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Role Conflict, Meaning In Life, and Leader Resilience: A Mediation Study among Structural Leaders in Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs

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Abstract

Leadership roles in public religious institutions involve competing expectations that may challenge leaders' psychological resilience. Although meaning in life may help explain how leaders navigate role conflict, the distinct contributions of the presence of meaning and the search for meaning remain unclear. This study examined the relationship between role conflict and resilience among structural leaders in Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, with Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning tested as separate parallel mediators. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 158 structural leaders working in Islamic public higher education institutions and regional offices. Data were collected using the Role Conflict Scale, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire, and the 10-item Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale. Parallel mediation analysis was conducted using 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Role conflict was positively associated with Presence of Meaning (*β* = .190, *p* = .017), but not with Search for Meaning (*β* = .091, *p* = .258). Presence of Meaning was positively associated with resilience when controlling for role conflict and Search for Meaning (*β* = .316, *p* = .007), whereas Search for Meaning was not (*β* = .031, *p* = .785). The indirect effect through Presence of Meaning was significant (95% CI [.009, .093]), while the indirect effect through Search for Meaning was not (95% CI [−.010, .035]). The direct and total effects of role conflict on resilience were nonsignificant. These findings suggest that the perceived presence of meaning may represent a relevant statistical pathway linking role conflict and leader resilience. However, the cross-sectional design precludes causal conclusions. The findings highlight the importance of distinguishing the presence of meaning from the active search for meaning when examining resilience among public-sector leaders.

Keywords: leader resilience, meaning in life, role conflict, structural leadership

Abstrak

*Peran kepemimpinan di lembaga keagamaan publik melibatkan ekspektasi yang saling bertentangan, yang dapat menguji ketahanan psikologis para pemimpin. Meskipun makna hidup dapat membantu menjelaskan bagaimana para pemimpin mengatasi konflik peran, kontribusi spesifik dari "Kehadiran Makna" dan "Pencarian Makna" masih belum jelas. Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan antara konflik peran dan ketahanan di kalangan pemimpin struktural di Kementerian Agama Indonesia, dengan "Kehadiran Makna" dan "Pencarian Makna" diuji sebagai variabel perantara paralel yang terpisah. Survei cross-sectional dilakukan terhadap 158 pemimpin struktural yang bekerja di lembaga pendidikan tinggi Islam negeri dan kantor-kantor wilayah. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan Skala Konflik Peran, Kuesioner Makna Hidup, dan Skala Ketahanan Connor–Davidson yang terdiri dari 10 item. Analisis mediasi paralel dilakukan dengan menggunakan 5.000 sampel ulang bootstrap. Konflik peran memiliki hubungan positif dengan Kehadiran Makna (*β* = .190, *p* = .017), tetapi tidak dengan Pencarian Makna (*β* = .091, *p* = .258). Kehadiran Makna berhubungan positif dengan ketahanan ketika mengontrol konflik peran*

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*dan Pencarian Makna (*β* = .316, *p* = .007), sedangkan Pencarian Makna tidak (*β* = .031, *p* = .785). Efek tidak langsung melalui Kehadiran Makna bersifat signifikan (95% CI [.009; .093]), sedangkan efek tidak langsung melalui Pencarian Makna tidak signifikan (95% CI [−.010; .035]). Efek langsung dan total konflik peran terhadap ketahanan tidak signifikan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa persepsi Kehadiran Makna mungkin mewakili jalur statistik yang relevan yang menghubungkan konflik peran dan ketahanan pemimpin. Namun, desain penelitian cross-sectional tidak memungkinkan kesimpulan kausal. Temuan ini menyoroti pentingnya membedakan antara Kehadiran Makna dan Pencarian Makna yang aktif saat mengkaji ketahanan di kalangan pemimpin sektor publik.*

***Kata kunci**: kepemimpinan struktural, ketahanan pemimpin, konflik peran, makna dalam hidup*

Introduction

Leadership in public organizations involves managing multiple, and sometimes competing, sources of accountability (Setyaningsih et al., 2025). Unlike leadership in organizations with relatively bounded objectives, public-sector leaders must simultaneously respond to formal regulations, organizational priorities, professional expectations, stakeholder interests, and broader societal demands (Dandalt, 2025). This complexity is particularly salient for structural leaders, whose positions require them to translate policies into organizational action while also responding to the needs of employees and the communities they serve. Such conditions make public-sector leadership a context in which competing expectations are not incidental but may be embedded in the structure of the leadership role itself.

