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Validation of the Cultural Management Model from the Perspective of Nahj al-Balaghah

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to validate a cultural management model derived from the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah. The model seeks to explain the foundational beliefs, managerial values, and behavioral patterns required for effective cultural management within cultural and organizational institutions.

Methods: This research is applied–developmental in purpose and adopts an exploratory mixed-methods (qualitative–quantitative) design. In the qualitative phase, the dimensions and indicators of cultural management were identified through thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with seminary and university experts. In the quantitative phase, the proposed model was validated and the causal relationships were examined using a researcher-developed questionnaire and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The statistical population consisted of managers and experts working in national cultural institutions. Using Cochran's formula and simple random sampling, 255 respondents were selected for data collection.

Results: Qualitative findings revealed that the cultural management model based on Nahj al-Balaghah is structured around three core levels: belief-based foundations (God-centeredness, justice, and divine responsibility), managerial values (meritocracy, simplicity, participatory orientation, and social justice), and behavioral patterns (people-centeredness, accountability, integrity, discipline, and confronting managerial pathologies). Quantitative results indicated that all hypothesized paths in the structural model were statistically significant. Among them, managers' ethical–behavioral competencies exerted the strongest influence on cultural management ($\beta = 0.769$). Other factors, including Islamic decision-making, governance and leadership, belief-based competencies, Islamic organizational culture, and Islamic work values, also demonstrated positive and significant effects.

Conclusions: The findings suggest that effective cultural management emerges from the integrated interaction of managers' ethical, belief-based, cognitive, and behavioral competencies alongside supportive cultural and organizational contexts. The proposed model provides a valid indigenous framework for enhancing cultural management grounded in Nahj al-Balaghah.

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Introduction

Culture, as the backbone of collective identity and the context for the formation of behaviors, attitudes, and social values, plays a fundamental role in the sustainability and development of any society. Cultural management is regarded as the principal mechanism for guiding, regulating, reproducing, and safeguarding this identity-based heritage. Cultural management refers to the application of planning, organizing, directing, and monitoring processes over the material and immaterial resources of society, with the aim of promoting beliefs, values, norms, and symbols (Makhmudova, 2022) in line with the ultimate goals of society (Ansari et al., 2025). From an Islamic perspective, cultural management is a form of guardianship and guidance whose objective is to provide the conditions for human growth and spiritual proximity to God.

Numerous scholars have emphasized that no society can preserve social cohesion, transmit core values, or withstand waves of social change without effective cultural management (Bonyanian, 2006; Fazeli, 2022). From the viewpoint of theorists in the field of cultural governance, cultural management constitutes the hidden pillar of governance and the foundation of managing other domains; weakness in this area may lead to identity instability, value fragmentation, erosion of social capital, and the collapse of moral order (Saroukhani, 2011; Rahmani, 2021). Rapid transformations in the digital age, the expansion of global media, changes in lifestyles, the emergence of digital generations, and the decline of certain traditional institutions have further intensified the need for a renewed and scholarly focus on cultural management (Kazemi, 2018; Fazeli, 2019; Fakouhi, 2015).

Effective cultural management requires managers who are well informed about lifestyle transformations, media literacy, value changes, audience analysis, identity formation among younger generations, and the dynamic nature of culture. Such managers must possess the ability to analyze cultural transformations, guide public opinion, manage cultural conflicts, make value-based decisions, and design multi-level cultural interventions (Amini, 2016; Farhadi, 2020). Moreover, cultural management should be grounded in accurate data, surveys, sociological research, and foresight studies so that cultural policies move beyond reactive approaches and evolve into problem-oriented and solution-based policymaking.

Within this context, cultural management faces a range of structural and environmental challenges. The multiplicity of cultural institutions and the absence of a clear division of labor among them

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have resulted in parallel activities, overlapping responsibilities, and the waste of human and financial resources (Ma'navi-Pour, 2019). Furthermore, cultural decision-making is often based on managerial preferences rather than research evidence and empirical findings, leading to a lack of theoretical coherence and practical effectiveness in cultural policies (Kadivar, 2014; Afkhami, 2022). Rapid lifestyle changes, increasing individualism, cultural globalization, the growth of media consumption, weaknesses in producing competitive content, and the widening gap between younger generations and the country's formal cultural system have also given rise to more profound challenges (Hosseini et al., 2021; Rostami, 2016; Mirzaei, 2019). Many studies have stressed that the absence of a native, integrated, and deeply rooted model of cultural management is the most significant factor behind the inefficiency of cultural policymaking in Iran (Ma'navi-Pour, 2019; Bonyanian, 2006; Rashad, 2017).

