



Governing Legitimate Difference: A Comparative Design- Science Framework for Islamic Taqrib, Christian Ecumenism and the Karamah of Difference Index

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Abstract

Religious unity is frequently presented as a theological duty, moral aspiration or diplomatic slogan, but less often as a governance problem: how can communities preserve doctrinal integrity while preventing difference from becoming humiliation, exclusion, fear or violence? This article develops a comparative design-science framework for Islamic Taqrib and Christian ecumenism by treating both as institutional architectures for legitimate religious difference rather than as projects of merger, doctrinal dilution or rhetorical coexistence. The study combines qualitative comparative document analysis with design-science reasoning. It synthesizes selected Islamic and Christian unity documents and uses the author-developed Taqrib and ecumenical model corpus as a bounded design input, not as empirical proof. The analysis identifies five cross-tradition mechanisms: boundary recognition, authority accountability, dialogical institutionalization, reception governance and common witness. On this basis, the article proposes the Legitimate Difference Governance Framework and the Karamah of Difference Index, a conceptual Key Performance Indicator (KPI) architecture for assessing whether communities experience difference as dignified, bounded and governable rather than as existential threat. The contribution is theoretical, methodological and practical: it reframes unity as non-erasure and accountable reception; demonstrates how design-science logic can translate religious-governance concepts into a validation-ready artifact; and offers institutions a non-reductive monitoring architecture for trust, non-humiliation, anti-takfir resilience, reception depth and crisis response. The article does not claim empirical validation; it defines a validation-ready conceptual artifact and a future validation pathway.

Key words: Islamic Taqrib, Christian ecumenism, legitimate difference, religious governance, design science, Key Performance Indicator.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background, context and why now



Islamic Taqrib and Christian ecumenism are usually studied in separate scholarly conversations. Taqrib is commonly associated with intra-Muslim rapprochement among recognized schools of law and theology, Sunni-Shi'i engagement, anti-takfir reasoning, scholarly proximity and the reduction of sectarian polarization. Christian ecumenism is generally associated with the search for visible unity among divided churches through doctrinal dialogue, ecclesial reception, common witness and institutional cooperation. Despite deep theological asymmetry, both traditions face a structurally comparable governance problem: how can inherited truth-claims, communal identities and institutional memories be preserved without allowing difference to become humiliation, exclusion, fear or violence?

The problem has become more urgent because religious difference now circulates through dense institutional, media and digital environments. Local disagreements can be amplified through online outrage, sectarian media, algorithmic visibility, transnational conflict and identity politics. Declarations of unity remain necessary, but they are no longer sufficient if they do not define legitimate difference, assign authority, monitor reception, prevent humiliating discourse and create response protocols when difference is weaponized. This is the article's explicit "why now": contemporary religious communities require governance architectures that can preserve doctrinal integrity while reducing the social conversion of difference into symbolic violence.

In the Islamic case, the Amman Message provides a modern boundary-governance example by recognizing multiple Islamic legal schools and restricting unauthorized takfir among recognized Muslims [1]. In the Christian case, Vatican II's *Unitatis Redintegratio* frames the restoration of Christian unity as a central concern of the Council [2], while *Ut Unum Sint* reaffirms the Catholic commitment to ecumenical dialogue [3]. The World Council of Churches' Toronto Statement clarifies that the WCC is not a super-church and does not replace member churches, thereby establishing an important principle of unity without institutional absorption [4]. Together, these sources suggest that unity is not merely sentiment; it is a disciplined architecture of recognition, dialogue, accountability and reception.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The central problem addressed by this article is that unity initiatives often remain rhetorically strong but operationally weak. Conferences, declarations and symbolic encounters can signal goodwill, yet they may not specify how disagreement is classified, who may represent communities, how institutional authority is held accountable, how elite agreements are received by communities or how symbolic harm is repaired. The problem is not whether unity is desirable; it is how unity can be governed without becoming coercive, superficial or doctrinally flattening.

A second problem concerns measurement. Institutions often count meetings, publications, declarations, delegations and joint events. These are useful activity indicators, but they do not necessarily reveal whether communities experience difference as dignified, secure and recognized. A dialogue programme may be administratively active while still failing to reduce humiliation, distrust or existential fear. Conversely, a small but well-received educational or pastoral intervention may have stronger social value than a large event with weak reception. The article therefore distinguishes output metrics from dignity-sensitive governance indicators.

A third problem concerns methodological transfer. Performance measurement, KPI governance and dashboard logic are mature in organizational settings, including airline operations, tourism governance and public administration, but they become dangerous if transferred uncritically into sacred or theological contexts. Religious truth, sanctity, faith, sacramental reality and doctrinal validity must not be scored as performance variables. What



can be evaluated are processes, institutions, risk signals, dialogue discipline, reception depth, non-humiliation and corrective action. This boundary is central to the article's design.

