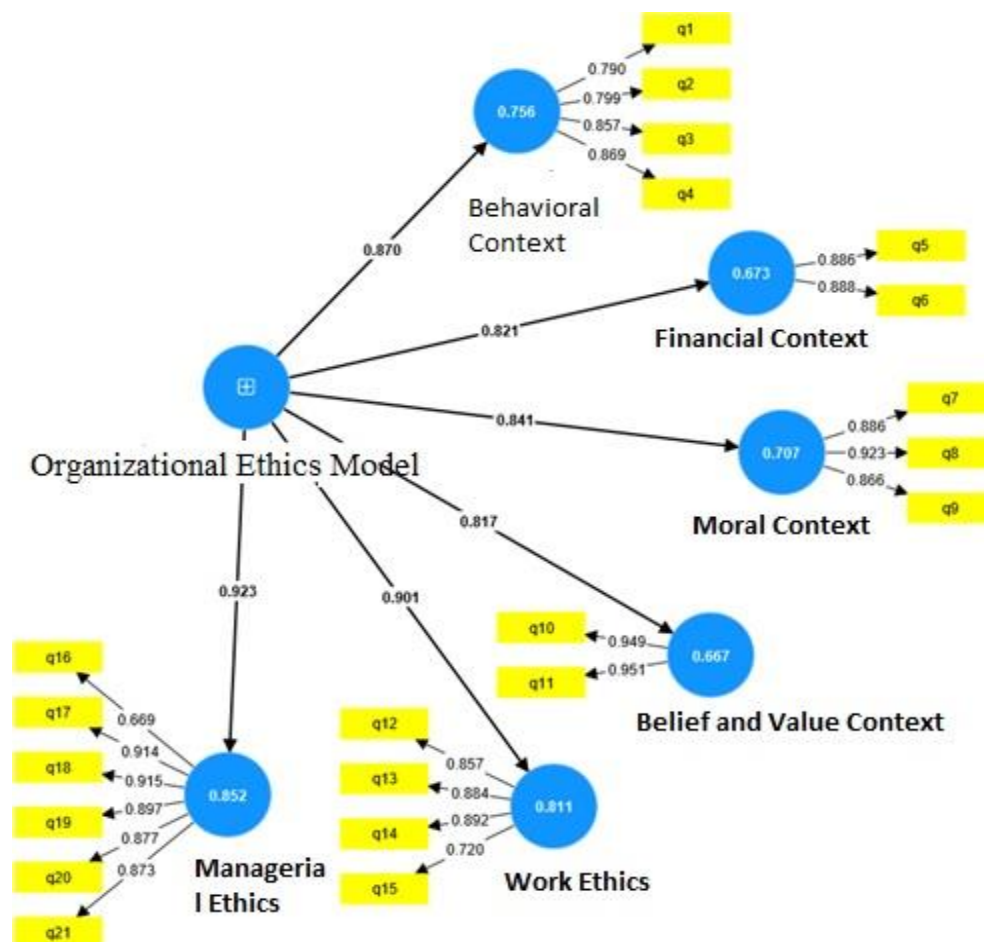
| Global Theme       | Organizing Theme                      | Basic Theme  | Source           | Theorists                         | Interview Codes       |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Behavioral Context | Magnanimity                           | Avoidance of authoritarian behavior                      | Nahj al-Balaghah | Kazemi & Heidari (2021)           | I3, I9, I5, I4, I2    |
|                    |                                       | Rejection of greed and excessive ambition                | Nahj al-Balaghah | Imani et al. (2021)               | I4, I8, I7, I6        |
|                    |                                       | Detachment from worldly appearances                      | —                | —                                 | I10, I6, I5, I1, I7   |
|                    |                                       | Self-esteem and dignity                                  | Nahj al-Balaghah | —                                 | I3, I9, I5, I4, I2    |
|                    |                                       | Courage and moral zeal                                   | Nahj al-Balaghah | —                                 | I4, I8, I7, I6        |
|                    | Compassion and Benevolence            | Self-restraint and anger control in dealing with others  | —                | —                                 | I3, I4, I11, I5       |
|                    |                                       | Forgiveness  | —                | —                                 | I10, I8, I3           |
|                    |                                       | Avoidance of resentment and revenge                      | Nahj al-Balaghah | Khodaei et al. (2021)             | —                     |
|                    | Patience and Forbearance              | Endurance and calmness in hardships                      | Nahj al-Balaghah | —                                 | —                     |
|                    |                                       | Patience in dealing with the needy                       | —                | —                                 | I6, I8, I10, I3, I4   |
|                    |                                       | Perseverance in performing duties                        | —                | —                                 | I10, I8, I1, I13, I14 |
|                    |                                       | Broad-mindedness   | Nahj al-Balaghah | —                                 | I3, I9, I5, I4, I2    |
|                    | Respect for Others' Rights            | Respecting individuals and subordinates                  | Nahj al-Balaghah | —                                 | I4, I8, I7, I6        |
|                    |                                       | Respect for privacy                                      | —                | Visch et al. (2021)               | I11, I12, I10, I4     |
| Financial Context  | Lawful Earnings                       | Non-materialistic attitude toward position and authority | —                | Badleh et al. (2020)              | I11, I9, I14, I4      |
|                    |                                       | Emphasis on lawful income                                | —                | —                                 | I6, I1, I2            |
|                    | Proper Allocation of Public Resources | Frugality in the use of public property                  | —                | —                                 | I11, I7, I10, I3, I1  |
|                    |                                       | Avoiding personal use of public funds                    | —                | —                                 | I3, I9, I5, I4, I2    |
|                    |                                       | Trustworthiness in public assets                         | —                | —                                 | I4, I8, I7, I6        |
| Moral Context      | Applied Ethics                        | Ethical performance                                      | —                | Tajdar & Safar-Mohammadloo (2019) | I5, I11, I4, I3       |