This complexity is especially relevant in Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), an institution whose organizational responsibilities encompass governmental administration in religious affairs as well as religious and educational services (Pattimukay & Sahetapy, 2024; Singgih, 2023). Structural leaders within Islamic public higher education institutions and regional offices operate at the intersection of bureaucratic requirements, institutional objectives, professional expectations, public interests, and value-laden missions. They may be required to implement national policies while simultaneously considering institutional priorities, employee needs, professional considerations, and expectations concerning the broader religious and social mission of their organizations. Consequently, MoRA provides a particularly relevant context for examining how leaders psychologically respond to complex and potentially competing role demands.

One central construct for understanding such experiences is role conflict, which refers to a condition in which individuals perceive that the expectations, requirements, or demands associated with their role are incompatible or difficult to reconcile (Anglin et al., 2022; Rizzo et al., 1970). Such incompatibility may arise when different individuals communicate conflicting expectations, when organizational requirements are inconsistent, or when fulfilling one expectation makes it difficult to satisfy another. In complex organizations, role conflict has traditionally been conceptualized as a dysfunctional condition because competing expectations can increase psychological tension, create uncertainty concerning priorities, and interfere with effective role performance. The foundational work of Rizzo et al. (1970) situated role conflict within organizational role stress and demonstrated its associations with anxiety, satisfaction, and other organizational outcomes.

Subsequent research has continued to treat role conflict as an important occupational stressor (Bowling et al., 2017; Hasymi et al., 2022; Raub et al., 2021) . When individuals must respond to incompatible demands, they may experience difficulty allocating limited resources, uncertainty about which expectations should receive priority, and tension between different aspects of their responsibilities. Such experiences can contribute to psychological strain and interfere with effective functioning. Accordingly, much of the organizational literature has implicitly or explicitly adopted a stress–strain perspective in which greater role conflict is expected to produce adverse individual and organizational outcomes (Michel et al., 2011; Muis et al., 2021). This perspective has generated substantial knowledge about the costs associated with incompatible role expectations, but it provides

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less insight into the psychological processes through which individuals may interpret and adapt to such experiences.

This limitation is particularly important when examining leaders. Leadership positions inherently involve balancing multiple interests, reconciling competing demands, and translating diverse expectations into organizational action (Abbas et al., 2022; Rusmini et al., 2023). Thus, conflicting expectations may not have a uniform psychological meaning for leaders. Although role conflict can clearly function as a source of strain, encountering competing demands may also require leaders to engage in active problem solving, prioritization, negotiation, and integration. The question is therefore not simply whether role conflict is stressful, but how leaders psychologically make sense of competing demands and whether such experiences are associated with adaptive functioning.

The challenge–hindrance stressor framework provides a useful perspective for addressing this issue. Cavanaugh et al. (2000) distinguished between challenge stressors, which represent demanding aspects of work that may simultaneously provide opportunities for growth, achievement, or advancement, and hindrance stressors, which tend to constrain goal attainment and personal development (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Lizarte Simón et al., 2024) . Meta-analytic studies show evidence that challenge and hindrance stressors can have different relationships with motivation, strain, and performance (Pandey et al., 2025; Podsakoff et al., 2007). Challenge stressors may generate strain while also stimulating motivation, whereas hindrance stressors tend to show more consistently negative relationships with work outcomes.

Importantly, this distinction does not imply that demanding experiences are inherently beneficial. Rather, it suggests that the consequences of work stressors may depend partly on how the demands are experienced and interpreted. Role conflict may represent a hindrance when incompatible expectations obstruct goal attainment or create uncontrollable demands (Latip et al., 2022). However, for leaders, competing expectations may also create circumstances that require them to clarify priorities, negotiate between stakeholders, reconsider their responsibilities, and integrate apparently divergent demands (Fousiani et al., 2025; Xiu et al., 2024). Such processes may have psychological implications beyond conventional indicators of strain because they may require leaders to consider the broader purpose and significance of their roles.

This possibility directs attention to resilience. Resilience refers broadly to the capacity to adapt successfully when confronted with adversity, stress, or significant challenges. Connor and Davidson (2003) conceptualized resilience as a multidimensional capacity related to coping with stress and adversity and developed the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) to assess this capacity (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Minnett & Stephenson, 2025). Rather than representing an absence of difficulty, resilience concerns the ability to maintain or regain adaptive functioning in the presence of difficult circumstances.