In this regard, *Nahj al-Balagha*, as one of the richest texts of Islamic heritage, offers immense potential for designing a cultural management model. This invaluable text comprises sermons, letters, and aphorisms that articulate the foundations of just governance, social ethics, human education, the reform of public culture, popular participation, social supervision, public opinion guidance, and the principles of cultural leadership in a precise and practical manner (Motahhari, 1991; Kazemi, 2015; Pour-Ezzat et al., 2014). An examination of *Nahj al-Balagha* reveals that Imam Ali (peace be upon him) portrays the cultural manager as an ethical, responsible, prudent, people-oriented, justice-promoting individual who is well aware of social dynamics. Many concepts emphasized in contemporary theories of cultural management—such as governance ethics, cultural justice, social participation, meritocracy, value-based education, and wisdom in decision-making—are clearly articulated in Alawi teachings (Rashad, 2017; Amini, 2016; Farhadi, 2020). This substantial overlap between the content of *Nahj al-Balagha* and modern theories highlights its capacity to provide a native, valid, and scientific model in the field of cultural management.

Despite this vast potential, most previous studies have focused primarily on explaining cultural concepts in *Nahj al-Balagha* and have rarely offered a systematic and empirically verifiable model of cultural management (Hosseini et al., 2021; Razavi, 2013). On the other hand, the challenges of cultural policymaking in the country indicate the necessity of scientifically and empirically

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evaluating management models grounded in religious wisdom to assess their effectiveness in practice (Fazeli, 2022; Rostami, 2016).

Moreover, recent research has shown that cultural management cannot succeed without native and deeply rooted models (Ma'navi-Pour, 2019; Rahmani, 2021). Many Western models are not fully applicable within Iran's cultural context, and cultural policymaking must be based on the identity, value, and religious foundations of Iranian society. Accordingly, revisiting rich cultural sources such as *Nahj al-Balagha*, the Holy Qur'an, works of Islamic philosophy, and Iran's civilizational experience constitutes a strategic necessity, enabling cultural management to play an effective role in "identity formation, meaning-making, and society-building." Under such conditions, the need for a model that is rooted in Islamic epistemological foundations while also allowing for empirical assessment and practical application in real policymaking contexts is felt more strongly than ever. Several studies have addressed the present topic. For instance, Azimi et al. (2025), using a qualitative approach and thematic analysis, proposed a three-dimensional model of Islamic entrepreneurial management derived from Qur'anic verses and narrations from *Nahj al-Balagha*. These three dimensions include behavioral, contextual, and structural components, indicating that entrepreneurial management from an Islamic perspective is not limited to individual skills but is also dependent on cultural–value contexts and organizational structures. The resulting model can serve as a practical framework for organizations and Islamic societies. Shakeri (2025), in a review–analytical study on ethics in management from the perspective of *Nahj al-Balagha*, demonstrated that individual and social ethics play a fundamental role in the effectiveness of Islamic managers. The findings emphasize principles such as honesty, justice, humility, respect for people's rights, accountability, and avoidance of oppression as central to Imam Ali's (peace be upon him) managerial recommendations. The managerial model of Malik al-Ashtar is also introduced as a comprehensive example of ethical management. The study concludes that ethics is both a prerequisite for legitimacy and a key factor in sustainability and social trust in Islamic management. Nilchi et al. (2024), using thematic analysis and document analysis, designed a model for evaluating cultural governance in light of *Nahj al-Balagha*. In the first stage, 1,977 attributes were extracted from the complete text of *Nahj al-Balagha* and subsequently categorized into 564 indicators, 42 domains, and ultimately four core constructs—political, administrative, economic, and social. The findings underscore that *Nahj al-Balagha* is an exceptionally rich source

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for designing indicators to evaluate cultural governance, and the proposed model can serve as a foundation for developing cultural policies and strategic documents in the country.

Rajaei and Shabani (2024), using content analysis and MAXQDA software, examined Letter 53 of *Nahj al-Balagha* and categorized 111 initial codes into six overarching themes: economy-oriented requirements, political requirements, people-centered requirements, justice-oriented requirements, transcendence-oriented requirements, and ethics-oriented requirements. The findings indicate that an Islamic manager should prioritize spiritual values over material ones, uphold justice and ethics, treat people with kindness, maintain moderation and anger control, consult righteous individuals, and pay special attention to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This study emphasizes that *Nahj al-Balagha* can serve as a strategic charter for Islamic governance.

Kordheidari and Amini (2024), in a study examining the perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics of managers from the perspective of *Nahj al-Balagha* through a meta-synthesis of texts, adopted a developmental approach based on qualitative data collected via library and documentary methods. Using the Sandelowski and Barroso meta-synthesis method for summarizing, categorizing, and integrating concepts, the results identified 78 concepts and 22 core categories classified into three domains: perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral. Perceptual characteristics include the ability to analyze realities through a religious and holistic worldview; attitudinal characteristics relate to managers' internal beliefs and inclinations; and behavioral characteristics encompass actions and practices grounded in religious values.

Faramarznasab et al. (2024) examined the characteristics of the disciples of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) as cultural and educational managers. This analytical–descriptive study, based on the teachings of *Nahj al-Balagha*, found that the attributes emphasized by Imam Ali (peace be upon him) for cultural managers comprise a set of cognitive, ethical, behavioral, and managerial dimensions that can serve as a foundation for designing contemporary educational and managerial models.