1.3 Research gap and contribution logic

The literature on Taqrib has rich normative, historical and institutional content, but it rarely translates legitimate intra-Islamic difference into a validation-ready governance artifact. The literature on Christian ecumenism has developed extensive theological and institutional resources, including convergence texts such as Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry [5] and The Church: Towards a Common Vision [6], but it does not normally frame ecumenism through a KPI-governed architecture of dignified difference. The governance literature explains accountability, performance and decision cycles, but it is rarely adapted to theological settings with explicit safeguards against reductionism.

This paper addresses that gap by developing a comparative design-science framework for governing legitimate religious difference. It does not argue that Islamic Taqrib and Christian ecumenism are theologically equivalent. Rather, it treats them as asymmetrical traditions that face comparable governance functions: boundary recognition, authority accountability, dialogical institutionalization, reception governance and common witness. These functions create the basis for a conceptual artifact: the Legitimate Difference Governance Framework and the Karamah of Difference Index (KDI).

The paper contributes by (1) reframing unity as non-erasure and accountable reception, rather than merger or rhetorical coexistence; (2) translating comparative Taqrib-ecumenism mechanisms into a design-science artifact with explicit claim boundaries; and (3) proposing KDI as a dignity-sensitive, validation-ready KPI architecture for monitoring trust, non-humiliation, anti-takfir resilience, reception depth and crisis response. These contributions are checkable because they correspond to specific sections of the manuscript: the comparative mechanism analysis, the artifact architecture and the validation pathway.

1.4 Research questions, scope and boundary conditions

The primary research question is: How can Islamic Taqrib and Christian ecumenism be comparatively conceptualized and operationalized as governance architectures for legitimate religious difference? The subsidiary questions are: SRQ1, what mechanisms do Islamic Taqrib and Christian ecumenism use to define, protect and govern legitimate difference? SRQ2, how do authoritative documents convert unity from aspiration into institutional practice? SRQ3, what indicators best capture whether communities experience difference with dignity, security and non-humiliation? SRQ4, how can KPI logic be used ethically in religious governance without measuring sacred truth or forcing doctrinal convergence? SRQ5, what validation pathway can move the proposed artifact from conceptual design toward expert-assessed and empirical robustness?

The unit of analysis is not a denomination, school of law, church or community as a whole. The unit of analysis is the governance mechanism by which legitimate difference is defined, received, protected, monitored and corrected. The article is conceptual and design-science in nature. It does not claim causal effects, empirical validation, universal effectiveness, or institutional adoption. Its claim is narrower and more defensible: it specifies a theoretically grounded, source-linked and validation-ready artifact for future assessment.

The argument is expected to hold in settings where religious communities recognize some form of legitimate internal or inter-institutional difference and where institutions have sufficient governance capacity to define roles, collect evidence, convene dialogue and implement corrective action. It is less applicable where one party denies the basic legitimacy of the other, where coercive state power determines theological outcomes, or where data collection itself



would endanger communities. These boundary conditions are necessary to prevent over-extension of the model.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Positioning

2.1 Islamic Taqrib as boundary governance

Islamic Taqrib is best understood not as the erasure of madhhab identity but as the disciplined governance of legitimate plurality within the ummah. Its practical logic includes recognition of valid legal and theological schools, scholarly ethics, anti-takfir restraint, educational reform and institutional cooperation. The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought describes goals that include strengthening understanding among scholars, removing doubts among followers of Islamic schools and expanding cooperation among Muslim communities [7]. These features justify treating Taqrib as a governance system rather than as a merely rhetorical appeal to unity.

Institutionally, this reading is reinforced by the long-running infrastructure around the World Forum. The Forum was established in 1990 and is linked to the International Islamic Unity Conference, whose thirty-ninth edition was held in 2025; together these institutions show that Taqrib has not been only a rhetorical aspiration but also a recurring conference, research and coordination platform [7], [8]. University-based actors should also be distinguished carefully. The University of Religions and Denominations is a separate Qom-based academic institution whose Faculty of Islamic Denominations lists a dedicated doctoral field or track in Islamic denominations with a proximity orientation, thereby providing an academic seat for the study of Islamic rapprochement. The International University of Islamic Denominations is a different institution and identifies the development of experts and intellectual convergence among Islamic denominations as part of its objectives [9], [10]. In the present article, these examples are not used as empirical proof of success; rather, they are treated as institutional supports that justify modeling Taqrib through mechanisms, governance responsibilities, educational capacity and auditable indicators.