Resilience is particularly consequential for leaders because leadership involves sustained exposure to complex demands and uncertainty (Schmitt & Pauknerova, 2025). Leaders must make decisions despite incomplete information, manage competing interests, regulate their responses to difficult circumstances, and maintain organizational functioning while responding to changing requirements. Structural leaders may also be expected to absorb pressures from higher organizational authorities while simultaneously addressing concerns from subordinates and other stakeholders. Consequently, the capacity to remain adaptive under pressure represents an important psychological resource for individuals occupying structural leadership positions.

In the present study, leader resilience refers to resilience among individuals who occupy structural leadership positions (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Förster et al., 2023). The term does not imply that resilience is conceptualized as an entirely distinct leader-specific psychological construct. Rather, the study examines general psychological resilience within a population whose occupational context is characterized by formal leadership responsibilities. This distinction is important because the study

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focuses on the psychological functioning of leaders without assuming that resilience operates differently for leaders as a fundamentally separate psychological construct.

The relationship between role conflict and resilience may therefore not be straightforward. If role conflict is experienced primarily as a hindrance, incompatible demands may undermine adaptive functioning (Jin et al., 2026). However, if competing expectations prompt leaders to actively interpret, integrate, and reconcile their experiences, the psychological consequences may involve processes that are not captured by a conventional stress–strain framework (Eke, 2026). One such process may involve the individual's sense of meaning in life (Guo et al., 2025) .

Meaning in life concerns the extent to which individuals experience their lives as coherent, purposeful, and significant (King & Hicks, 2021; Martela & Steger, 2016). Contemporary conceptualizations commonly distinguish several related components of meaning, including a sense that one's life makes sense, that it has valued direction or purpose, and that one's existence is significant or worthwhile (Martela & Steger, 2016, 2023). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire developed by Steger et al. (2006) further distinguishes between the presence of meaning and the search for meaning, emphasizing that experiencing meaning and actively searching for meaning are related but distinct processes (Steger et al., 2006; Zhao et al., 2026).

Meaning becomes particularly relevant when individuals encounter experiences that challenge their existing assumptions about themselves, their circumstances, or their goals. Meaning-Making Theory provides a framework for understanding this process. Park (2010) proposed that individuals possess relatively broad systems of global meaning, including beliefs, goals, and expectations, and that stressful experiences can create discrepancies between these global meanings and the meanings assigned to specific situations(Kring et al., 2024; Park, 2010). Meaning-making processes involve efforts to reduce or resolve these discrepancies, potentially through reinterpretation of the stressful experience or broader reorganization of one's understanding of the situation.

This perspective offers a useful explanation for why demanding leadership experiences may have consequences beyond psychological strain. When leaders encounter incompatible expectations, they may need to determine how these competing demands fit within their broader understanding of their responsibilities (Smith et al., 2016). They may need to consider which responsibilities are most important, how different expectations can be reconciled, and why their leadership work matters. In this sense, demanding experiences may provide an occasion for leaders to integrate apparently conflicting aspects of their work into a broader framework of purpose and significance (Berson et al., 2015; Maran et al., 2022).

It is important, however, to distinguish meaning-making as a process from meaning in life as an outcome or psychological state. Meaning-making refers to the process through which individuals interpret and integrate experiences (Frödin, 2025; Park, 2017), whereas meaning in life refers to the experienced sense that one's life possesses coherence, purpose, and significance (Costin & Vignoles, 2020; Martela & Steger, 2016). The present study measures the latter. Meaning-Making Theory is therefore used as the theoretical framework for explaining how challenging or conflicting experiences may be associated with an individual's broader sense of meaning.

Meaning in life may subsequently function as a psychological resource for resilience (Miao & Cao, 2024). When individuals perceive their lives as meaningful, difficult experiences can be interpreted within a broader framework of purpose rather than as isolated threats. Meaning can provide direction and significance that support persistence when circumstances are difficult. Empirical evidence has linked meaning in life with more adaptive responses to stressors. Ostafin and Proulx (2020), for example, found across three studies that meaning in life was associated with more adaptive responses to stressors, including lower stressor-related psychological distress and repetitive negative thinking (Ostafin & Proulx, 2020). More recent longitudinal and experimental evidence has further strengthened the proposed relationship. Researchers found that meaning in life predicted subsequent resilience in a longitudinal study, while an intervention designed to increase meaning in life also produced

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improvements in resilience (Li et al., 2025). These findings suggest that meaning in life may constitute a psychological resource that supports adaptive functioning when individuals face demanding circumstances.