Nikzadeh et al. (2023) proposed a competency model for cultural managers from the perspective of *Nahj al-Balagha*. The findings revealed that the competencies of cultural managers in *Nahj al-Balagha* encompass three main dimensions: (1) individual cultural dimension, including components such as self-management and self-efficacy, religiosity, moral development, spiritual

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enhancement, and positive thinking; (2) professional skills dimension, including foresight, managerial capability and artistry, managerial skills, and employee support; and (3) religious values dimension, comprising courage and decisiveness, integrity, respect for public rights, people-centeredness, and idealism. The final analysis suggests that these dimensions and components can provide a comprehensive and effective model for the selection, training, and evaluation of cultural managers within an Islamic system.

Mamouri (2025), in a qualitative study based on content analysis of 19 selected letters of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) and their comparison with 74 contemporary leadership theories, demonstrated that the leadership model in *Nahj al-Balagha* is founded upon ethics, spirituality, justice, and human-centeredness, and overlaps significantly with modern approaches such as transformational, servant, ethical, and authentic leadership. The results indicate that Alawi teachings can serve as a practical and inspiring foundation for enhancing organizational culture and improving governance in the modern era.

Al-Qur'an (2025), through an integrative literature review and critical analysis of decision-making theories, concluded that from the perspective of Islamic culture, behavioral decision-making theory—with its emphasis on bounded rationality and conditions of uncertainty—shows the greatest compatibility with Islamic management. This study introduces *shūrā* (consultation) as the core of Islamic strategic decision-making and identifies criteria such as faith, justice, trustworthiness, and expertise as essential for selecting advisors. The article ultimately proposes an Islamic theoretical framework for strategic decision-making.

Menkar et al. (2023) concluded that cultural diversity and the deep-rooted nature of local customs can simultaneously represent both challenges and opportunities for implementing Islamic-based institutional management models. Resistance to change, limited resources, and divergent interpretations of Sharia rulings were identified as major barriers to implementation. Conversely, active community participation and the involvement of local leaders in decision-making, policy flexibility, adaptive training programs, and innovation in management practices aligned with cultural contexts were highlighted as key opportunities for enhancing organizational effectiveness.

Karami et al. (2023), in a study entitled *"Assessing the Validity of a Talent Management Model Based on the Teachings of Nahj al-Balagha,"* concluded that the model derived from the teachings

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of *Nahj al-Balagha* can be considered a valid, practical, and reliable framework for talent management in organizations.

Davoudi Sharifabad and Seyyedi (2023), in a study titled *"Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Sermons of Nahj al-Balagha,"* reported that Imam Ali's (peace be upon him) discourse exhibited the highest frequency in the descriptive stage (65%) and the lowest frequency in the explanatory stage (9%). Furthermore, based on Berman's (2010) translation model, the clarification strategy had the highest application rate (33%), whereas qualitative attenuation and logical justification strategies showed the lowest frequency (8% each).

Mourni (2021), in a study entitled *"Islamic Cultural Management in School Educational Institutions,"* examined the role of education and management in shaping Islamic culture within educational environments. The findings indicate that fostering an Islamic culture in schools not only influences students' individual and collective behaviors but also provides a foundation for improving educational quality, developing moral character, and achieving the objectives of the Islamic educational system.

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to design and validate a cultural management model based on the teachings of *Nahj al-Balagha*. By proposing an integrated, indigenous, and empirically assessable model, this research can serve as a practical framework for cultural planning and governance in the country, contributing to enhanced policy effectiveness, strengthened cultural cohesion, and the wise guidance of cultural dynamics.

Material and Methods

The purpose of the present study is to validate a cultural management model derived from the teachings of Nahj al-Balagha. In terms of purpose, this research is classified as applied–developmental, and in terms of methodology, it adopts an exploratory mixed-methods design (qualitative–quantitative).

Qualitative Phase

In the qualitative phase, the study population consisted of university faculty members and seminary scholars familiar with religious texts such as Nahj al-Balagha, with more than ten years of teaching experience and relevant academic publications, as well as senior cultural managers with over fifteen years of professional experience and postgraduate education in cultural fields.

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Participants were selected through purposive (judgmental) sampling, followed by snowball sampling.

Interviews were conducted until no new data emerged and theoretical saturation was achieved; in total, fifteen interviews were carried out. Data analysis was performed using the thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke. In this process, the researcher first gained deep familiarity with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and multiple reviews of the audio recordings. Initial coding was then conducted by extracting meaning units, and the resulting codes were organized into initial themes. In the subsequent stage, these themes were reviewed to assess their coherence with the raw data and the entire dataset. After refinement and stabilization of the themes, precise definitions and appropriate labels were assigned to each theme, and finally, the findings were reported in the form of an integrated analytical narrative.

To enhance the credibility of the qualitative findings, the researcher engaged in prolonged interaction with the data and employed follow-up questions to refine interpretations. A portion of the findings was returned to the interviewees for confirmation or modification (member checking). Triangulation was achieved by incorporating the perspectives of university experts, seminary scholars, and cultural managers, and any inconsistencies were carefully examined.

