

Designing an Iranian–Islamic Lifestyle Model for Managers Based on Compassionate Management: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to design an Iranian–Islamic lifestyle model for managers based on the principles and components of compassionate management.

Methods and Materials: This applied qualitative study employed an exploratory design and content analysis approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews as well as a review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, resulting in a final sample of 15 participants. The credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative data were established through confirmability procedures. Data analysis was conducted systematically using three stages of coding, including open, axial, and selective coding, to identify, organize, and integrate the main categories and subcategories constituting the proposed Iranian–Islamic managerial lifestyle model grounded in compassionate management.

Findings: The qualitative analysis resulted in the identification of five major dimensions of the proposed model. The personal growth and development dimension comprised strengthening responsibility, reducing feelings of career plateau, fostering creativity and innovation, encouraging study and reflection, and strengthening faith and spirituality. The ethical dimension included promoting mutual respect, developing employee commitment, observing ethical principles, fostering discipline, and establishing justice based on kindness. The social interaction dimension encompassed enhancing employee happiness, developing an organizational culture of support, establishing humane and high-quality relationships, attending to employees' interests and needs, creating a participatory and interactive environment, and promoting meritocracy and effectiveness. The identity and cultural dimension involved promoting Iranian–Islamic culture and identity and drawing upon Iranian–Islamic teachings. Finally, the educational dimension included implementing educational programs, designing curricula based on compassionate management, applying appropriate compassion-oriented instructional approaches, and conducting extracurricular activities intended to strengthen compassion within managerial and organizational practices.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that an Iranian–Islamic lifestyle model for managers based on compassionate management is a multidimensional framework integrating personal development, ethical conduct, constructive social relationships, cultural and religious identity, and education. Applying this model may contribute to more humane, value-oriented, supportive, and ethically grounded managerial practices consistent with Iranian–Islamic principles.

Keywords: Iranian–Islamic lifestyle; compassionate management; managers; model development; qualitative research.

1. Introduction

Contemporary organizations operate in environments characterized by increasing complexity, rapid change, intensified stakeholder expectations, and growing demands for both organizational effectiveness and human-centered management. Under such conditions, the role of managers extends beyond conventional administrative functions such as planning, organizing, directing, and controlling; managers are also expected to shape organizational culture, facilitate employee development, establish constructive interpersonal relationships, maintain ethical standards, and align individual behavior with organizational purposes. Classical and contemporary management theories consequently emphasize that managerial effectiveness is influenced not only by structural arrangements and technical competencies but also by managers' behavioral orientations, values, decision-making patterns, and styles of interaction with employees (Ahmadi, 2020; Behrangi, 2019; Niazazari et al., 2020). The distinction between management and leadership further demonstrates that organizational influence cannot be reduced to formal authority because effective leadership requires the capacity to inspire, guide, communicate, and mobilize people toward shared objectives (Yousefi Sarkhni & Mehrzadeh, 2021). Empirical and conceptual studies have therefore examined the relationships among managerial styles, organizational effectiveness, managerial performance, knowledge management, and organizational structures, indicating that the quality of management has consequences for both organizational processes and outcomes (Ashrafi, 2018; Azimi et al., 2024; Bijani, 2022; Hatefi, 2018; Tirband, 2023; Zamani et al., 2017).

Within this broader shift, increasing attention has been given to leadership approaches that recognize employees as active human agents rather than merely organizational resources. Leadership style has been associated with work engagement, innovative work behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, readiness for change, organizational commitment, and organizational performance across different institutional and cultural contexts (Kebu Gemedo & Lee, 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Kleanthis et al., 2020). Research on Iranian knowledge-based enterprises has similarly highlighted the importance of contextually appropriate leadership styles for organizational success (Ghafoori et al., 2019), while studies in educational organizations have examined the role of servant leadership, leadership styles, conflict management, and organizational effectiveness in shaping employee-related and institutional

outcomes (Eftekhari, 2022; Gourkani, 2022; Roshi, 2019). Knowledge-based and learning-oriented organizations additionally depend on managerial practices that facilitate knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, learning, and adaptation (Rehman et al., 2021). At the same time, developments such as electronic human resource management demonstrate that managerial systems increasingly require flexibility and responsiveness while preserving the human dimensions of organizational functioning (Davoudpour, 2022). These developments collectively suggest that successful management requires an integrated orientation in which competence, adaptability, ethical behavior, relational sensitivity, and employee development are treated as interdependent rather than isolated managerial concerns.

One important framework through which these dimensions can be integrated is the concept of lifestyle. Lifestyle is more than a collection of routine behaviors; it represents a relatively coherent pattern through which values, beliefs, preferences, priorities, relationships, consumption practices, social conduct, and individual choices are expressed in everyday life. Because managerial behavior is embedded within broader systems of values and meanings, managers' lifestyles may influence the manner in which they perceive responsibility, authority, interpersonal relationships, justice, work, development, and organizational obligations. In the Iranian context, the concept of an Iranian-Islamic lifestyle has therefore attracted considerable scholarly attention as an approach that seeks to establish coherence between cultural identity, Islamic teachings, personal development, and social conduct. Research has sought to conceptualize the strategic coordinates and underlying dimensions of Islamic lifestyle and to develop models that reflect the interaction between Iranian cultural characteristics and Islamic values (Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Esmaeili Joshghani et al., 2019). Studies of Iranian-Islamic lifestyle among university students and within family and cultural settings further demonstrate that this construct encompasses multiple personal, social, cultural, behavioral, and value-oriented domains (Ahmadzadeh Ardabili, 2019; Asadian & Heydari Kaljeh, 2022).