|                          |                        |  |                 |   |                       |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--|-----------------|---|-----------------------|
|                          |                        | Moral commitment                               | —               | —                                       | I1, I2, I9, I7, I5    |
|                          |                        | Good temper                                    | —               | —                                       | I8, I7, I11, I15      |
|                          |                        | Cheerfulness                                   | Nahj al-Balagha | —                                       | —                     |
|                          |                        | Learning lessons from the Qur'an               | Nahj al-Balagha | Rajab-Dari et al. (2021)                | —                     |
|                          |                        | Attracting affection                           | —               | Karami et al. (2017)                    | I11, I13, I14, I2, I9 |
|                          |                        | Kindness and respect toward subordinates       | Nahj al-Balagha | Tavassoli et al. (2019)                 | I3, I11, I5           |
|                          |                        | Avoidance of hypocrisy                         | —               | —                                       | I7, I3, I9, I10, I11  |
|                          |                        | Avoidance of fault-finding                     | —               | —                                       | I1, I9, I13           |
|                          | Moral Traits           | Humility and avoidance of arrogance            | —               | —                                       | I6, I7, I5, I4        |
|                          |                        | Honesty in speech and behavior                 | —               | —                                       | I7, I5, I1, I12       |
| Belief and Value Context | Asceticism and Piety   | Trust in God (Tawakkul)                        | Nahj al-Balagha | —                                       | I11, I1, I3, I8, I6   |
|                          |                        | Seeking livelihood through divine satisfaction | Nahj al-Balagha | —                                       | —                     |
|                          |                        | Piety and chastity                             | —               | —                                       | I3, I11, I5           |
|                          |                        | Commitment to truth                            | Nahj al-Balagha | —                                       | —                     |
|                          | Practical Faith        | Not being deceived by appearances              | —               | —                                       | I8, I2, I9, I1        |
|                          |                        | Simple lifestyle of managers                   | —               | —                                       | I11, I1, I3, I8, I6   |
|                          |                        | Broad-mindedness                               | —               | —                                       | I6, I9, I3, I21       |
|                          |                        | Emphasis on confidentiality                    | Nahj al-Balagha | —                                       | —                     |
| Work Ethics              | Justice Orientation    | Justice in minor affairs                       | —               | Szymanski & Olszewska (2021)            | I4, I2, I8, I5, I9    |
|                          |                        | Forgiving personal injustices                  | Nahj al-Balagha | —                                       | I11, I12, I10, I4     |
|                          | Organizational Justice | Distributive justice                           | Nahj al-Balagha | —                                       | I11, I9, I14, I4      |
|                          |                        | Procedural justice                             | —               | Gooch (2021)                            | I5, I6, I4, I13       |
|                          |                        | Interactional justice                          | —               | —                                       | I1, I2, I11, I7, I10  |
|                          |                        | Informational and spatial justice              | —               | —                                       | I2, I6, I10, I9       |
|                          |                        | Employment justice                             | —               | —                                       | I11, I9, I10, I4, I5  |
| Managerial Ethics        | Practical Management   | Commitment to obligations                      | —               | —                                       | I8, I3, I5, I4, I2    |
|                          |                        | Benevolence within the organization            | —               | —                                       | I4, I3, I2, I8, I6    |
|                          |                        | Sound judgment                                 | —               | —                                       | I3, I9, I5, I4, I2    |
|                          |                        | Correct understanding and perception           | —               | —                                       | I5, I8, I7, I6, I4    |
|                          |                        | Foresight and moral education                  | Nahj al-Balagha | —                                       | —                     |
|                          | Servant Leadership     | Public satisfaction                            | Nahj al-Balagha | Imani et al. (2021)                     | I3, I9, I5, I4, I2    |
|                          |                        | Assistance to organizational members           | Nahj al-Balagha | Ghanbari & Abdolmaleki (2021)           | I4, I8, I7, I6        |
|                          |                        | Priority of public interest                    | —               | Ghanbari & Navidi (2017)                | I2, I6, I7, I9        |
|                          |                        | Generosity toward people                       | Nahj al-Balagha | Badleh et al. (2020); Zhang & Hu (2020) | —                     |

### Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

After completing the qualitative analysis, the relationships among the research variables corresponding to each hypothesis were examined using a causal structural model based on the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique.

In the overall research model, illustrated in Figure 1, both the measurement model (relationships between observed variables and latent constructs) and the structural model (relationships among latent variables) were estimated simultaneously. The results of hypothesis testing are also reported separately based on the specific paths between variables.



**Figure 1.** Factor Loadings and Coefficient of Determination of the Organizational Ethics Model Based on Nahj al-Balaghah in the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education

## Discussion

Today, the strategic role of ethics in business and organizational environments has attracted increasing attention from strategic managers. Institutionalizing organizational ethical responsibilities is considered one of the most important issues in organizational leadership. Orientation toward ethical values in economic development is regarded as a pathway for transforming threats into opportunities (Gharamaleki, 2018).

In the present study, while acknowledging and respecting scientific findings and models developed in Western contexts, we argue that the foundations of those theories are rooted in ethical understandings shaped by their own cultural contexts and are not directly derived from the concepts of Nahj al-Balagha or Iranian-Islamic culture. Therefore, selected elements of these theories were adopted, while additional components aligned with indigenous cultural and religious values were incorporated to develop a context-specific model of organizational ethics.

Based on the findings of this study, organizational ethics grounded in Nahj al-Balagha within the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education comprises six overarching dimensions:

Behavioral context

Managerial ethics

Work ethics

Belief and value context

Moral context

Financial context

In the first phase of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify the dimensions, components, and indicators of organizational ethics. Ultimately, data obtained from 14 interviews resulted in the identification of 6 dimensions, 21 components, and 82 indicators. The extracted dimensions were largely consistent with the views of several scholars whose studies aligned conceptually with the objectives of the present research, as discussed below.

### Dimensions of Organizational Ethics

**Behavioral Context:** The results indicated that four components were identified within this dimension. Among them, magnanimity received the greatest emphasis from experts and from concepts derived from Nahj al-Balagha. This finding aligns with studies by Kazemi and Heidari (2021), Imani et al. (2021), Tayebi et al. (2021), Calhoun et al. (2011), Hazrati and Memarzadeh

(2014), and Khodaei et al. (2021). These scholars similarly emphasized avoiding authoritarian behavior, rejecting greed and excessive ambition, maintaining self-esteem and dignity, courage and moral zeal, avoidance of resentment and revenge, patience and composure in hardships, broad-mindedness, and respect for individuals and subordinates.

Conversely, researchers such as Szymanski and Olszewska (2021) and Zhang and Hu (2020) argued that ethical predispositions do not necessarily contribute to qualitative growth in organizational ethics and therefore should not be considered a central axis. From this perspective, their findings diverge from the results of the present study.

**Financial Context:** Two components were identified for this dimension. Overall, researchers such as Badleh et al. (2020) are consistent with these findings, emphasizing that a non-materialistic attitude toward position and authority constitutes an essential part of organizational ethics. However, Ghanbari and Abdolmaleki (2021) regarded financial considerations as a negative and inhibiting factor in ethics, which contrasts with the results of this study.

**Moral Context:** This dimension includes components such as applied ethics, moral traits, and ethical interactions. The findings are consistent with those of Szymanski and Olszewska (2021), Ghanbari and Abdolmaleki (2021), Alimohammadi et al. (2021), Tajdar and Safar-Mohammadloo (2019), Rajab-Dari et al. (2021), Karami et al. (2017), and Tavassoli et al. (2019), all of whom emphasized the role of individuals' religious and moral culture in shaping organizational ethics. In contrast, Calhoun et al. (2011) identified religious culture as a restrictive factor, rendering their findings inconsistent with the present research.