Quantitative Phase

In the quantitative phase, the statistical population included managers and experts working in the country's cultural institutions. Given the relatively homogeneous structure of the population, simple random sampling was employed to ensure that all members had an equal chance of selection. The sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula based on a population of 750 individuals, a 5% margin of error, and an estimated proportion of p=q=0.5 p = q = 0.5 p=q=0.5, resulting in a required sample size of 255 respondents. To account for potential non-response, questionnaires were distributed to 280 individuals, of which 255 completed and usable questionnaires were ultimately collected.

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire. Content validity was assessed using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR). Reliability was evaluated by calculating Cronbach's alpha for each construct. Items and constructs with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70 were deemed reliable, and the final version of the questionnaire was subsequently developed.

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For data analysis, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS software (version 3).

Results

Qualitative Findings

In this section, the characteristics of the experts participating in the qualitative phase are first presented. The findings indicated that 60% of the experts were male, and the majority were within the age range of 41–45 years. In terms of educational background, most participants held either a doctoral degree or a master's degree. Furthermore, the majority had between 16–20 years or more than 20 years of professional experience, reflecting a high level of expertise and substantial familiarity with the subject of cultural management from the perspective of Nahj al-Balagha.

Based on the thematic analysis of the interview data, a comprehensive framework of cultural management was extracted. The results were organized into overarching themes, organizing themes, and basic themes, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions, Components, and Indicators of Cultural Management from the Perspective of Nahj al-Balagha (Experts' Views)

Overarching Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes (Indicators)
Personal and Ideological Competencies of the Manager	Religious beliefs and faith	Degree of God-centeredness in policymaking and managerial decisions
		Practical commitment to Islamic rulings and Qur'anic–Alawi values in action
		Adherence to *wilāyah* and religious criteria in managing cultural affairs
		Presence of piety, trust in God, and faith when facing managerial crises
		Avoidance of decisions contrary to divine and ethical principles
	Spirituality and personal well-being	Continuous self-accountability, self-discipline, and moral refinement in management
		Attention to afterlife responsibility and the spiritual consequences of decisions
		Maintaining psychological health, emotional stability, and calmness under pressure
		Creating hope, vitality, and spiritual motivation among employees and audiences
		Avoidance of despair-inducing, violent, or discouraging behaviors
	Insight and holistic vision	Analyzing cultural issues based on public interest, religious duty, and Islamic rationality
		Discernment in distinguishing truth from falsehood in organizational and social matters

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		Foresight regarding long-term consequences, especially for future generations
		Socio-political awareness of changes in the cultural environment
		Ability to explain events and guide employees intellectually based on Alawi wisdom
Ethical–Behavioral Competencies of the Manager	Personal ethics	Absolute honesty in organizational speech and conduct
		Trustworthiness in managing resources, information, and public trust
		Humility and modesty in dealing with employees and even opponents
		Open-mindedness in listening to criticism and accepting correction
		Simple lifestyle and avoidance of managerial extravagance
	Justice orientation	Fair distribution of opportunities, positions, and resources
		Avoidance of ethnic, gender, ideological, or factional discrimination
		Justice in performance evaluation, rewards, and disciplinary actions
		Sensitivity to cultural and social inequalities
		Defense of the rights of the vulnerable and prevention of violations of *ḥaqq al-nās*
	Human dignity and public rights	Strict observance of people's rights in decisions and administrative processes
		Dignity-centered interaction with staff, clients, and critics
		Special attention to deprived and vulnerable groups in cultural policies
		Complete avoidance of oppression, humiliation, coercion, or abuse of power
		Fairness and ethics in dealing with violations and errors
	Piety and self-control	Control of selfish desires in the use of power and authority
		Avoidance of autocracy, authoritarianism, and individual-centered decision-making
		Ethical and internal supervision of agents rather than merely formal control
		Firm, fair, and transparent confrontation with administrative and moral corruption
		Observance of piety in relationships, contracts, interactions, and decisions
Knowledge-Based and Professional Competencies	Managerial knowledge and insight	Mastery of public management and Islamic management principles based on *Nahj al-Balagha*
		Awareness of psychology, sociology, and the culture of the target society
		Proper understanding of laws, policies, and structures of the Islamic system
		Ability to analyze economic and social issues affecting culture
		Identification of cultural priorities based on religious and expert foundations
	Learning and knowledge development	Continuous study of religious, managerial, and cultural resources
		Active participation in scientific and training programs