The relevance of Iranian-Islamic lifestyle is not limited to personal or family life; its values may also be reflected in organizational behavior and managerial practices. Studies have examined Islamic lifestyle in relation to consumption culture, spirituality, psychological well-being, quality of life, happiness, job satisfaction, organizational commitment,

and managerial functioning (Bani Tarfi, 2022; Hosseini, 2018; Najva, 2023). Within educational management specifically, the relationship between Islamic lifestyle and managerial skills or spiritual health has been examined among school principals, suggesting that managerial competence and value orientation can be meaningfully interconnected (Karimi, 2020). Islamic lifestyle and school culture have also been considered in relation to principals' managerial performance, further indicating that culturally and religiously grounded patterns of conduct may have practical implications for organizational administration (Izadi, 2022). Literary and cultural examinations of Islamic lifestyle likewise point to the importance of spirituality, reflection, ethical conduct, moderation, and value-based behavior in defining desirable ways of life (Rabiei, 2021). More recently, efforts to design an Iranian-Islamic lifestyle curriculum have extended this concern into formal education, emphasizing that lifestyle-related values can be systematically cultivated rather than being treated solely as implicit cultural dispositions (Zarei et al., 2024).

These considerations are particularly significant in educational organizations, where managers simultaneously exercise administrative, instructional, ethical, and social influence. School managers affect teachers, students, families, organizational climate, resource use, professional norms, and institutional culture. Consequently, their management cannot be understood solely through technical efficiency. Research on school-based management grounded in Iranian-Islamic values has sought to identify dimensions, components, and indicators that can align educational administration with indigenous cultural and value frameworks (Taghiani et al., 2023). Other studies have focused on the training and development of managers within the administrative system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, reflecting the need to define context-sensitive managerial competencies and development processes (Shibak, 2023). Research on smart leadership has similarly attempted to identify leadership components suitable for contemporary educational institutions facing increasingly complex administrative and technological demands (Tousi et al., 2025). Furthermore, research concerning classroom management and family educational styles has highlighted the importance of responsibility as an individual and educational outcome, reinforcing the broader relevance of responsibility-oriented managerial and social environments (Asadi Allahabadi, 2023). Thus, in educational administration, managerial lifestyle may become an

important mechanism through which values are translated into daily organizational practices.

Islamic management provides another conceptual foundation for examining such value-based managerial behavior. Islamic management models derived from Qur'anic principles emphasize that management should not be separated from moral responsibility, human dignity, justice, accountability, spirituality, and concern for collective welfare (Mousavizadeh, 2022). Current research on Islamic educational leadership similarly emphasizes the strategic integration of Sharia-based principles with institutional leadership and management practices (Zahiri & Sahal, 2025). Evidence from school settings suggests that Islamic leadership values may contribute to the development of teachers' professional competence when they are meaningfully incorporated into principals' leadership practices (Sahrudin, 2025). At the organizational level, spiritual leadership and Islamic spiritual well-being have also been examined as mechanisms capable of reducing undesirable workplace behavior, suggesting that spirituality may exert behavioral and regulatory effects within organizations (Bagis et al., 2026). Ethical dimensions of leadership are also evident in research on moral anger, trust in leaders, honesty, perceived organizational justice, and Islamic work ethics, which demonstrates the continuing importance of ethical interpretation in leader-employee relationships (Salehzadeh, 2025). Broader Iranian-Islamic discussions of social justice and welfare further reinforce the centrality of justice, social responsibility, and attention to human welfare within value-based governance (Zarani et al., 2025).

Within this ethical and human-centered orientation, compassionate management has particular relevance. Compassionate leadership and management are based on recognizing the experiences, needs, difficulties, dignity, and developmental capacities of organizational members and responding to them through supportive, respectful, and constructive managerial behavior. A systematic review of compassionate leadership demonstrates that compassion has become an increasingly important construct in management and leadership research, although its conceptual boundaries, mechanisms, and organizational applications continue to require further clarification and development (Ramachandran et al., 2024). Compassion should not be interpreted as the abandonment of performance standards, managerial authority, accountability, or organizational discipline. Rather, it can be conceptualized as a relational and ethical orientation through which managers combine

concern for people with responsibility for organizational objectives. In the Iranian cultural and linguistic context, the notion of *mehr* carries connotations associated with affection, kindness, and benevolent human relations, and standard Persian lexical resources contribute to clarifying the semantic foundations of such culturally embedded concepts (Moein, 2021). Accordingly, compassionate management can be interpreted as a management orientation in which kindness is translated into responsible and purposeful organizational conduct rather than remaining merely an interpersonal sentiment.