The relationship between role conflict and meaning in life, however, remains theoretically and empirically less clear (Kulik et al., 2015; Wolfram, 2023). A conventional stress perspective would suggest that incompatible demands may undermine meaning (Carlson et al., 2019). Persistent conflict can make responsibilities appear incoherent, create uncertainty regarding priorities, and produce tension between organizational requirements and personally or professionally valued goals (Hariyani et al., 2025). From this perspective, greater role conflict might be expected to correspond with a diminished sense of purpose and significance.

An alternative possibility follows from the challenge–hindrance perspective and Meaning-Making Theory. For leaders, competing expectations may require active interpretation and integration of different responsibilities. A leader confronted with conflicting demands may attempt to connect these expectations to a broader understanding of the organization's mission and their own leadership responsibilities (Besharov & Khurana, 2000). Government policy may be interpreted in relation to institutional mission; institutional priorities may be reconciled with stakeholder needs; and administrative responsibilities may be connected to a broader sense of public, professional, or social contribution. Through such processes, complex responsibilities may become more coherent and purposeful even when the underlying demands remain difficult.

This possibility has received considerably less empirical attention than the traditional negative consequences of role conflict. Existing role-stress research has extensively examined outcomes such as anxiety, dissatisfaction, strain, and withdrawal, whereas research on meaning has developed more prominently within the literature on stressful life experiences, well-being, and adaptation (Bliese et al., 2017; Hasson & Villaume, 2026). Although previous research has considered relationships between multiple roles, role conflict, and meaning in life, much of this work has focused on work–family contexts rather than structural leadership within public organizations (Li & Yang, 2026; Smith & Hatmaker, 2024). Consequently, the relationship between organizational role conflict and meaning in life remains insufficiently understood, particularly among leaders who routinely navigate competing institutional and stakeholder expectations.

This represents an important theoretical gap because role conflict may have psychological implications that extend beyond conventional indicators of occupational strain. If competing demands require leaders to interpret and integrate their responsibilities within a broader framework of purpose, role conflict may be associated with meaning-related processes that have been largely overlooked in the role-stress literature (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Demerouti, 2025). Examining this possibility may therefore contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how leaders psychologically navigate complex organizational roles.

A further gap concerns the connection between these processes and resilience. Research has established that resilience is important for adaptive functioning under stressful conditions, and emerging evidence indicates that meaning in life may contribute to resilience (Jiang et al., 2026; Schwandt et al., 2024; Kocjan et al., 2021). Yet, relatively little research has examined whether meaning in life functions as a psychological pathway connecting leaders' experiences of competing role demands with their capacity for resilience (Brown et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant in public-sector leadership, where conflicting expectations may be embedded in the institutional structure of the role rather than representing isolated or exceptional events.

The context of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs provides an especially relevant setting in which to investigate this possibility. Structural leaders in Islamic public higher education institutions and regional offices operate within an organizational environment where bureaucratic, institutional, professional, religious, and societal expectations intersect. The population is therefore theoretically relevant not merely because it represents an understudied group, but because its organizational context

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provides a setting in which competing role expectations are structurally salient. Examining this population allows the study to investigate whether the psychological interpretation of such demands is associated with meaning in life and, in turn, resilience.

Taken together, the preceding literature suggests that the relationship between role conflict and resilience may be better understood as an indirect psychological process rather than a simple direct association. Structural leaders who encounter competing expectations may experience these demands as sources of tension, but they may also be required to interpret and integrate such experiences within a broader understanding of their responsibilities and purpose. Meaning in life may therefore represent an important psychological mechanism through which demanding role experiences are associated with adaptive functioning.

Drawing on the challenge–hindrance stressor framework and Meaning-Making Theory, the present study proposes that role conflict may be associated with meaning in life as leaders attempt to interpret and integrate competing expectations within a broader framework of purpose. In turn, meaning in life may provide psychological resources that support resilience when leaders encounter demanding circumstances. Importantly, this proposition does not imply that role conflict is inherently beneficial or that increasing role conflict would improve leaders' well-being. Rather, the study examines whether meaning-related processes help explain the relationship between leaders' experiences of competing role demands and their resilience.