**Belief and Value Context:** For this dimension, two components were identified. Studies by Imani et al. (2021), Ghanbari and Abdolmaleki (2021), Tajdar and Safar-Mohammadloo (2019), Badleh et al. (2020), and Zhang and Hu (2020) support these findings. Most of these studies emphasized justice and fairness, simplicity of lifestyle, avoidance of superficial appearances, and the cultivation of confidentiality. No studies were found that explicitly rejected or contradicted these components.

**Work Ethics:** Components identified in this dimension included justice orientation, commitment to justice in administrative and organizational affairs, professional work ethics, and occupational ethics. The results indicate that strengthening these components can contribute significantly to the effective selection and development of managers within the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and

Medical Education. These findings are consistent with studies by Tajdar and Safar-Mohammadloo (2019), Rastgar and Enayati (2019), Gooch (2021), Szymanski and Olszewska (2021), Kazemi and Heidari (2021), and Alimohammadi et al. (2021).

However, Arar et al. (2016) argued that strict adherence to justice in all areas may lead to dissatisfaction among some employees and that substantial differentiation among staff based on performance is necessary. This perspective contrasts with the findings of the present study.

**Managerial Ethics:** This dimension encompasses components such as applied management, servant leadership, self-control, responsibility, meritocracy and merit-based selection, and enforcement of rules and regulations. The findings are consistent with those of Tayebi et al. (2021), Viseh et al. (2021), Imani et al. (2021), Kazemi and Heidari (2021), Carrington and Kimber (2020), Arar et al. (2016), Cahan et al. (2015), Habibi et al. (2021), Majdzadeh et al. (2019), Badleh et al. (2020), Zhang and Hu (2020), Ghanbari and Navidi (2017), and Ghanbari and Abdolmaleki (2021).

These studies emphasize that developing ethical models depends on effective managerial organization, meritocracy, and proper selection of managers and employees. In contrast, Tavassoli et al. (2019) considered managerial structuring a restrictive factor in organizational ethics, which diverges from the findings of the present research.

### **Quantitative Phases and Model Validation**

In the second phase, the DEMATEL technique was employed to determine the causal influence of identified factors on organizational ethics. Pairwise comparison questionnaires were distributed among 21 faculty members and managers. The results indicated that the behavioral context, financial context, belief and value context, moral context, managerial ethics, and work ethics were influential dimensions, respectively. Meanwhile, work ethics, managerial ethics, moral context, belief and value context, financial context, and behavioral context demonstrated the highest levels of dependence. Due to the novelty of the analytical approach, no directly comparable studies were identified.

In the third phase, the current status of organizational ethics dimensions and components was assessed. The results showed that all dimensions were at a moderate level, yet remained distant from the desired state. These findings are consistent with studies by Mohammadiha et al. (2019)

and Haj-Ali-Akbari et al. (2019), but contrast with Azizishamami (2017), who identified financial issues as the most significant weakness.

In the fourth phase, the integration of structural equation modeling revealed that the behavioral context ranked highest among the dimensions with a factor loading of 0.971, while the moral context ranked lowest with a factor loading of 0.718. Among components, commitment to justice in administrative and organizational affairs ranked highest (0.950), whereas lawful earnings ranked lowest (0.555). Given the originality of these dimensions and components, no comparable studies were identified.

In the fifth phase, the organizational ethics model based on Nahj al-Balagha was designed using an integrated structural equation modeling approach, incorporating dimensions such as philosophy and objectives, theoretical foundations, implementation stages, evaluation system, and executive mechanisms. A 34-item questionnaire was distributed among 30 faculty members and managers, confirming the practical applicability of the model with 6 dimensions, 21 components, and 82 indicators.

Finally, external validation of the model demonstrated high validity across all dimensions, including philosophy and objectives ( $M = 3.939$ ), evaluation system ( $M = 3.858$ ), executive mechanisms ( $M = 3.812$ ), supporting theories ( $M = 3.772$ ), and operational principles ( $M = 3.70$ ). No prior studies were found that examined this topic directly or indirectly.

### **Practical Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for strengthening organizational ethics grounded in Nahj al-Balagha within the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education:

Prioritize the recruitment, identification, and promotion of transformational managers committed to ethical principles in educational settings.

Enhance training programs and strengthen non-educational sectors, including administrative staff, sports services, social, cultural, and artistic services, international education, welfare facilities, economic services, and educational infrastructure.

Encourage managers to reinforce individual ethical traits such as courage and moral integrity.

Promote forgiveness and compassion through self-restraint and anger control.

Strengthen ethical foundations and indicators identified in this study among organizational leaders.



### Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

### Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

### Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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