The historical and religious foundations of compassion also make this concept especially compatible with an Iranian-Islamic approach to management. Analyses of the social and military management of Imam Ali in *Nahj al-Balagha* have emphasized manifestations of mercy and affection in leadership and social governance, illustrating that compassion can coexist with authority, justice, responsibility, and decisiveness (Aghababaei Renani, 2017). This perspective is particularly important because it provides an indigenous ethical foundation for understanding compassionate management rather than treating compassion exclusively as a concept imported from contemporary Western organizational psychology. At the same time, the conceptual development of culturally rooted management constructs requires appropriate interpretive frameworks. Conceptual metaphor has been discussed as an analytical mechanism for understanding complex political and intellectual texts and for connecting abstract concepts with comprehensible cognitive structures (Razavi et al., 2023). In the context of lifestyle and management, metaphorical reasoning has explicitly been employed to connect lifestyle, leadership, and compassionate management within an Iranian-Islamic futures-oriented framework (Farid et al., 2022). Such approaches indicate the possibility of constructing a management model that integrates cultural meaning, ethical principles, and organizational realities.

An Iranian-Islamic lifestyle of managers grounded in compassionate management may therefore encompass several interconnected dimensions. At the personal level, it may involve responsibility, continuous learning, creativity, reflection, faith, spirituality, and resistance to professional stagnation. At the ethical level, it may encompass respect, commitment, honesty, discipline, fairness, and justice. At the interpersonal and social level, it may include supportive behavior, recognition of employees' needs, constructive relationships, participation, happiness, meritocracy, and organizational effectiveness. At the cultural level, it may

require an active connection with Iranian-Islamic identity and teachings, while at the educational level, it may require mechanisms for training, curriculum development, and the institutional reinforcement of compassionate behavior. These dimensions are consistent with the broader literature showing that organizational effectiveness depends on the interaction among managerial styles, ethical values, employee relationships, organizational culture, and learning processes rather than on any single managerial characteristic (Ashrafi, 2018; Niazazari et al., 2020; Rehman et al., 2021). They are also compatible with evidence that leadership can influence innovation, citizenship behavior, work engagement, readiness for change, and commitment through organizational and relational mechanisms (Kebu Gemedo & Lee, 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Kleanthis et al., 2020).

Despite these conceptual convergences, the existing literature appears fragmented across several relatively separate research streams. One group of studies has investigated management and leadership styles and their relationships with organizational performance, effectiveness, conflict management, commitment, and knowledge management (Bijani, 2022; Gourkani, 2022; Hatefi, 2018; Roshi, 2019; Zamani et al., 2017). Another body of work has examined Iranian-Islamic lifestyle at the individual, family, educational, cultural, and organizational levels (Ahmadzadeh Ardabili, 2019; Asadian & Heydari Kaljeh, 2022; Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Esmaeili Joshghani et al., 2019). A further stream has focused on Islamic management, Islamic leadership, spiritual leadership, and Islamic work ethics (Bagis et al., 2026; Mousavizadeh, 2022; Sahrudin, 2025; Salehzadeh, 2025; Zahiri & Sahal, 2025), while compassionate leadership has developed as a distinct contemporary field of inquiry (Ramachandran et al., 2024). Although these bodies of scholarship offer important theoretical and empirical insights, they do not by themselves provide a sufficiently integrated framework explaining how Iranian-Islamic lifestyle principles can be translated into the everyday personal, ethical, relational, cultural, and educational practices of managers through compassionate management.

Developing such a framework is important for both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, an integrated model can connect lifestyle studies with management and leadership research, thereby clarifying how personal values and cultural identity become expressed in organizational behavior. From a practical perspective, a clearly articulated model can provide a basis for managerial selection, professional development, training, evaluation,

and organizational culture-building. This is particularly relevant for educational institutions, in which managers serve not only as administrators but also as behavioral and cultural models whose actions may influence employees and the broader educational community. The growing emphasis on indigenous management models, Iranian-Islamic educational values, manager training, smart leadership, and value-based curricula underscores the need for frameworks that are simultaneously culturally grounded and responsive to contemporary organizational demands (Shibak, 2023; Taghiani et al., 2023; Tousi et al., 2025; Zarei et al., 2024). Furthermore, the integration of compassionate management may help operationalize values such as dignity, justice, respect, participation, spirituality, responsibility, and support within routine managerial practices rather than leaving them at the level of abstract normative principles.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to design an Iranian-Islamic lifestyle model for managers based on compassionate management.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study is classified as applied research in terms of its objective. In terms of data collection, the study employed a qualitative approach, while in terms of implementation, it used a descriptive design and content analysis.

In addition to reviewing the research background and examining relevant sources and texts, the views of experts were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview sessions were organized by initially contacting the interviewees either by telephone or in person. At the predetermined date and time, the research questions were presented to the participants, and the interviews were conducted. The interviews continued until the researcher reached theoretical saturation with 15 participants, at which point additional interviews no longer yielded new information.

To ensure the validity of the study, member checking, data triangulation, and peer review were employed. In

member checking, several interviewees were asked to review the analytical process or the categories derived from the data and to express their views regarding them. Data triangulation was also used to further enhance the validity of the findings. Accordingly, multiple sources were employed in the present study, including information obtained from the theoretical foundations related to the research variable, previous studies conducted in this field, and the perspectives of experts and specialists in management and school administration. These sources were used to generate more comprehensive and in-depth data for designing the proposed lifestyle model.