The study therefore addresses three interconnected gaps. First, a contextual gap exists because research on role conflict, meaning in life, and resilience has rarely focused on structural leaders within a public religious bureaucracy, particularly Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs. Second, a theoretical gap exists because the relationship between role conflict and meaning in life has received substantially less attention than the relationship between role conflict and conventional strain-related outcomes. Third, a process gap exists because the potential role of meaning in life as a mechanism linking role conflict with resilience has not been sufficiently examined among leaders who routinely navigate competing institutional and stakeholder demands.

By addressing these gaps, the present study extends role-stress research beyond conventional adverse outcomes and examines a more nuanced psychological pathway through which leaders may respond to complex role demands. It also extends the application of Meaning-Making Theory to organizational leadership by examining whether competing role experiences are associated with a broader sense of meaning and whether this meaning is subsequently related to resilience.

Accordingly, this study examines the relationship between role conflict and leader resilience among structural leaders in Islamic public higher education institutions and regional offices under Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs. Drawing on the challenge–hindrance stressor framework and Meaning-Making Theory, the study investigates whether meaning in life statistically accounts for the relationship between role conflict and resilience. Specifically, it examines Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning as two distinct parallel mediators rather than treating meaning in life as a single composite construct. By distinguishing these dimensions, the study seeks to clarify whether the perceived presence of meaning and the active search for meaning show different patterns of association with role conflict and leader resilience in a public religious institutional context.

Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among role conflict, meaning in life, and leader resilience, with particular attention to the mediating roles of Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning. Data were collected between January and June 2026 from 158 leaders affiliated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) in West Java, Indonesia.

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Participants ranged in age from 30 to 64 years (M = 51.63, SD = 6.16). Of the participants, 86.1% (n = 136) identified as male and 13.9% (n = 22) as female. Participants represented leadership positions across Islamic public higher education institutions and MoRA regional or local offices.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who met the study's eligibility criteria. Eligible participants were individuals affiliated with MoRA institutions or offices in West Java who held formally appointed structural leadership positions and had managerial, supervisory, or administrative responsibilities. Individuals who did not meet the institutional affiliation criteria or who did not hold a formal structural appointment were ineligible. Functional positions without formal structural responsibilities were not classified as structural leadership positions solely on the basis of professional seniority or job title.

Participants occupied positions at different organizational levels, including senior institutional leadership, faculty or unit leadership, section or subdivision leadership, heads of Religious Affairs Offices (Kantor Urusan Agama; KUA), and heads of madrasahs. Structural leadership status was determined based on formal appointment and organizational responsibilities rather than job title alone.

Role Conflict. Role conflict was measured using the eight-item Role Conflict subscale of the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). The items assess incompatible work demands, conflicting expectations from different groups, and situations in which individuals are expected to perform tasks without adequate resources. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater role conflict. The composite score was calculated as the mean of the eight items. Internal consistency in the present sample was good (Cronbach's α = .826).

Meaning in Life. Meaning in life was measured using the 10-item Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006). The instrument assesses two theoretically distinct dimensions: Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning, each comprising five items. Responses are recorded on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 to 7. The item concerning the absence of a clear life purpose was reverse-scored for the relevant dimension in accordance with the instrument's scoring instructions.

The study used the two MLQ dimensions as separate variables rather than combining them into a single composite score. Presence of Meaning represented the extent to which participants perceived their lives as meaningful, whereas Search for Meaning represented their active efforts to seek or discover meaning in life. The two dimensions were examined separately as potential mediators to preserve their conceptual distinction.

The Indonesian-language MLQ version was selected with reference to previously published Indonesian adaptation and validation research, including Reinaldi et al. (2021). The applicability of the instrument to the present sample of organizational leaders was considered separately from evidence obtained in student populations. Internal consistency was evaluated separately for Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning.

Leader Resilience. Leader resilience was measured using the 10-item Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10; Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007, based on Connor & Davidson, 2003). The Indonesian-language version was selected with reference to previously published Indonesian studies of the instrument. Responses were coded on a five-point scale ranging from 0 to 4, with higher scores indicating greater resilience. The composite score was calculated as the mean of the 10 items, producing a possible score range of 0–4. In the present sample, the mean resilience score was 3.36 (SD = .53), and internal consistency was good (Cronbach's α = .852). These reliability estimates describe the instrument's internal consistency in the present sample and do not, by themselves, establish all aspects of measurement validity.