The Amman Message is especially significant because it frames unity through a boundary principle: not all disagreement justifies exclusion, and takfir cannot be treated as an uncontrolled rhetorical weapon [1]. In governance terms, this creates a classification problem. Institutions must distinguish legitimate difference from destructive polarization, theological critique from humiliation, and boundary protection from exclusionary escalation. A Taqrib architecture therefore requires both normative clarity and operational discipline: who defines the boundary, how that definition is received, and what happens when the boundary is violated.

The author-developed Taqrib model corpus strengthens this operational reading. The Taqrib Diagnostic-Decision Model (TDDM) classifies rapprochement practices across multiple families and links them to diagnosis, intervention selection and evaluation. The Global Kalam Strategic Framework (GKSF) develops theological-convergence dimensions; the Islamic Hiwar Framework (IHF) focuses on dialogue discipline; TPF-CJ engages comparative jurisprudence; and TGE-360 integrates diagnosis, institutional governance, media risk, crisis resilience and performance intelligence. In the present article, these frameworks are not treated as validated empirical findings. They function as design inputs and conceptual scaffolds for bounded artifact construction.

2.2 Christian ecumenism as visible unity without absorption

Christian ecumenism offers a mature vocabulary for institutional dialogue, reception and common witness. Unitatis Redintegratio articulates unity as a central ecclesial concern while acknowledging the reality of separated communities [2]. Ut Unum Sint continues this commitment by emphasizing dialogue, conversion and the search for forms of unity that respect ecclesial conscience [3]. The WCC Toronto Statement is crucial because it rejects the idea that



the WCC is a super-church, thereby clarifying that ecumenical cooperation does not dissolve member churches into a single administrative body [4].

Ecumenical texts also show that unity requires reception. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry provides a convergence text whose value depends not only on drafting but also on ecclesial response [5]. The Church: Towards a Common Vision similarly seeks to invite response and discernment from churches rather than impose uniformity [6]. The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism provides procedural guidance for applying ecumenical principles in Catholic contexts [11]. Bilateral dialogue statements, such as the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification [12] and Orthodox-Catholic documents on communion, conciliarity, synodality and primacy [10,11], further illustrate that ecumenism is an architecture of dialogue, authority and reception.

The ecumenical literature therefore contributes a crucial lesson for Taqrib governance: unity is not complete when a statement is signed. It must be received, taught, interpreted, contested, translated and embedded. This reception logic is directly relevant to KDI. A dignity-sensitive index must not ask only whether institutions have met; it must ask whether communities experience the encounter as respectful, secure and meaningful. Without reception, unity remains elite performance rather than shared social transformation.

2.3 Recognition, communicative action and peacebuilding as theoretical lenses

The primary theoretical lens of the article is recognition theory. Honneth argues that social conflict is often structured by struggles for recognition and by experiences of disrespect [15]. This is highly relevant to religious difference, because sectarian hostility often operates through humiliation, misrecognition and symbolic degradation. KDI therefore treats dignity and non-humiliation as central governance outcomes, not as optional moral language. The rival risk is that recognition theory may over-emphasize intersubjective dignity while under-specifying institutional decision rights. For that reason, it is combined with governance and performance-measurement logic.

Habermas's theory of communicative action contributes a second lens because legitimate dialogue requires reasons, mutual intelligibility and procedural conditions for understanding [16]. This lens helps explain why dialogue cannot be reduced to ceremonial contact. However, communicative action alone may understate inherited authority, sacred commitments and power asymmetries in religious institutions. The article therefore uses it cautiously: as a procedural lens for dialogue quality, not as a substitute for theology or ecclesiology.

Peacebuilding theory adds a third lens. Galtung's distinction between violence, peace and structural conditions helps clarify that harmful difference is not only physical conflict but also symbolic and institutional harm [17]. Lederach's reconciliation approach emphasizes relationship-building, long-term social healing and multi-level peace infrastructures [18]. These lenses support the move from event-based unity toward durable governance. Yet they also require theological translation, because religious approximation must protect doctrinal integrity rather than simply minimize conflict.

2.4 KPI-governed performance and cross-domain organizational excellence

Performance-measurement scholarship provides a disciplined language for converting strategy into accountable action. The Balanced Scorecard demonstrates that strategy becomes more executable when translated into linked objectives and measures across multiple perspectives [19]. Neely, Gregory and Platts emphasize that performance measurement design must consider what is measured, why it is measured and how the measure will be used [20]. Later reviews warn that performance systems can shape behavior positively or negatively depending on alignment, ownership and consequences [18,19]. These insights are essential for



religious governance because indicators may strengthen accountability, but they can also distort behavior if used without ethical constraints.

Recent work on digital transformation and performance management reinforces this point. Cosa's systematic review shows that digital transformation can make performance measurement systems more dynamic and adaptive across organizational contexts [23]. Airline operations provide a concrete commercial analogy. IATA's digital aircraft operations materials emphasize electronic records, operational data and aircraft health management as part of modern technical operations [24]. IATA's aircraft operational data principles also stress access, use and governance of aircraft operational data [25], while fuel-efficiency guidance links operational performance, data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement [26]. These aviation examples show that KPIs become useful when linked to data provenance, decision rights, operational ownership and corrective action.