Content analysis was used to analyze the data. As a research technique, content analysis encompasses concepts, categories, and major and sub-factors. In the present study, after coding the reviewed sources, open codes were extracted. Subsequently, the open codes were refined and categorized, and ultimately classified into five major categories: personal growth and development, ethics, social interactions, identity/culture, and education.

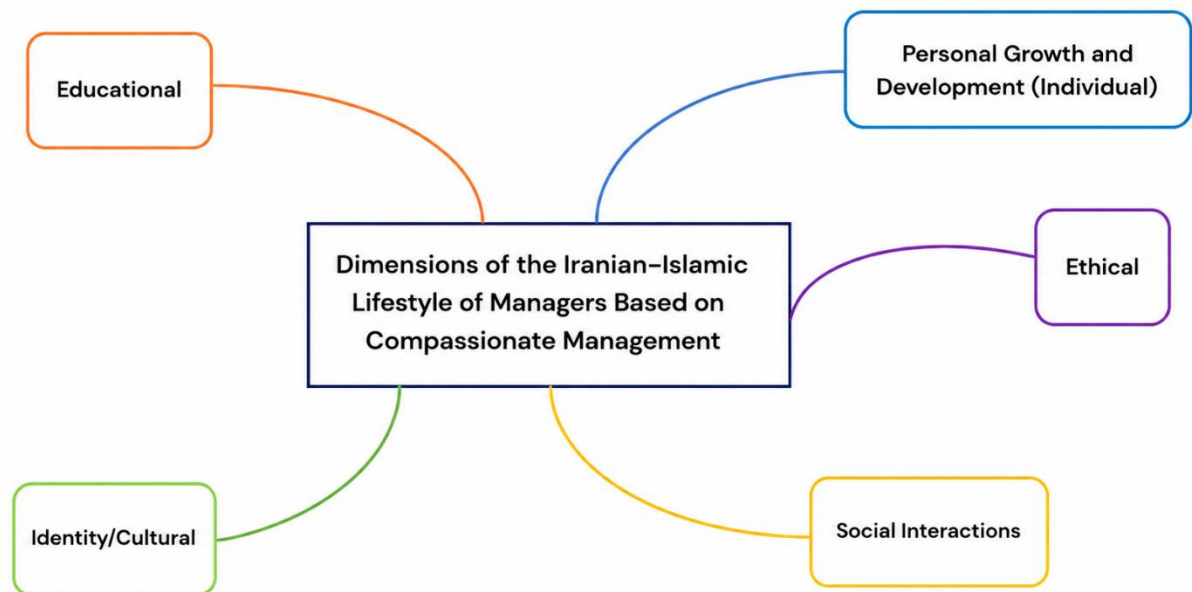
3. Findings and Results

Based on the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the literature review, previous studies, in-depth exploratory interviews, coding, and content analysis of the interview transcripts, as well as the alignment of these findings with the theoretical foundations, the participants' perspectives led to the identification of an Iranian-Islamic lifestyle model for managers based on compassionate management comprising five factors and 22 components, as presented below.

The results of coding and content analysis of the categories indicated that the Iranian-Islamic lifestyle of managers based on compassionate management can be explained and examined through five principal dimensions: (1) personal growth and development, (2) ethics, (3) social interactions, (4) identity/culture, and (5) education. These dimensions are presented in Figure 1 on the following page.

Figure 1

Main Categories Extracted from the Findings



Each of the dimensions presented in Figure 1 is further divided into a set of components that provides a more precise and comprehensive understanding of this lifestyle model. For example, the dimension of personal growth and development can be divided into several components, including strengthening a sense of responsibility, reducing feelings of career plateauing, fostering creativity and innovation, encouraging study and reflection, and strengthening faith and spirituality. Each of these components elucidates a specific aspect of this dimension.

As another example, the social-interaction dimension comprises creating happiness among employees, developing a supportive organizational culture, fostering high-quality and humane relationships, managerial attention to individuals' interests and needs, creating a participatory and interactive environment, and promoting meritocracy and effectiveness. Table 1 presents the dimensions and components of the Iranian-Islamic lifestyle of managers based on compassionate management.

Table 1

Dimensions and Components of the Iranian-Islamic Lifestyle of Managers Based on Compassionate Management

Dimension (Main Category)	Component (Subcategory)	Literature and Previous Research	Interview Codes	Frequency	Frequency (%)
Personal Growth and Development	Strengthening a sense of responsibility	(Niaz Azari et al., 2020; Nourahmadi et al., 2021; Khalifeh Soltani, 2016; Emami, 2009; Najafi et al., 2021; Parvin & Kargozari, 2016; Ardalan et al., 2019; Mohammadi et al., 2022; Salimi, 2022; Afjeh et al., 2019; Kalani, 2018)	I1, I2, I3, I4, I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, I14, I15	22	8.3
Personal Growth and Development	Reducing feelings of career plateauing	(Rajabi Farjad & Alipour Sobhi, 2018; Damghanian & Shahbar, 2020; Mehraban, 2021; Ebrahimi et al., 2020; Andarami et al., 2020)	I2, I3, I6, I8, I13, I14, I15	12	4.5
Personal Growth and Development	Fostering creativity and innovation	(Niaz Azari et al., 2020; Ghanbarpour Nosrati et al., 2020; Nourahmadi et al., 2021; Rajabi Farjad & Alipour Sobhi, 2018)	I1, I2, I6, I9, I12	9	3.4
Personal Growth and Development	Encouraging study and reflection	(Rabiei, 2021; Asadian & Heydari Kaljeh, 2022)	I2, I6, I9, I15	6	2.2
Personal Growth and Development	Strengthening faith and spirituality	(Navabakhsh et al., 2020; Ghorbani, 2013; Esmaeili Joshaghani et al., 2019; Rasa & Farahani, 2020; Rabiei, 2021; Asadian & Heydari Kaljeh, 2022)	I1, I2, I3, I4, I6, I8, I9, I15	14	5.3