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		Promotion of organizational learning culture
		Continuous self-evaluation and refinement of managerial style
		Learning from successful and unsuccessful past experiences (Alawi lessons)
	Meritocracy and talent management	Appointment based on faith, trustworthiness, expertise, and justice
		Designing transparent and fair evaluation systems
		Planning for career development and empowerment of talented staff
		Prevention of nepotism, factionalism, and patronage
		Providing equal opportunities for growth
	Decision-making skills	Evidence-based decision-making grounded in Islamic rationality
		Use of consultation (*shūrā*) with competent and righteous experts
		Consideration of medium- and long-term cultural consequences
		Ability to make timely and sound decisions under uncertainty and crisis
		Avoidance of hasty, biased, or emotional decisions
Behavioral–Managerial Competencies	Communication and persuasion skills	Holding direct dialogue sessions with staff and the public; active listening
		Persuasion through rational and religious reasoning rather than coercion
		Transparent explanation of decisions to stakeholders
		Respectful and reasoned responses to criticism
		Use of polite, respectful, yet firm language
	Conflict and error management	Holding joint meetings with conflicting parties
		Use of trustworthy mediators in sensitive conflicts
		Prohibition of gossip, suspicion, and slander in the workplace
		Recording and analyzing errors for process improvement
		Accepting managerial responsibility for errors and modeling accountability
	Leadership and entrepreneurship	Initiating innovative cultural and educational programs
		Field presence and continuous follow-up by the manager
		Accepting responsibility for outcomes without blame-shifting
		Careful assessment of risks before undertaking cultural initiatives
		Encouraging creativity through personal role modeling
	Time management and efficiency	Commitment to punctuality and honoring commitments
		Prioritization of tasks based on importance and urgency
		Continuous monitoring of costs and project timelines
		Optimal use of resources and avoidance of waste
		Defining performance indicators for cultural units
Islamic Organizational Culture and Values	Ethical–cultural values	Emphasis on divine intention and service to people
		Performing duties conscientiously even without supervision

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		Proactive problem-solving for citizens
		Observance of citizens' rights in interactions
		Organizational participation in social responsibility activities
	Knowledge-based values	Use of valid research and data in cultural planning
		Documentation of experiences for future decisions
		Monitoring intellectual, media, and social trends
		Scenario planning and attention to long-term impacts
		Consultation with scientific and cultural elites
Good Governance and Leadership	Good (Karimah) governance	Continuous engagement of managers with the public
		Public accountability for cultural decisions
		Merit-based selection of middle managers
		Correction of deviations in cultural institutions
		Reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy
	Transparent governance	Public disclosure of financial and performance reports
		Transparency systems for contracts and budgets
		Internal and external oversight mechanisms
		Prohibition of conflicts of interest
		Documentation of major cultural decisions
Islamic Decision-Making	Islamic behavioral decision-making	Integration of reason, revelation, and experience
		Regular consultation with trustworthy experts
		Evaluation based on Islamic jurisprudential principles
		Alignment of decisions with divine goals and Alawi values
		Avoidance of impulsive or self-interested decisions
Adaptive Islamic Leadership	Alawi leadership and contemporary theories	Alignment with justice, asceticism, courage, and compassion
		Emphasis on spiritual and moral development of followers
		People-centered decision-making
		Guidance through dialogue and persuasion
		Managerial role modeling in simplicity and integrity

Quantitative Findings (Measurement Model Evaluation)

To validate the cultural management model, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed. Given that Partial Least Squares (PLS) is a nonparametric technique, the assumption of data normality is not required; therefore, normality tests were neither conducted nor reported.

As the first step in evaluating the measurement model, the factor loadings of the indicators were examined. The results of the factor loadings, along with their standard deviations, t-values, and significance levels, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Factor Loadings of the Main Indicators of Cultural Management

Path	Factor Loading	Std. Deviation	t-value	P-value
QA_01 ← Religious Beliefs and Convictions	0.663	0.030	21.816	0.001
QA_02 ← Religious Beliefs and Convictions	0.865	0.023	37.913	0.001
QA_03 ← Religious Beliefs and Convictions	0.850	0.024	35.226	0.001
QA_03 ← Personal and Faith-Based Competencies of the Manager	0.883	0.020	45.093	0.001
QA_04 ← Religious Beliefs and Convictions	0.919	0.010	95.463	0.001