Measurement quality was evaluated through the examination of item coding, response ranges, reverse-scoring procedures, and internal consistency. The reliability of each MLQ dimension was assessed separately. Evidence of validity from previous Indonesian studies was considered alongside the

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applicability of the measures to the present population of structural leaders. Any additional validity analyses conducted in the current sample should be reported with their corresponding results.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. Before participating, individuals received information about the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and the handling of their data, and provided informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained by restricting access to research data and reporting findings in aggregate form. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw in accordance with the approved research protocol.

Descriptive statistics, internal consistency coefficients, and Pearson product–moment correlations were calculated for the study variables. Before hypothesis testing, item coding and composite scores were checked against the response options and scoring instructions of the respective instruments. Two separate mediation models were specified using ordinary least squares regression following the analytical framework of Hayes' PROCESS Model 4. In the first model, Presence of Meaning was examined as the mediator of the relationship between role conflict and leader resilience. In the second model, Search for Meaning was examined as the mediator of the same relationship.

For each model, the analysis estimated (a) the effect of role conflict on the relevant mediator (path a), (b) the effect of the mediator on leader resilience while controlling for role conflict (path b), (c) the direct effect of role conflict on leader resilience while controlling for the mediator (path c′), and (d) the total effect of role conflict on leader resilience (path c). The indirect effect (a × b) was evaluated using 5,000 bootstrap resamples. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant when its 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. The final reported confidence intervals and significance tests should correspond to the bootstrap procedure actually implemented in the statistical software.

Results and Discussion

Results

The study included 158 structural leaders working within Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), including leaders in Islamic public higher education institutions and regional offices. Participants represented a range of structural leadership positions and organizational responsibilities within the Ministry. The demographic and professional characteristics of the participants are presented in **Table 1.** The sample was predominantly male (86.1%), with an average age of 51.63 years (SD = 6.16; range = 30–64). Participants occupied a range of structural leadership positions. The largest groups were section/sub-division heads (22.2%), religious functional officers (10.1%), institute/center/department leaders in universities (8.2%), and heads of local religious affairs offices (KUA; 8.2%). Other positions included unit heads (7.0%), school/madrasah heads (7.0%), faculty-level leaders such as deans and vice deans (5.1%), senior institutional leaders (3.8%), senior regional/bureau leaders (3.8%), and other or unclassified positions (24.6%).

Table 1. Demographic and Professional Characteristics of Participants (N = 158)

Characteristic	***n***	**%**
Gender		
Male	136	86.1
Female	22	13.9
Age	*M* = 51.63, *SD* = 6.16, range 30-64	

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Leadership position (grouped)		
Section/sub-division head	35	22.2
Religious functional officer	16	10.1
Institute/center/department leader (university)	13	8.2
Local religious affairs office head (KUA)	13	8.2
Unit head	11	7.0
School/madrasah head	11	7.0
Faculty-level leader (Dean/Vice Dean)	8	5.1
Work group leader	39	24.6
Senior institutional leader	6	3.8
Senior regional/bureau leader	6	3.8

Descriptive statistics, internal consistency estimates, and Pearson product–moment correlations were calculated for role conflict, presence of meaning, search for meaning, and leader resilience (**Table 1**). Role conflict had a mean of 2.94 (SD = .84), presence of meaning 5.64 (SD = 1.08), search for meaning 5.81 (SD = .86), and leader resilience 4.36 (SD = .53). Internal consistency was good for role conflict (α = .826) and leader resilience (α = .852), but low for presence of meaning (α = .632) and especially search for meaning (α = .325).

Role conflict was positively correlated with presence of meaning ($r = .19$, $p = .017$), but not with search for meaning ($r = .09$, $p = .258$) or leader resilience ($r = .12$, $p = .127$). Presence of meaning ($r = .35$, $p < .001$) and search for meaning ($r = .27$, $p < .001$) were both positively correlated with leader resilience. The two dimensions of meaning were strongly correlated ($r = .75$, $p < .001$).

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability, and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Min–Max	α	1	2	3
1. Role Conflict	2.94	.84	1.00–5.00	.826	—		
2. Presence of Meaning	5.64	1.08	2.00–7.00	.632	.19*	—	
3. Search for Meaning	5.81	.86	3.20–7.00	.625	.09	.75***	—
4. Leader Resilience	3.36	.53	1.80–4.00	.852	.12	.35***	.27***

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

A parallel mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS Model 4 procedure, with role conflict as the independent variable, presence of meaning and search for meaning as simultaneous mediators, and leader resilience as the dependent variable. Indirect effects were estimated with 5,000 bootstrap resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (**Table 2**).