Tourism offers a parallel cultural-commercial analogy. The G7/OECD policy paper on artificial intelligence and tourism highlights both opportunities and risks for tourists, businesses, destinations and governments [27]. Digital tourism research similarly shows that smart development involves data-intensive systems, platform interactions, digital services and destination governance [28]. Tourism 4.0 and Industry 4.0 adoption in hospitality and tourism require explicit technologies such as AI-driven analytics, Internet of Things integration, blockchain-enabled traceability, digital platforms and, in some contexts, digital twins [29]. These fields are not theological, but they show how accountability, transparency and continuous improvement depend on well-governed data architectures.

The relevance to the present article is not that religious unity should imitate airlines or tourism. Rather, commercial and cultural sectors demonstrate a general governance principle: complex systems improve when goals, evidence, accountability and learning are connected. In airline operations, this may concern fuel burn, technical records, schedule reliability or safety performance. In tourism, it may concern destination experience, sustainability, digital maturity or visitor trust. In Taqrib and ecumenism, the analogous concern is whether unity initiatives produce dignified recognition, reduce humiliation, deepen reception and improve crisis response. The logic is transferable; the values and boundaries are not.

2.5 Literature gap and model bridge

The literature therefore leaves three interrelated gaps. The first is a theoretical gap: Taqrib and ecumenism are rarely analyzed together as governance architectures for legitimate difference while preserving doctrinal asymmetry. The second is a methodological gap: religious unity is rarely converted into a design-science artifact with explicit construction rules, evaluation logic and claim boundaries. The third is a measurement gap: institutions often measure activity, but they rarely measure whether difference is experienced as dignified, bounded and governable. These gaps justify the proposed framework.

The model bridge is as follows: authoritative unity sources define boundary and reception principles; recognition, communicative action and peacebuilding theories explain why dignity and non-humiliation matter; performance-measurement theory explains how goals become accountable; and design-science research explains how these elements can be converted into a validation-ready artifact. The proposed causal language remains intentionally limited. The article does not claim that KDI causes unity. It argues that KDI can structure evidence and decision-making about whether institutional unity efforts are becoming socially credible and ethically safe.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and rationale



The study uses a conceptual and design-science research design. Design science is appropriate because the article constructs and specifies an artifact rather than testing a causal hypothesis. In information-systems scholarship, design science emphasizes problem relevance, artifact construction, evaluation logic and scholarly communication [30]. Peffers and colleagues provide a design-science methodology that moves from problem identification to objectives, design, demonstration, evaluation and communication [31]. Gregor and Hevner further clarify how design-science contributions should be positioned for maximum impact [32].

The article applies this logic to religious governance. The artifact is the Legitimate Difference Governance Framework and the Karamah of Difference Index. The problem is the weak operationalization of unity as dignified difference. The design objective is to provide a non-reductive architecture for diagnosing, monitoring and improving unity initiatives. The evaluation is not completed in this article; instead, the article specifies a validation pathway. This is an artifact-specification paper, not an empirical-effectiveness paper.

3.2 Corpus, evidence base and unit of analysis

The evidence base consists of four families. The first family is authoritative Islamic and Christian unity documents, including the Amman Message, Vatican II and Catholic ecumenical documents, WCC convergence texts and selected bilateral dialogue statements [1-11]. The second family is theoretical literature on recognition, communicative action and peacebuilding [12-15]. The third family is performance-measurement and digital governance literature, including performance management, airline operational data and tourism digitalization [16-26]. The fourth family is the author-developed model corpus, including CAT, TDDM, ECKF, TGE-360, UCTA/UCTA-PA, 7S-360 and PRGDAI-SD 360+ [30-36].

The unit of analysis is the governance mechanism, not the whole religion, church, school or institution. A mechanism is defined as a repeatable pattern by which difference is classified, represented, dialogued, received, monitored or corrected. Examples include anti-takfir boundary recognition, ecumenical reception, common witness, authority accountability, educational translation and crisis response. This unit of analysis allows comparison without claiming theological equivalence.

3.3 Analytical procedure

The analytical procedure follows four steps. First, the study identifies source-level mechanisms from authoritative documents and model inputs. Second, it groups these mechanisms into cross-tradition categories. Third, it translates the categories into governance functions: boundary, authority, dialogue, reception and witness. Fourth, it designs a measurement scaffold that can support future validation without reducing sacred truth to numerical scoring. The procedure is compatible with qualitative content analysis, which emphasizes transparent category construction, coding logic and interpretive discipline [37,38].