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QA_05 ← Religious Beliefs and Convictions	0.894	0.017	54.072	0.001
QA_06 ← Spirituality and Personal Well-being	0.917	0.010	93.287	0.001
QA_07 ← Spirituality and Personal Well-being	0.887	0.019	47.771	0.001
QA_08 ← Spirituality and Personal Well-being	0.834	0.025	33.805	0.001
QA_09 ← Spirituality and Personal Well-being	0.841	0.019	44.772	0.001
QA_22 ← Justice Orientation	0.794	0.030	26.848	0.001
QA_23 ← Justice Orientation	0.756	0.036	20.991	0.001
QA_24 ← Justice Orientation	0.858	0.017	51.915	0.001
QA_25 ← Justice Orientation	0.876	0.013	68.710	0.001
QA_26 ← Public Rights and Human Dignity	0.839	0.018	47.496	0.001
QA_27 ← Public Rights and Human Dignity	0.899	0.012	77.521	0.001
QA_28 ← Public Rights and Human Dignity	0.891	0.016	56.573	0.001
QA_29 ← Public Rights and Human Dignity	0.880	0.016	55.465	0.001
QA_30 ← Public Rights and Human Dignity	0.847	0.021	39.664	0.001
QA_31 ← Piety and Self-Control	0.833	0.021	40.191	0.001
QA_32 ← Piety and Self-Control	0.821	0.020	40.808	0.001
QA_33 ← Piety and Self-Control	0.894	0.010	86.860	0.001
QA_34 ← Piety and Self-Control	0.894	0.010	88.397	0.001
QA_35 ← Piety and Self-Control	0.849	0.019	44.637	0.001
QA_36 ← Managerial Knowledge and Insight	0.858	0.018	47.792	0.001
QA_37 ← Managerial Knowledge and Insight	0.833	0.022	37.998	0.001
QA_46 ← Meritocracy and Talent Management	0.831	0.027	30.989	0.001
QA_47 ← Meritocracy and Talent Management	0.883	0.017	50.898	0.001
QA_48 ← Meritocracy and Talent Management	0.893	0.015	60.877	0.001
QA_49 ← Meritocracy and Talent Management	0.924	0.011	83.342	0.001
QA_50 ← Meritocracy and Talent Management	0.900	0.016	57.480	0.001
QA_51 ← Decision-Making Skills	0.806	0.024	33.478	0.001
QA_52 ← Decision-Making Skills	0.887	0.012	71.565	0.001
QA_66 ← Leadership and Entrepreneurial Capacity	0.806	0.030	27.026	0.001
QA_67 ← Leadership and Entrepreneurial Capacity	0.794	0.023	34.064	0.001
QA_68 ← Leadership and Entrepreneurial Capacity	0.788	0.025	31.136	0.001
QA_69 ← Leadership and Entrepreneurial Capacity	0.810	0.022	36.734	0.001
QA_70 ← Leadership and Entrepreneurial Capacity	0.737	0.029	25.394	0.001
QA_71 ← Time Management and Efficiency	0.805	0.023	35.333	0.001
QA_72 ← Time Management and Efficiency	0.837	0.022	38.723	0.001
QA_73 ← Time Management and Efficiency	0.841	0.022	38.548	0.001
QA_86 ← Professional and Foundational Values	0.792	0.020	40.449	0.001
QA_87 ← Professional and Foundational Values	0.740	0.025	30.022	0.001
QA_88 ← Professional and Foundational Values	0.860	0.021	40.489	0.001
QA_89 ← Professional and Foundational Values	0.793	0.035	22.364	0.001
QA_90 ← Professional and Foundational Values	0.909	0.011	80.708	0.001
QA_91 ← Error Management Culture	0.830	0.019	43.036	0.001
QA_92 ← Error Management Culture	0.851	0.015	57.200	0.001
QA_93 ← Error Management Culture	0.712	0.030	23.818	0.001
QA_94 ← Error Management Culture	0.782	0.025	31.430	0.001
QA_95 ← Error Management Culture	0.692	0.040	17.244	0.001
QA_96 ← Academic and Educational Organizational Culture	0.749	0.027	27.436	0.001
QA_97 ← Academic and Educational Organizational Culture	0.791	0.022	36.525	0.001
QA_98 ← Academic and Educational Organizational Culture	0.810	0.023	35.189	0.001
QA_99 ← Academic and Educational Organizational Culture	0.811	0.021	37.773	0.001
QA_100 ← Academic and Educational Organizational Culture	0.873	0.015	59.903	0.001
QA_101 ← Good (Karimah) Governance	0.901	0.013	68.942	0.001
QA_111 ← Cultural Governance	0.722	0.029	24.554	0.001
QA_112 ← Cultural Governance	0.769	0.030	25.290	0.001
QA_113 ← Cultural Governance	0.721	0.035	20.691	0.001
QA_114 ← Cultural Governance	0.802	0.022	36.311	0.001

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QA_115 ← Cultural Governance	0.787	0.023	33.814	0.001
QA_116 ← Financial Policymaking	0.801	0.031	26.039	0.001
QA_117 ← Financial Policymaking	0.795	0.027	29.255	0.001
QA_118 ← Financial Policymaking	0.858	0.019	46.085	0.001
QA_138 ← Islamic Cultural Management in Education	0.652	0.133	4.891	0.001
QA_139 ← Islamic Cultural Management in Education	0.862	0.017	50.398	0.001
QA_140 ← Islamic Cultural Management in Education	0.752	0.027	27.983	0.001

The table 2 presents the factor loadings of the indicators associated with each construct. The primary criterion for retaining an indicator was a factor loading greater than 0.70; however, indicators with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 were also examined. Based on the results, all indicators exhibited factor loadings above 0.40 and significance levels below 0.05. Consequently, no indicator was removed from the model. These findings indicate an excellent fit of the measurement model in terms of factor loadings.