Ethics	Fostering a sense of respect among employees	(Sedaghat et al., 2022; Khoshshima et al., 2023; Zargar Shirazi et al., 2017; Shakouri et al., 2020; Soltani et al., 2016; Niaz Azari et al., 2020; Ramachandran et al., 2024)	I2, I3, I4, I6, I8, I9, I10, I14	15	5.6
Ethics	Developing employee commitment	(Niaz Azari et al., 2020; Nourahmadi et al., 2021; Khalifeh Soltani, 2016; Emami, 2009; Najafi et al., 2021; Parvin & Kargozari, 2016; Ardalan et al., 2019; Mohammadi et al., 2022; Salimi, 2022; Afjeh et al., 2019; Kalani, 2018)	I1, I2, I3, I4, I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, I14, I15	22	8.3
Ethics	Adherence to ethical principles	(Niaz Azari et al., 2020; Zargar Shirazi et al., 2017; Khoshshima et al., 2023)	I2, I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, I14	10	3.7
Ethics	Promoting order and discipline	(Rabiei, 2021; Asadian & Heydari Kaljeh, 2022)	I2, I4, I6, I8, I9	7	2.6
Ethics	Establishing justice based on compassion	(Niaz Azari et al., 2020; Zargar Shirazi et al., 2017; Khoshshima et al., 2023)	I3, I6, I7, I13, I15	8	3.0
Social Interactions	Creating happiness among employees	(Asghari Mehr et al., 2022; Fereydounnejad, 2021; Navaei Esmatpanah et al., 2025; Hasani Chenar et al., 2024; Seligman, 2024)	I4, I6, I13, I14, I15	10	3.7
Social Interactions	Developing a supportive organizational culture	(Kalani, 2018; Jafari et al., 2017; Aloudari et al., 2015; Afjeh et al., 2019; Safari et al., 2018; Ghasemzadeh & Faryabi, 2023; Navaei Esmatpanah et al., 2025; Ebrahimi Dasht-Bayaz & Elhami, 2024)	I3, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, I11, I12, I13, I14	19	7.1
Social Interactions	Fostering high-quality and humane relationships	(Niaz Azari et al., 2020; Sedaghat et al., 2022; Dovali et al., 2022; Khalifeh Soltani, 2016; Salimi, 2022)	I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, I13, I14, I15	13	4.9
Social Interactions	Managerial attention to individuals' interests and needs	(Niaz Azari et al., 2020; Zargar Shirazi et al., 2017; Shakouri et al., 2020; Dovali et al., 2022; Kalayi, 2018)	I3, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I10, I11, I12, I13, I14	16	6.0
Social Interactions	Creating a participatory and interactive environment	(Dovali et al., 2022; Gholipour et al., 2012; Ghanbarpour Nosrati et al., 2020; Mohammadi et al., 2022; Rabiei, 2021)	I2, I4, I6, I7, I8, I9, I12, I13, I14	14	5.3
Social Interactions	Meritocracy and effectiveness	(Niaz Azari et al., 2020; Zargar Shirazi et al., 2017; Khoshshima et al., 2023)	I2, I3, I6, I7, I12, I13, I15	10	3.7
Identity/Culture	Promoting Iranian-Islamic culture and identity	(Esmaeili Joshaghani et al., 2019; Zaghian & Zarei, 2021; Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Rabiei, 2021; Navabakhsh et al., 2020)	I1, I2, I3, I4, I7, I8, I12, I13, I14	14	5.3
Identity/Culture	Drawing inspiration from and promoting Iranian-Islamic teachings	(Najva, 2023; Hosseini, 2020; Navabakhsh et al., 2020; Izadi, 2022; Ghorbani, 2013; Rabiei, 2021; Hossein Fazeli, 2022; Asadian & Heydari Kaljeh, 2022; Rasa & Farahani, 2020; Esmaeili Joshaghani et al., 2019; Zaghian & Zarei, 2021; Ebrahimi et al., 2021)	I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8, I9, I13, I14, I15	24	9.0
Education	Implementing multiple educational programs	—	I2, I3, I12, I13	4	1.5
Education	Designing a curriculum based on the compassionate management model	—	I1, I2, I4, I5, I6, I9	6	2.2
Education	Providing education through an appropriate compassion-based approach	—	I2, I4, I5, I6, I9	5	1.8
Education	Implementing extracurricular activities to strengthen compassion	—	I1, I2, I4, I6	4	1.5