Role conflict significantly predicted presence of meaning (a_1: b = .242, SE = .100, β = .190, p = .017) but not search for meaning (a_2: b = .093, SE = .082, β = .091, p = .258). With role conflict and both mediators in the model, presence of meaning significantly predicted leader resilience (b_1: b = .156,

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SE = .057, β = .316, p = .007), whereas search for meaning did not (b_2: b = .019, SE = .070, β = .031, p = .785).

The total effect of role conflict on leader resilience was not significant (c: b = .077, SE = .050, β = .122, p = .127), nor was the direct effect after the mediators were included (c′: b = .037, SE = .049, β = .059, p = .443). The indirect effect through presence of meaning was significant (a_1b_1 = .038, SE = .020, 95% CI [.009, .093]), whereas the indirect effect through search for meaning was not (a_2b_2 = .002, SE = .009, 95% CI [−.010, .035]). The total indirect effect was significant (b = .040, SE = .018, 95% CI [.012, .086]). The contrast between the two specific indirect effects was not significant (b = .036, SE = .026, 95% CI [−.002, .103]).

Table 3. Parallel Mediation: Role Conflict, Presence and Search for Meaning, and Leader Resilience

Effect	b	β	SE	95% CI	p
a_1: Role Conflict → Presence	.242	.190	.100	—	.017
a_2: Role Conflict → Search	.093	.091	.082	—	.258
b_1: Presence → Resilience	.156	.316	.057	—	.007
b_2: Search → Resilience	.019	.031	.070	—	.785
Direct effect (c′)	.037	.059	.049	—	.443
Total effect (c)	.077	.122	.050	—	.127
Indirect via Presence (a_1b_1)	.038	.060	.020	[.009, .093]	sig.
Indirect via Search (a_2b_2)	.002	.003	.009	[−.010, .035]	ns
Total indirect	.040	.063	.018	[.012, .086]	sig.
Contrast (Presence − Search)	.036	.057	.026	[−.002, .103]	ns

Note. CIs are bias-corrected bootstrap intervals (5,000 resamples). Standardized indirect effects are products of standardized paths.

When presence and search were combined into a single meaning in life score, role conflict marginally predicted meaning in life (b = .167, SE = .085, p = .051), and meaning in life significantly predicted leader resilience (b = .191, SE = .045, p < .001). The direct effect was not significant (c′: b = .045, SE = .048, p = .353). The indirect effect was significant (b = .032, SE = .016, 95% CI [.008, .073]). Role conflict was associated with leader resilience only indirectly. This indirect-only pattern was carried by presence of meaning, not by search for meaning. The difference between the two indirect effects was not significant, so the data do not show that presence mediates more strongly than search. The results are statistical, not causal, because the design is cross-sectional.

Discussion

This study examined the relationships among role conflict, meaning in life, and leader resilience among structural leaders in Indonesian public religious institutions, distinguishing between Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning. The findings suggest that Presence of Meaning may represent a relevant pathway linking role conflict with resilience, whereas Search for Meaning did not demonstrate a significant specific indirect effect. However, the difference between the two indirect effects was not statistically significant. These findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between experiencing

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life as meaningful and actively searching for meaning when examining leadership-related psychological outcomes.

The positive association between role conflict and Presence of Meaning suggests that competing work demands do not necessarily coincide with a diminished sense of purpose among structural leaders. One possible interpretation is that leaders may continue to perceive their lives as meaningful while navigating conflicting organizational expectations. Their responsibilities may remain connected to broader personal, institutional, or societal purposes despite the difficulties involved in fulfilling competing demands (Schmitt & Pauknerova, 2025).

This interpretation distinguishes the experience of role conflict from the subjective evaluation of one's life. Role conflict concerns incompatible expectations and demands, whereas Presence of Meaning reflects the perceived meaningfulness and purpose of life (Martela & Steger, 2023; Steger et al., 2006). These experiences can coexist without implying that role conflict is beneficial. The findings therefore suggest that the psychological implications of role conflict may depend partly on how leaders experience their broader sense of purpose, although the mechanisms underlying this relationship were not directly examined.

The association was modest, and the cross-sectional design prevents conclusions about its direction. Role conflict may prompt reflection on personal and professional priorities, but leaders with a stronger sense of meaning may also interpret their responsibilities differently. These possibilities require further investigation rather than being treated as established explanations.