The results related to composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Composite Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Research Constructs

Construct	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Individual Ethics	0.934	0.738
Work Ethics and Religiosity	0.921	0.745
Organizational Integration and Cultural Diversity	0.871	0.771
Islamic Work Values and Ethics	0.940	0.887
Ethical–Cultural Values	0.938	0.751
Professional and Foundational Values	0.911	0.674
Knowledge–Insight Values	0.888	0.616
Behavioral–Islamic Decision-Making Model	0.874	0.583
Religious Beliefs and Convictions	0.924	0.711
Insight and Holistic Thinking	0.943	0.769
Islamic Decision-Making	0.876	0.779
Piety and Self-Control	0.933	0.738
Cultural Diversity and Institutional Management	0.875	0.778
Leadership and Entrepreneurial Capacity	0.890	0.618
Public Rights and Human Dignity	0.940	0.760
Practical Wisdom and Prudence in Decision-Making	0.921	0.701
Good (Karimah) Governance	0.943	0.768
Transparent Governance	0.934	0.739
Cultural Governance	0.873	0.579
Governance and Leadership	0.884	0.720
Financial Policymaking	0.917	0.688
Managerial Knowledge and Insight	0.910	0.670
Adaptive Islamic Leadership	0.906	0.828
Alavi Leadership and Contemporary Theories	0.950	0.904
Cultural Context and Environment	0.878	0.783
Time Management and Efficiency	0.921	0.699
Healthy Governance and Political System	0.928	0.719
Islamic Cultural Management in Education	0.888	0.615

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Cultural Management	0.920	0.794
Cultural Management in Police and Law Enforcement Institutions	0.908	0.666
Organizational Cultural Management	0.913	0.678
Spirituality and Personal Well-Being	0.941	0.760
Communication and Persuasion Skills	0.934	0.739
Decision-Making Skills	0.936	0.747
Learning and Knowledge Development	0.860	0.555

According to the results presented in Table 3, all composite reliability (CR) values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability for all research constructs. Moreover, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are equal to or greater than 0.50, demonstrating adequate convergent validity. This implies that, on average, each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Matrix Based on the Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Constructs	Construct 1	Construct 2	Construct 3	Construct 4	Construct 5
Construct 1	$\sqrt{AVE_1}$				
Construct 2	Cor(1,2)	$\sqrt{AVE_2}$			
Construct 3	Cor(1,3)	Cor(2,3)	$\sqrt{AVE_3}$		
Construct 4	Cor(1,4)	Cor(2,4)	Cor(3,4)	$\sqrt{AVE_4}$	
Construct 5	Cor(1,5)	Cor(2,5)	Cor(3,5)	Cor(4,5)	$\sqrt{AVE_5}$

As shown in Table 4, the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

Predictive Relevance and Model Fit

The results of the Stone–Geisser's Q^2 criterion indicate that all Q^2 values for the research constructs are greater than zero, suggesting strong predictive relevance and an appropriate structural model fit.

Table 5. Model Goodness-of-Fit Index

Statistic	Value
SRMR (Threshold < 0.08)	0.063

As presented in Table 5, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value is 0.063, which is below the recommended threshold of 0.08. This finding indicates an acceptable overall goodness of fit for the proposed model.

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Table 6. Results of Hypotheses Testing (Structural Model Paths)

No.	Path	Path Coefficient	Std. Deviation	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
1	Governance and Leadership → Cultural Management	0.689	0.044	15.659	0.001	Supported
2	Islamic Organizational Culture and Values → Cultural Management	0.580	0.052	11.154	0.001	Supported
3	Managerial Behavioral Competencies → Cultural Management	0.543	0.073	7.438	0.001	Supported
4	Ethical–Behavioral Competencies of the Manager → Cultural Management	0.769	0.058	13.259	0.001	Supported
5	Individual and Faith-Based Competencies of the Manager → Cultural Management	0.604	0.048	12.583	0.001	Supported
6	Cultural Context and Environment → Cultural Management	0.501	0.045	11.133	0.001	Supported
7	Islamic Work Values and Ethics → Cultural Management	0.449	0.055	8.164	0.001	Supported
8	Adaptive Islamic Leadership → Cultural Management	0.550	0.054	10.185	0.001	Supported
9	Knowledge–Professional Competencies → Cultural Management	0.553	0.066	8.379	0.001	Supported
10	Islamic Decision-Making → Cultural Management	0.744	0.122	6.098	0.001	Supported

The results of structural equation modeling indicate that all independent variables included in the model have a statistically significant effect on cultural management. For all structural paths, the P-values are equal to 0.001 and below the 0.05 significance level, and the corresponding t-values substantially exceed the critical value of 1.96. Therefore, all research hypotheses are supported.

Among the examined dimensions, ethical–behavioral competencies of the manager exert the strongest influence on cultural management ($\beta = 0.769$, $t = 13.259$). This finding highlights that managerial ethics, justice-oriented behavior, humility, responsibility, and practical commitment to religious values play a decisive role in enhancing organizational cultural management.

The second strongest predictor is Islamic decision-making ($\beta = 0.744$, $t = 6.098$), indicating that decision-making processes grounded in Sharia-based, rational, and justice-oriented principles significantly strengthen coherence and effectiveness in cultural management.

Furthermore, individual and faith-based competencies of managers ($\beta = 0.604$, $t = 12.583$) underscore the importance of internalized beliefs, piety, self-control, and intrinsic adherence to Islamic values in shaping effective cultural management.

Variables related to governance and leadership ($\beta = 0.689$) and adaptive Islamic leadership ($\beta = 0.550$) demonstrate that participatory leadership styles, justice, consultation (shūrā), and the contextual adaptation of Islamic principles meaningfully enhance cultural management practices.