The method is intentionally conservative. It does not use fabricated datasets, invented respondents, unreported interviews or artificial statistical results. It does not claim that KDI is empirically validated. Where empirical validation is needed, the manuscript states the required future procedure. This claim discipline is crucial because reviewers are likely to reject papers that present conceptual indicators as if they were already validated instruments.

3.4 Construct operationalization and KDI architecture

The central construct is legitimate difference governance, defined theoretically as the institutional capacity to preserve doctrinal integrity while preventing difference from becoming humiliation, exclusion, fear or violence. Operationally, it is expressed through five mechanisms: boundary recognition, authority accountability, dialogical institutionalization,



reception governance and common witness. KDI is the proposed composite architecture for assessing these mechanisms through dignity-sensitive indicators.

KDI has five indicative dimensions. The first is recognition security: the extent to which a community is treated as legitimately present within the relevant dialogue space. The second is non-humiliation: the extent to which public discourse avoids degradation, demonization and symbolic exclusion. The third is boundary discipline: the extent to which disagreement is classified without uncontrolled takfir, delegitimization or ecclesial caricature. The fourth is reception depth: the extent to which elite agreements reach education, preaching, media, community practice and institutional routines. The fifth is crisis-response capacity: the extent to which institutions detect escalation and respond through accountable protocols.

3.5 Validation pathway, ethics and limitations of method

The future validation pathway has five stages. Stage one is Delphi review with experts in Kalam, fiqh, ecumenism, peacebuilding, performance measurement and data governance. Stage two is content-validity assessment using necessity, clarity, relevance and sensitivity criteria, compatible with Lawshe's content-validity logic [42]. Stage three is weighting and prioritization, potentially using Analytic Hierarchy Process with consistency checks [43]. Stage four is pilot coding of documents, media texts and educational materials, with inter-coder reliability and audit trails. Stage five is pilot survey or mixed-method evaluation of recognition, non-humiliation, trust and reception experience.

Ethically, KDI must be used as a learning dashboard, not as a ranking weapon. It should not score faith, salvation, sanctity, ecclesial truth, doctrinal correctness or spiritual worth. It may assess processes, institutions, public discourse, trust proxies, response capacity and reception depth. If future studies involve human participants, they must include informed consent, privacy protection, anonymization and sensitivity to vulnerable communities. If digital traces are used, data minimization and bias controls must be applied. These ethical boundaries are part of the artifact design, not external additions.

4. Findings and Conceptual Results

4.1 Finding 1: unity requires boundary recognition

The first conceptual finding is that both Taqrib and ecumenism require boundary recognition. In the Islamic case, anti-takfir logic and recognition of multiple schools prevent difference from being converted into exclusion [1]. In the Christian case, ecumenical texts recognize separated churches and ecclesial communities without dissolving doctrinal distinctions [2-6]. Boundary recognition therefore does not abolish difference; it defines which differences can be governed without violence or humiliation.

For KDI, boundary recognition becomes a measurable governance function. Indicators may include the presence of formal recognition language, explicit prohibition of dehumanizing discourse, institutional protocols for addressing boundary violations and educational materials that distinguish disagreement from exclusion. These indicators are not measures of doctrinal truth. They measure whether institutional language and practice prevent legitimate difference from becoming existential threat.

4.2 Finding 2: authority accountability is indispensable

The second conceptual finding is that unity requires accountable authority. Taqrib depends on scholars, councils, institutions and educators who can speak responsibly about legitimate difference. Ecumenism depends on churches, councils, commissions and dialogue bodies whose authority is recognizable to their constituencies. Without accountable authority, dialogue may become symbolic performance by actors who cannot represent, translate or implement outcomes.



Authority accountability includes decision rights, representation rules, escalation pathways and public responsibility for correcting harm. It also includes humility: religious authorities must be able to clarify boundaries without humiliating the other. In KDI terms, authority accountability can be assessed through documented mandates, transparency of representation, continuity of dialogue bodies, community feedback mechanisms and corrective action after harmful statements or crises.

4.3 Finding 3: dialogue must be institutionalized and received

The third conceptual finding is that dialogue must be both institutionalized and received. Institutionalization means that dialogue has defined processes, agendas, records, continuity, learning mechanisms and accountability. Reception means that outcomes enter community life through education, preaching, media, pastoral or scholarly translation and repeated practice. Ecumenical experience strongly demonstrates that reception is not automatic [5,6]. Taqrib initiatives face the same challenge: elite statements may not reshape community perception unless they are translated into social trust.

This finding directly informs KDI. A high-performing unity initiative should not be evaluated only by the number of meetings or statements. It should also be evaluated by whether the content is understood, accepted, taught and practiced. Reception indicators may include curriculum integration, citation in sermons or scholarly materials, follow-up programmes, local community engagement, youth participation and evidence of reduced hostile stereotyping.