The results presented in Table 1 show that, among the components of the Iranian-Islamic lifestyle of managers based on compassionate management, strengthening a sense of responsibility had the highest frequency percentage (8.3%), whereas encouraging study and reflection had the lowest frequency percentage (2.2%) within the personal dimension. Within the ethical dimension, developing employee commitment had the highest frequency percentage

(8.3%), whereas promoting order and discipline had the lowest frequency percentage (2.6%). Within the social-interaction dimension, developing a supportive organizational culture had the highest frequency percentage (7.1%), whereas creating happiness among employees and meritocracy and effectiveness had the lowest frequency percentages (3.7%). Within the identity/cultural dimension, drawing inspiration from and promoting Iranian-Islamic

teachings had the highest frequency percentage (9.0%). Finally, within the educational dimension, designing a curriculum based on the compassionate management model had the highest frequency percentage (2.2%), whereas implementing educational programs and extracurricular activities aimed at strengthening compassion had the lowest frequency percentages (1.5%).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present qualitative study was conducted to design an Iranian-Islamic lifestyle model for managers based on compassionate management. Analysis of the literature, previous research, and in-depth interviews resulted in the identification of five overarching dimensions and 22 components: personal growth and development, ethics, social interactions, identity/culture, and education. The findings suggest that compassionate management within an Iranian-Islamic framework cannot be reduced to kindness or benevolent interpersonal conduct alone; rather, it represents a multidimensional managerial orientation integrating managers' personal development, ethical conduct, interpersonal relationships, cultural and spiritual identity, and educational responsibilities. Among the identified components, drawing inspiration from and promoting Iranian-Islamic teachings had the highest overall frequency (9.0%), followed by strengthening a sense of responsibility and developing employee commitment (8.3% each) and developing a supportive organizational culture (7.1%). These findings indicate that the proposed model is fundamentally value-oriented while simultaneously incorporating behavioral and organizational mechanisms necessary for effective management.

The first dimension identified in the study was personal growth and development, comprising strengthening a sense of responsibility, reducing feelings of career plateauing, fostering creativity and innovation, encouraging study and reflection, and strengthening faith and spirituality. Strengthening responsibility had the highest frequency within this dimension, suggesting that participants viewed accountability for decisions, employees, organizational outcomes, and personal conduct as a central characteristic of the compassionate manager. Such an interpretation is consistent with contemporary approaches to management that regard effective managerial functioning as involving personal accountability and the capacity to influence employees beyond the exercise of formal authority (Ahmadi, 2020; Yousefi Sarkhni & Mehrzadeh, 2021). The

importance attributed to responsibility is also consistent with findings concerning educational and family management styles and their relationship with responsibility development (Asadi Allahabadi, 2023). From an Iranian-Islamic perspective, responsibility is not merely an administrative requirement but also has ethical and spiritual significance, making it particularly compatible with a lifestyle-based conceptualization of management.

The inclusion of creativity, innovation, continuous study, reflection, and overcoming career plateauing indicates that compassionate management is not a passive or exclusively affective managerial orientation. Rather, managers are expected to continually develop themselves and create conditions for organizational dynamism. Previous research has established relationships between leadership approaches and innovative work behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, work engagement, and responsiveness to change (Kebu Gemedo & Lee, 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Kleanthis et al., 2020). Similarly, knowledge management and organizational learning depend heavily on the willingness of organizational members and managers to acquire, exchange, and apply knowledge (Ashrafi, 2018; Rehman et al., 2021). Thus, encouraging study and reflection, despite having a relatively lower frequency in the present findings, remains conceptually important because thoughtful learning enables managers to update their knowledge and avoid professional stagnation. The emphasis on faith and spirituality also corresponds with studies associating Islamic lifestyle with spiritual health, managerial functioning, and positive individual outcomes (Izadi, 2022; Karimi, 2020). Recent evidence concerning spiritual leadership and Islamic spiritual well-being further supports the proposition that spirituality can influence employee behavior and organizational functioning (Bagis et al., 2026).

The second major dimension was ethics, consisting of fostering respect among employees, developing employee commitment, adherence to ethical principles, promoting order and discipline, and establishing justice based on compassion. Employee commitment emerged as the most prominent component within this dimension. This finding suggests that compassionate management does not merely involve a manager displaying kindness toward employees; it also involves establishing a relational environment in which employees develop a meaningful attachment to their organization and responsibilities. Previous research has shown that leadership styles can influence employee commitment, engagement, readiness for organizational change, and citizenship behaviors (Kebu Gemedo & Lee,

2020; Kleanthis et al., 2020; Roshi, 2019). The relationship reported between Islamic lifestyle, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment likewise provides support for integrating value-oriented lifestyle principles with organizational management (Bani Tarfi, 2022). Therefore, commitment may function as a bridge through which compassionate managerial behavior is transformed into sustained employee involvement and organizational responsibility.

The ethical findings also highlight respect, moral principles, discipline, and justice as mutually reinforcing rather than competing managerial concerns. Compassionate management should therefore not be misunderstood as excessive leniency or avoidance of organizational accountability. The inclusion of discipline indicates that compassionate behavior can coexist with clear expectations, standards, and responsible performance. At the same time, justice based on compassion suggests that organizational rules should be applied with attention to dignity, circumstances, and fairness. This interpretation is supported by contemporary research on leader morality, trust, honesty, perceived organizational justice, and Islamic work ethics (Salehzadeh, 2025). It is also consistent with broader Iranian-Islamic conceptions of justice and welfare that emphasize social responsibility and equitable treatment (Zarani et al., 2025). Moreover, studies of mercy and affection in the management practices attributed to Imam Ali demonstrate that compassion, justice, decisiveness, and administrative responsibility need not be considered contradictory principles (Aghababaei Renani, 2017). Consequently, the ethical dimension of the proposed model reflects a balanced approach in which humane treatment and organizational discipline reinforce one another.