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At the organizationalial behavioral Islamic organizational culture and values (β = 0.580), managerial behavioral competencies (β = 0.543), and knowledge–professional competencies (β = 0.553) all show positive and significant effects. This implies that the closer an organization's value system, managerial conduct, and professional expertise align with Islamic and professional standards, the more coherent and effective its cultural management becomes.

Finally, cultural context and environment (β = 0.501) and Islamic work values and ethics (β = 0.449) also significantly influence cultural management, albeit with relatively weaker effects. These results indicate that societal and organizational cultural contexts, as well as adherence to Islamic work ethics such as trustworthiness, fairness, work conscience, and justice in professional relations, meaningfully contribute to cultural management outcomes.

Discussion

The findings of the present study indicate that cultural management from the perspective of Nahj al-Balagha constitutes a coherent, multi-layered, and value-oriented system that integrally encompasses ethical, faith-based, managerial, governance-related, and behavioral dimensions. In the qualitative phase, a total of 182 basic themes, 36 organizing themes, and 11 global themes were identified from the perspectives of experts. These global themes include: individual and faith-based competencies of the manager; ethical–behavioral competencies of the manager; knowledge–professional competencies; behavioral–managerial competencies; Islamic organizational culture and values; governance and leadership; cultural management; cultural context and environment; Islamic work values and ethics; Islamic decision-making; and adaptive Islamic leadership. Together, these themes reflect the conceptual richness and structural coherence of cultural management as articulated in Nahj al-Balagha.

The results of the quantitative phase and structural equation modeling further demonstrated that all research constructs exhibited highly satisfactory measurement properties, as evidenced by strong factor loadings, high composite reliability, and acceptable levels of average variance extracted. None of the measurement items required elimination, indicating an appropriate fit of the measurement model and strong theoretical consistency of the proposed framework. These findings confirm that the conceptual structure derived from the qualitative phase was empirically supported and statistically robust.

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Analysis of the quantitative findings reveals that components such as religious beliefs and convictions, personal spirituality, justice orientation, public rights and human dignity, piety and self-control, managerial knowledge and insight, meritocracy, decision-making skills, leadership and entrepreneurial capacity, time management, professional and foundational values, error management culture, academic organizational culture, good governance, cultural governance, financial policymaking, and Islamic cultural management in education all play a decisive role in shaping the optimal Alavi model of cultural management. This breadth of influential factors underscores the comprehensive and systemic nature of cultural management in the framework of Nahj al-Balagha. Overall, the findings suggest that Nahj al-Balagha emphasizes three fundamental pillars in cultural management.

The first pillar concerns the faith-based and ethical foundations of the manager, encompassing religious beliefs, piety, justice, respect for public rights, professional ethics, self-control, insight, and holistic thinking. This dimension functions as the moral and spiritual infrastructure of the cultural manager's character.

The second pillar relates to managerial and governance competencies, including managerial knowledge, decision-making skills, meritocracy, financial policymaking, good (karimah) governance, supervision and control, error management, and the capacity to administer the cultural system in an intelligent, transparent, and justice-oriented manner.

The third pillar is the cultural–social and environmental dimension, which includes organizational culture, Islamic cultural management in education, cultural diversity, institutional adaptability, and continuous monitoring of cultural transformations. This dimension highlights the necessity of contextual awareness, sensitivity to social change, and cultural intelligence in cultural management.

The findings further demonstrate that the optimal model of cultural management derived from Nahj al-Balagha is neither merely an ethical model nor solely a managerial one, but rather a strategic framework for sustainable and just cultural governance. Moreover, the quantitative results indicate that the conceptual structure of the study exhibits strong internal coherence, enabling it to serve as an indigenous and applicable model for cultural management across educational, governmental, and social institutions.

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Finally, the present study emphasizes that enhancing the effectiveness of cultural management at the national level requires the operationalization of Nahj al-Balagha–based approaches in policymaking, planning, evaluation systems, supervision mechanisms, and human capital development. Establishing institutions such as a Cultural Monitoring Center based on Alavi indicators, reforming cultural structures, clarifying organizational missions, and enhancing the competencies of cultural managers are among the most important practical implications inspired by this research. Overall, the findings suggest that Nahj al-Balagha can be presented as a comprehensive, operational, and future-oriented model for Iranian–Islamic cultural management—a model that, if properly implemented, has the potential to transform the cultural system from a reactive and fragmented state into an intelligent, justice-oriented, and transformative system.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. First, all data were collected through self-report measures, which may involve social desirability bias and perceptual errors. Second, the subjective nature of certain constructs—such as spirituality, values, and ethics—may have led to variations in respondents' interpretations. Third, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to examine the stability of relationships and constructs over time.

Accordingly, future research is recommended to replicate the proposed model across different organizational contexts and sectors to enhance its generalizability. The use of mixed methods, particularly in-depth qualitative interviews, may provide deeper insights into spiritual, ethical, and managerial constructs. Furthermore, cultural policymakers are encouraged to utilize key constructs of the model—such as justice orientation, piety, good governance, and Islamic cultural management—as central pillars in the formulation of organizational and national cultural programs.

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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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