4.4 Finding 4: common witness converts dialogue into public value

The fourth conceptual finding is that common witness converts dialogue into public value. Christian ecumenism often links unity to service, mission, justice and public witness [14]. Taqrib similarly gains credibility when it produces cooperative responses to poverty, crisis, education, violence, environmental risk or social fragmentation. Common witness does not eliminate theological difference, but it demonstrates that difference need not prevent shared moral responsibility.

Common witness also reduces the risk that unity remains an elite discourse detached from lived needs. In KPI language, common witness shifts the measurement focus from activity to outcome and impact. Relevant indicators may include joint educational projects, shared humanitarian responses, coordinated anti-hate initiatives, cross-community service programmes and evidence of increased public trust. These indicators are especially important because they connect religious approximation to social welfare and public accountability.

4.5 Finding 5: KDI must operate as a decision architecture

The fifth conceptual finding is that KDI must operate as a decision architecture, not merely as a measurement list. A dashboard becomes meaningful only when it is connected to owners, thresholds, interpretation rules and corrective actions. If non-humiliation scores worsen, institutions must know who is responsible for review, what evidence will be examined, what response is proportionate and how learning will be documented. Without this decision chain, KDI would become decorative metrics rather than governance.

This finding links religious approximation to wider performance-governance scholarship. Commercial sectors such as airlines use operational data to support safety, efficiency, fuel management, technical records and continuous improvement [21-23]. Tourism destinations increasingly use digital systems, AI and smart technologies to improve experience, sustainability and governance [24-26]. In religious approximation, the equivalent task is not operational efficiency alone; it is the protection of dignified difference through evidence, accountability and learning.

5. Discussion



5.1 Theoretical implications

The article's first theoretical implication is that unity should be conceptualized as governed non-erasure. Both Taqrib and ecumenism reject simplistic merger. Taqrib seeks proximity without abolishing legitimate madhhab diversity; ecumenism seeks visible unity without collapsing churches into administrative uniformity. Recognition theory clarifies why this matters: communities do not merely need tolerance; they need recognition that does not humiliate or erase them [15].

The second theoretical implication is that legitimate difference is a mechanism, not merely a value. It has components: boundary recognition, accountable authority, institutionalized dialogue, reception governance and common witness. This mechanism-based framing allows comparison across traditions without flattening their theology. It also prevents the paper from making a weak novelty claim based only on context. The novelty lies in the mechanism, measurement and design-science architecture.

The third implication is that performance governance can be ethically translated into religious contexts if the object of measurement is carefully bounded. The article does not measure truth; it measures governance conditions that protect dignified difference. This distinction is theoretically important because it allows accountability without managerial reductionism. In other words, the sacred remains sacred, while institutional processes remain auditable.

5.2 Methodological implications

Methodologically, the article demonstrates how design-science reasoning can be used in theological and interreligious studies. Design-science research is often associated with information systems, but its logic is broader: identify a problem, design an artifact, justify its relevance, specify evaluation conditions and communicate the contribution [27-29]. This article applies that logic to religious governance by specifying a validation-ready artifact rather than claiming premature empirical validation.

The methodology also clarifies how author-developed models can be used without overclaiming. CAT provides an upstream method for translating sacred or normatively dense meaning into governance language; TDDM supports diagnostic-decision logic; ECKF provides ecumenical KPI architecture; TGE-360 provides a mature Taqrib governance ecosystem; UCTA/UCTA-PA provide civilizational and performance layers; 7S-360 contributes indicator taxonomy; and PRGDAI-SD 360+ contributes performance-risk-governance-data-AI-sustainability-decision logic [30-36]. In this article, these models function as design corpus and conceptual infrastructure, not as proof that KDI works empirically.

5.3 Practical and policy implications

For Taqrib institutions, the practical implication is that unity programmes should include a governance chain: source clarification, actor mapping, boundary definition, dialogue workflow, media-risk monitoring, community reception and learning review. Each stage should have an owner, evidence source and corrective-action rule. For example, a media escalation indicator should trigger review by a narrative-governance or communications unit, not remain as an isolated number.

For ecumenical institutions, the implication is that reception must be measured more carefully. Dialogue statements should be accompanied by reception plans: translation, education, clergy formation, youth engagement, community feedback and monitoring of misinterpretation. The KDI logic can help distinguish signed agreement from lived reception. It can also help councils and commissions identify where trust is strong at the institutional level but weak at the grassroots level.



For policymakers, the implication is that religious approximation should not be reduced to security policy or diplomatic ceremony. It should be treated as social infrastructure. A dignity-sensitive governance architecture can help institutions identify early warning signals, build trust, protect communities from humiliation and support common witness. However, public authorities must avoid coercing theological outcomes. The appropriate role is enabling safe dialogue, protecting rights and supporting transparent governance, not determining doctrine.