The third and most extensive dimension was social interactions, which included creating happiness among employees, developing a supportive organizational culture, fostering high-quality and humane relationships, managerial attention to individuals' interests and needs, creating a participatory and interactive environment, and promoting meritocracy and effectiveness. Among these components, developing a supportive organizational culture had the highest frequency. This finding is particularly important because compassion becomes organizationally meaningful only when it is translated from an individual managerial disposition into recurring relational practices and an institutionalized culture. A supportive culture allows employees to seek assistance, exchange ideas, communicate difficulties, collaborate, and participate without excessive

fear of negative interpersonal consequences. Research has repeatedly shown that leadership and organizational culture interact in shaping innovative behavior, citizenship behavior, and organizational outcomes (Khan et al., 2020). Studies of leadership in Iranian knowledge-based enterprises have also emphasized the significance of leadership patterns suited to organizational and contextual requirements (Ghafoori et al., 2019).

The emphasis on participation, humane relationships, and attention to employees' needs closely corresponds with the conceptual foundations of compassionate leadership. A systematic review by Ramachandran et al. indicates that compassionate leadership centers on recognizing others' needs and difficulties and responding in ways that support human and organizational functioning (Ramachandran et al., 2024). The present findings extend this perspective by situating compassion within an Iranian-Islamic lifestyle framework. In this model, compassionate interaction does not end with empathic understanding but extends to participation, support, employee happiness, merit-based management, and effectiveness. This interpretation is also compatible with research emphasizing the role of conflict management and management styles in organizational effectiveness (Bijani, 2022; Gourkani, 2022; Zamani et al., 2017). Attention to employees' interests and needs may help managers identify sources of conflict or dissatisfaction before they intensify, while participatory relationships can enable more constructive organizational decision-making.

The simultaneous inclusion of meritocracy and effectiveness is also noteworthy. It shows that participants did not conceptualize compassionate management as incompatible with competence-based decisions or performance expectations. Compassion without merit-based standards could potentially create perceptions of favoritism, whereas meritocracy without human concern could generate an impersonal organizational environment. The proposed model therefore combines relational sensitivity with competence and effectiveness. This balance is consistent with managerial research demonstrating that leadership styles, management systems, and managerial competencies contribute to organizational performance and effectiveness (Azimi et al., 2024; Hafezi, 2018; Tirband, 2023). It also corresponds with emerging approaches to smart leadership that emphasize the need for managers to respond effectively to increasingly complex institutional environments (Tousi et al., 2025).

The fourth dimension, identity/culture, consisted of promoting Iranian-Islamic culture and identity and drawing

inspiration from and promoting Iranian–Islamic teachings. The latter component had the highest frequency among all 22 components identified in the study, indicating that participants regarded cultural and religious grounding as a defining characteristic of the proposed managerial lifestyle. This finding is consistent with previous efforts to conceptualize Iranian–Islamic lifestyle as a multidimensional system of values, beliefs, behaviors, and social orientations (Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Esmaeili Joshghani et al., 2019). Studies examining Iranian–Islamic lifestyle among students and within cultural and family contexts likewise indicate that identity and lifestyle are closely interconnected (Ahmadzadeh Ardabili, 2019; Asadian & Heydari Kaljeh, 2022). The current findings therefore suggest that a managerial lifestyle intended to be specifically Iranian–Islamic requires more than the addition of isolated religious practices; it needs a coherent cultural-value orientation that informs everyday managerial decisions and interactions.

This interpretation is reinforced by research directly addressing Islamic leadership and management. Models of Islamic management derived from Qur’anic principles emphasize the relevance of moral responsibility, justice, spirituality, and human dignity to management (Mousavizadeh, 2022). Recent studies have similarly emphasized the integration of Islamic principles into strategic educational leadership and demonstrated the potential relevance of Islamic leadership values to teacher competence and institutional functioning (Sahrudin, 2025; Zahiri & Sahal, 2025). Research on Iranian–Islamic school-based management further supports the need to define educational administration according to culturally grounded values rather than relying exclusively on generic management models (Taghiani et al., 2023). Moreover, Farid et al. linked lifestyle, leadership, and compassionate management through an Iranian–Islamic conceptual framework, providing particularly close theoretical support for the integrated model developed in the present research (Farid et al., 2022). Conceptual and metaphorical approaches can also facilitate the interpretation of culturally embedded managerial meanings and translate abstract value systems into comprehensible organizational frameworks (Razavi et al., 2023).