Presence of Meaning was positively associated with leader resilience and accounted for a significant indirect statistical association between role conflict and resilience in the parallel mediation model. This finding is consistent with the distinction proposed by Steger et al. (2006) between perceiving life as meaningful and actively searching for meaning. A perceived sense of purpose may provide a framework for interpreting demanding responsibilities and maintaining engagement with work despite organizational difficulties (Costin & Vignoles, 2020; Martela & Steger, 2016).

By contrast, Search for Meaning did not demonstrate a significant specific indirect effect. Although it was positively correlated with resilience at the bivariate level, its unique association was not statistically significant when Presence of Meaning and role conflict were considered simultaneously. This pattern may partly reflect the substantial overlap between the two dimensions, as well as the relatively modest reliability of their scores. It does not establish that searching for meaning is unimportant; rather, the present analysis did not identify a statistically significant indirect pathway through this dimension.

The contrast between the two specific indirect effects was also nonsignificant. Consequently, the findings do not establish that Presence of Meaning mediates the relationship more strongly than Search for Meaning. The results instead provide preliminary evidence that perceived meaning may be relevant to the association between role conflict and resilience, while the distinct contribution of active meaning-seeking remains uncertain. Importantly, the significant indirect effect should not be interpreted as evidence that role conflict causes greater meaning or that meaning subsequently increases resilience. Because all variables were measured cross-sectionally, the mediation model represents a pattern of statistical associations rather than a demonstrated causal process.

The findings contribute to leadership research by suggesting that meaning in life should not necessarily be treated as a single, undifferentiated construct. Distinguishing Presence of Meaning from Search for Meaning allows researchers to examine whether perceived purpose and active meaning-seeking have different associations with leadership-related outcomes (Enestrom et al., 2024; Frödin, 2025; Park, 2017). In the present study, the findings were more consistent with a potential role for perceived meaning than with a significant indirect pathway through active searching. Nevertheless, the distinction between the pathways requires further replication, particularly given the measurement limitations.

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For leadership development in public religious institutions, the findings suggest that opportunities to reflect on professional purpose, clarify personal and institutional values, and connect daily responsibilities with broader societal contributions may be worth exploring. Such activities could be incorporated into mentoring, reflective supervision, or leadership development programs. However, the present study did not evaluate these interventions, so their effectiveness in strengthening resilience remains to be established.

These implications should be considered alongside organizational measures to address role conflict. Clear role definitions, coordinated expectations, reasonable workloads, and appropriate supervisory support remain important. A sense of meaning should not be regarded as a substitute for addressing conflicting responsibilities or avoidable organizational pressures (King et al., 2023; Tummers & Knies, 2013).

Several limitations qualify the interpretation of the findings. First, the cross-sectional design does not establish temporal ordering or causality. Longitudinal studies could investigate whether changes in role conflict precede changes in meaning and whether these changes are subsequently associated with resilience. Intervention-based research could further evaluate whether meaning-oriented leadership development contributes to resilience.

Second, purposive sampling of structural leaders affiliated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs in West Java limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions and organizational contexts. Research involving more diverse leadership populations would help establish whether the observed relationships extend beyond the present setting.

Third, the internal consistency estimates for Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning were relatively modest ($\alpha = .632$ and $\alpha = .625$, respectively). These values warrant caution because measurement imprecision may affect the estimated associations and indirect effects. The findings involving the MLQ dimensions should therefore be considered preliminary. Future research should verify item mapping and scoring, examine item-level performance and factor structure, and establish stronger evidence of reliability and validity among organizational leaders.

Finally, the substantial correlation between the two meaning dimensions raises questions about the precision of their unique contributions in the parallel mediation model. Future studies should examine multicollinearity diagnostics and the stability of the estimated indirect effects. Further research could also investigate psychological and organizational processes that may connect role conflict with meaning and resilience, provided these mechanisms are directly measured and evaluated using theoretically justified models.

This study provides preliminary evidence that Presence of Meaning may account for an indirect statistical association between role conflict and leader resilience among structural leaders in Indonesian public religious institutions. Search for Meaning did not demonstrate a significant specific indirect effect, and the difference between the two indirect pathways was not statistically significant. The findings underscore the value of distinguishing between perceived meaning and active meaning-seeking when investigating resilience in leadership contexts. However, the modest reliability of the MLQ dimensions and the cross-sectional design limit the strength of the conclusions. Further research using stronger measurement evidence, more diverse samples, and longitudinal or intervention-based designs is needed to clarify how the distinct dimensions of meaning in life relate to leadership resilience.

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