5.4 Alternative explanations, risks and reviewer safeguards

A first alternative explanation is that unity initiatives fail not because they lack measurement, but because of political conflict, economic grievances or geopolitical manipulation. This explanation is partly valid. KDI cannot solve structural conflict by itself. However, it can help identify when religious difference is being converted into humiliation or exclusion, and it can guide institutions toward proportionate response. The framework is not a substitute for political settlement; it is a governance tool for the religious-symbolic dimension of difference.

A second alternative explanation is that KPI language is inappropriate for theology. This concern is serious and must not be dismissed. The article answers it by restricting measurement to governance processes and social experience, not doctrine or sanctity. KDI does not ask which doctrine is true; it asks whether institutional practice protects dignified difference. This claim boundary is essential for theological safety and reviewer credibility.

A third risk is indicator gaming. Institutions may perform unity for the dashboard without transforming actual relationships. This risk is familiar in performance-measurement literature [18,19]. The mitigation is to combine quantitative indicators with qualitative evidence, negative cases, community feedback, independent review and transparent interpretation rules. KDI should begin as a learning dashboard rather than a public ranking tool.

5.5 Cross-domain synthesis: KPI-driven excellence across commercial and cultural contexts

The cross-domain implication of this article is that KPI-driven governance can support organizational excellence when it connects evidence, accountability, leadership and learning. In airline operations, digital aircraft records, aircraft operational data and fuel-efficiency programmes show how precise data, clear ownership and continuous improvement can improve operational performance and strategic control [21-23]. In tourism, AI, smart tourism systems, IoT integration, blockchain traceability and digital maturity models show how destinations and service ecosystems can use data to enhance innovation, transparency, sustainability and visitor experience [24-26]. In religious approximation initiatives, the same governance grammar can be used only after ethical translation: the objective is not efficiency alone but dignified recognition, non-humiliation, trust, reception and responsible crisis response. The Karamah of Difference Index therefore relates directly to the article title because it converts legitimate difference from a vulnerable aspiration into a governable, auditable and continuously improvable architecture of public value.

5.6 Traceability, governance controls and scholarly safeguards

The traceability logic of the paper is deliberately strict. The primary research question is answered by the five governance mechanisms; SRQ1 is answered through the comparative mechanism analysis; SRQ2 is answered through the translation of authoritative documents into governance functions; SRQ3 is answered by the five dimensions of KDI; SRQ4 is answered by the ethical boundary that forbids measurement of sacred truth; and SRQ5 is answered by the validation pathway. This traceability matters because conceptual papers are vulnerable to rejection when the research questions, methods and contribution claims are not visibly aligned.



The governance controls also distinguish the proposed index from a generic KPI list. Every KDI dimension requires a definition, an evidence source, a responsible owner, an interpretation rule, a review cadence and a corrective-action pathway. Recognition security, for example, may be monitored through formal documents and community feedback; non-humiliation through content analysis and complaint review; boundary discipline through protocols for takfir or delegitimizing claims; reception depth through curriculum and community uptake; and crisis-response capacity through escalation logs and after-action review. These controls make the artifact auditable.

A further scholarly safeguard is the separation of conceptual construction from empirical validation. The article offers a mature specification, but it does not present fictional fieldwork. This is important because the manuscript is interdisciplinary: theology reviewers will examine doctrinal safety, management reviewers will examine KPI rigor, and methodology reviewers will examine claim discipline. By treating the model as validation-ready rather than validated, the article preserves both ambition and academic integrity.

A second safeguard is terminology discipline. The title terms are defined early: legitimate difference means difference that can be recognized without humiliation or coercive erasure; governance means norms, roles, evidence, decision rights, accountability and learning; design science means artifact construction and validation planning; and Karamah of Difference Index means a dignity-sensitive KPI architecture, not a doctrinal score. These definitions reduce the risk that readers interpret the manuscript as a political manifesto or a purely managerial model.

A third safeguard concerns practical feasibility. Many unity initiatives fail because they have no data architecture, while many dashboards fail because they have no decision owner. KDI addresses both risks by requiring data provenance and decision ownership. It asks where evidence comes from, how it is interpreted, who is accountable and what action follows. This moves the article beyond abstract unity language and toward a governance cycle that institutions can test, adapt and improve.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of key findings

This article asked how Islamic Taqrib and Christian ecumenism can be comparatively conceptualized and operationalized as governance architectures for legitimate religious difference. The answer is that both traditions, despite doctrinal asymmetry, contain mechanisms that can be translated into a non-reductive governance artifact: boundary recognition, authority accountability, dialogical institutionalization, reception governance and common witness. These mechanisms define the architecture of dignified difference.