The fifth dimension was education, including implementing educational programs, developing a compassion-based curriculum, employing appropriate compassion-oriented instructional approaches, and implementing extracurricular activities to strengthen

compassion. Although these components had lower frequencies than many personal, ethical, social, and cultural components, their inclusion has considerable practical significance. A managerial lifestyle cannot be institutionalized merely by identifying desirable values; those values must be learned, practiced, reinforced, and transferred through structured developmental processes. Research on the training of managers in the Iranian administrative context demonstrates the importance of developing models specifically designed to cultivate contextually appropriate managerial capabilities (Shibak, 2023). Similarly, attempts to design Iranian–Islamic lifestyle curricula indicate that lifestyle principles can be converted into explicit educational content and systematically taught (Zarei et al., 2024). Educational mechanisms may therefore provide the practical infrastructure needed to transform the present model from a conceptual framework into sustained managerial behavior.

The educational dimension also links the model with the developmental role of educational leadership. School and educational managers not only administer institutions but also create environments in which values, behaviors, and professional norms are transmitted. The application of management theory to educational planning and supervision emphasizes the formative responsibilities of educational managers (Behrangi, 2019). Likewise, research concerning human resource management, flexibility, and organizational development highlights the importance of systematic mechanisms for preparing employees and managers to respond to changing organizational demands (Davoudpour, 2022). Therefore, compassion-oriented curricula, training programs, and extracurricular activities can serve as mechanisms for cultivating relational competencies, ethical decision-making, cultural awareness, and reflective managerial practice.

Taken together, the five-dimensional structure identified in this study demonstrates that an Iranian–Islamic lifestyle for managers based on compassionate management is best understood as an integrated system rather than a set of independent attributes. Personal growth provides managers with the capacity for reflection, learning, responsibility, creativity, and spirituality; ethics defines standards of justice, commitment, respect, and discipline; social interaction translates these values into organizational relationships; identity and culture provide the Iranian–Islamic normative foundation of the model; and education creates the mechanism through which these competencies and orientations may be intentionally developed and

sustained. This multidimensional structure is consistent with studies showing that effective management is shaped by interactions among managerial behavior, organizational culture, values, learning, and human relationships (Ahmadi, 2020; Niazazari et al., 2020; Rehman et al., 2021). It also responds to calls for approaches that connect Islamic lifestyle and managerial performance (Izadi, 2022), spiritual and ethical leadership (Bagis et al., 2026; Salehzadeh, 2025), and compassionate leadership (Ramachandran et al., 2024).

The findings consequently extend previous research by integrating areas that have often been examined separately. Prior studies have addressed Iranian-Islamic lifestyle, Islamic management, leadership styles, organizational effectiveness, spirituality, compassionate leadership, or educational management as distinct topics. The present model connects these domains within a unified managerial lifestyle framework. This synthesis is particularly relevant because managerial behavior is ultimately enacted through everyday decisions, relationships, priorities, and patterns of conduct. A manager may formally endorse ethical or religious values, but those principles become organizationally meaningful only when they are manifested in responsibility, fairness, support, participation, respect, development, and effective performance. The proposed model therefore conceptualizes compassionate management not as an isolated leadership technique but as an expression of a broader Iranian-Islamic managerial lifestyle.

This study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the qualitative nature of the research and the purposive selection of 15 participants limit the statistical generalizability of the resulting model to all managers and organizational contexts. Although theoretical saturation was achieved, participants' interpretations may have been influenced by their individual experiences, professional backgrounds, and understandings of Iranian-Islamic values and compassionate management. Second, data were derived primarily from interviews and documentary sources, and therefore the findings may be affected by self-report bias and socially desirable responses, particularly because the study addressed ethical, cultural, and religious values. Third, the model was developed conceptually and qualitatively and was not subsequently tested through quantitative validation, structural modeling, or longitudinal assessment. Finally, contextual differences among schools, educational levels, administrative environments, geographic regions, and other organizational sectors may affect the relative importance and practical manifestation of the identified dimensions and components.

Future research should quantitatively validate the proposed model using larger and more diverse samples of managers and employees and employ exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to examine its dimensional structure. Researchers could subsequently develop and validate a standardized instrument for assessing the Iranian-Islamic lifestyle of managers based on compassionate management. Structural equation modeling may also be used to investigate relationships between the dimensions of the model and outcomes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, employee well-being, organizational citizenship behavior, innovation, trust, justice perceptions, and organizational effectiveness. Comparative studies across educational institutions, governmental organizations, private-sector organizations, and different Iranian provinces could determine the extent to which the model is context-dependent. Longitudinal and intervention studies would also be valuable for determining whether compassion-based managerial training produces sustainable changes in managerial behavior and employee outcomes.

In practice, educational authorities and organizational decision-makers can use the identified dimensions as a framework for manager selection, professional development, performance appraisal, and succession planning. Training programs for current and prospective managers should incorporate responsibility, reflective learning, creativity, spirituality, ethical decision-making, justice, respectful communication, employee support, participatory management, meritocracy, and culturally grounded leadership. Organizations can also develop compassion-oriented managerial curricula, workshops, mentoring programs, and experiential activities that convert the model's principles into observable managerial behaviors. Performance evaluation systems should assess not only task accomplishment and administrative efficiency but also managers' capacity to create supportive relationships, promote fairness, recognize employee needs, encourage participation, and reinforce Iranian-Islamic organizational values. Embedding these practices in organizational policies and leadership development systems may facilitate the transition from compassion as an individual virtue to compassionate management as a sustained organizational practice.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and, or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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