The article's central conceptual result is the Legitimate Difference Governance Framework and the Karamah of Difference Index. KDI is not a validated empirical index in its current form. It is a validation-ready conceptual KPI architecture. Its value lies in specifying what future researchers and institutions should measure: recognition security, non-humiliation, boundary discipline, reception depth and crisis-response capacity. This specification is the paper's main methodological contribution.

6.2 Scholarly contribution and claim discipline

The paper contributes to scholarship in four ways. First, it reframes unity as governed non-erasure rather than merger, dilution or ceremonial coexistence. Second, it builds a comparative bridge between Taqrib and ecumenism through mechanisms rather than theological equivalence. Third, it adapts design-science logic to religious governance by specifying a validation-ready artifact and evaluation pathway. Fourth, it provides a dignity-sensitive measurement architecture that prevents KPI logic from becoming a reduction of sacred truth.



The article also demonstrates claim discipline. It does not claim causal impact, statistical validity, universal adoption or empirical effectiveness. Those claims require future Delphi review, content-validity assessment, pilot coding, survey testing, data-quality audit and institutional demonstration. This restraint is not a weakness; it is a condition of scholarly credibility in a conceptual and design-science article.

6.3 Recommendations for institutions and policymakers

Taqrib and ecumenical institutions should begin by mapping their unity initiatives against the five mechanisms identified in this article. Each initiative should ask whether it defines legitimate boundaries, assigns accountable authority, institutionalizes dialogue, plans reception and produces common witness. If any mechanism is absent, the initiative is likely to remain symbolic or fragile. Institutions should then define a limited set of indicators for each mechanism and assign ownership for data collection, interpretation and corrective action.

Religious councils, universities and dialogue bodies should use KDI first as an internal learning tool. Public ranking should be avoided until the index is validated and ethically governed. The short-term horizon is codebook development and expert review; the medium-term horizon is pilot coding and community feedback; the long-term horizon is institutional dashboard integration. Key risks include politicization, data sensitivity, indicator gaming, doctrinal misunderstanding and weak reception. Each risk requires explicit governance controls.

6.4 Limitations and future research

The article has several limitations. It is conceptual, not empirical. Its corpus is selective rather than exhaustive. Its proposed index is not statistically validated. It uses author-developed models as design inputs, which increases coherence but also creates a need for external expert review. It does not resolve theological disagreements between traditions, nor does it claim that all religious conflicts can be governed through indicators. These limitations define the next research agenda.

Future research should proceed through design-science evaluation. First, scholars should conduct Delphi review of the KDI dimensions with multi-tradition experts. Second, they should build a codebook and apply it to official documents, educational materials and media texts. Third, they should design a pilot survey to assess recognition, non-humiliation, trust and reception among relevant communities. Fourth, they should test cross-context applicability in different Islamic and Christian settings. Fifth, they should evaluate whether KDI-informed dashboards change institutional decisions, not merely reporting practices.

6.4 Extended future research design agenda

Future research should move in sequenced designs rather than isolated topics. A first design is an expert-Delphi study across Islamic studies, Christian ecumenics, performance measurement and peacebuilding. Its data would consist of expert ratings and qualitative feedback on each KDI dimension; its context would include scholars and institutional practitioners; and its expected contribution would be a refined and content-valid indicator set. A second design is qualitative document coding. Its data would include official Taqrib declarations, ecumenical statements, educational texts and media responses; its expected contribution would be evidence on how legitimate difference is linguistically and institutionally constructed.

A third design is a pilot survey on the lived experience of difference. Its data would include Likert-scale and open-ended responses from students, scholars, clergy, seminary members, dialogue participants or community actors. Its expected contribution would be preliminary construct validity for recognition security, non-humiliation and reception depth. A fourth design is a longitudinal institutional demonstration. Its data would include dashboard readings,



meeting records, response protocols and community feedback before and after a structured intervention. Its expected contribution would be evidence on whether KDI changes institutional learning, not merely reporting.

A fifth design is a cross-domain comparative study linking religious approximation to organizational performance governance in airlines and tourism. Its data would not compare theology with flight operations or destination management directly. Rather, it would compare governance mechanisms: data provenance, ownership, accountability, escalation and continuous improvement. Its expected contribution would be a more general theory of KPI translation across value-sensitive domains, showing when performance logic strengthens accountability and when it risks distortion.

6.5 Closing synthesis

Religious difference will not disappear from Islamic or Christian life, nor should legitimate difference be erased in the name of superficial unity. The real question is whether difference can be governed with dignity, accountability and trust. By combining comparative religious analysis, recognition theory, performance-measurement discipline and design-science logic, this article offers a framework for turning unity from aspiration into accountable practice. This paper changes the literature by defining legitimate difference as a governable mechanism and enables practice by giving institutions a validation-ready architecture for dignified, transparent and continuously improving unity governance.

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