Reassessing Leadership traits:
An Islamic perspective

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Abstract: The phenomena of leadership has long been cited and discussed in business and management literature. Discourse on effective leadership qualities is popular in management circles. Interestingly, traditional literature on leadership has presented rather diverse results. And recent developments in the field of leadership and management reveal a growing interest in religion and spirituality. The present study attempts to understand leadership and submit a comprehensive framework exploring leadership traits from an Islamic viewpoint. A sample of 16 respondents was selected, most of whom had extensive knowledge and experience in leadership and management. They belonged to diverse industries such as manufacturing, construction, telecommunications, banking and education. The study found that Islamic Leadership is based around the notion of stewardship of Allah's creation. An Islamic leader must be a role model with exemplary personality, attitude, character and competence. And only those individuals may be selected as leaders who have piety (Taqwa) and goodness. The study also presented that Taqwa, Consultation and Intellectual competence are the key traits for a Muslim leader. In addition, Taqwa encompasses Islamic Spirituality and Islamic Social responsibly. The sub-constructs of Taqwa include; belief (Iman), worship (Ibadat) and repentance (Tawbah), patience, emotional control, forgiveness, the establishment of zakah and giving sadakah, fulfillment of contracts, justice and integrity. Together, these traits frame the overall description of Islamic leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, Taqwa (piety), Consultation, Intellectual Competence, Spirituality, Social Responsibility

Introduction

The global business environment is increasingly competitive and challenging. To survive in this climate, it is vital for business organizations to successfully achieve their goals and objectives by utilizing their resources efficiently. Able and compe-

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tent leadership also plays a pivotal role in coping with such immense business challenges (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Antonakis & House, 2014; Antonakis et al., 2003). Indeed, it takes a skillful and visionary leader to bring about the changes required for continued existence and to direct individuals as well as organizations through the uncertainty and confusion of rapid changes (Daft, 2002; Parry et al., 2014; Brennan, 2017). Albeit a great amount of research (Like; Rowold & Heinitz, 2007; Heinitz & Rowold, 2007; Rafferty & Griffin, 2004; Jian and Fairhurst, 2017) has been furnished on leadership and existing leadership theories, hitherto, these empirical studies have largely been authored by scholars from the West. Thus, the focus has remained on Western philosophy. Yukl (2002, p.143) avows, "Most of the enquiries on leadership during the past half century have been conducted in the United States, Canada and the Western Europe. The amount of leadership research conducted in the non-western cultures is still very limited". Although, non-western culture also is very rich, it holds a rather diverse viewpoint about leadership with regards to the western concept (Day et al., 2014; Jian and Fairhurst, 2017; Ali, 1987; Mohsen, 2007; Sulaiman et al, 2015; Egel and Fry, 2017).

Traditional literature on leadership over its course of progression has presented differing results. Some research results confirm that it is the traits of a leader that contribute towards organizational success, whereas others affirm that it is the leader's behavior which makes the overall difference (Day, 2000; Day, 2010; Day, 2011; Brennan, 2017; Egel and Fry, 2017). Blank (2001) confirmed that leaders possess 108 traits, others validated that there are only five or seven traits and the same persist for the behavioral theories (Brennan, 2017). In addition, it is also argued that the situation which the leader and the follower subsist in will define the overall traits and effectiveness of the leader (Fiedler, 1967). Nevertheless, literature on management would be enriched with further inquiry into traits that make a leader more efficient, effective and successful (Horner, 1997; Galanou & Farrag, 2015; Othman et al., 2018; Brennan, 2017).

It is worth emphasizing that the field of management is experiencing a rising interest in religion and spirituality. Past studies reveal that both spirituality and religion play a significant role in shaping the overall beliefs, values and behaviors of individuals as well as leaders (Manz *et al*., 2001; Gunther, 2001; Graber, 2001; Brandt, 1996; Thompson, 2000; McCarthy, 1996; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Bryant, 1998, Bhatti et al., 2016a, b). Evidence also suggests that leadership models grounded in the tenets of faith and religion foster higher levels of employee well-being, organizational commitment, financial

performance and social responsibility (Egel and Fry, 2017). Islam is a comprehensive, integrated and holistic belief system which covers and regulates all facets of life. The two main sources that a believer seeks guidance from are the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Quran provides direction and rules for rightly carrying out one's private as well as public life. Importantly, the Quran also comprehensively covers the qualities, characteristics and traits that are necessary for one to be a devoted follower and a successful leader. Particularly, leadership in Islam is a responsibility and trust that leaders assume with their followers. It is considered a part of religious devotion (Jubran, 2015 p.28). In Islam, leadership means to serve and benefit members of the organization, community and society. It means guiding the members of society to understand what is right and refrain from them from all that has been forbidden (Egel and Fry, 2017). Research on Islamic leadership in the management context is relatively new and fast gaining momentum. It has become a center of attention for academics and experts in terms of both theory development as well as practical implementation (Mohsen, 2007; Kamil et al., 2011; Sulaiman et al., 2013; Bhatti et al, 2017). While much has been argued about Islamic leadership, literature on Islamic leadership remains fragmented and slightly ambiguous in terms of its conceptualization and composition (Ahmad, 2008; Egel and Fry, 2017). In fact, "scholars are facing difficulties in selecting the right Islamic leadership model that can be applied and generalized due to the diverging observations, conceptualizations and dimensions of the construct" (Othman et al., 2018, p.46). Therefore, the present study attempts to understand Islamic leadership more precisely and submit a comprehensive framework clarifying leadership traits that accurately represent the Islamic Worldview.

Literature Review

Leadership from an Islamic Perspective

Islam was instrumental in bringing about a change among the people of Arabia, who produced capable leaders (e.g., Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan, Ali ibn Abi-Talib, Hasan ibn 'Ali and so forth) as acknowledged by many modern intellectuals (Al-Buraey, 2003; Bhatti et al, 2017). The Islamic world view elucidates that man was created by Allah in a natural state of *fitrah* that is free from any sin (Abdalati, 1998; Chapra, 1992; Hamid, 1999; Bhatti et al, 2017). This key notion invalidates the belief of Western intellectuals that when an individual enters this world, he/she already possesses the failures and sins of his ancestors, hence, furthering the idea of original sin (Chapra, 1992). In the Quran, Allah affirms that;

"Man is at once a khalifah (vicegerent) on earth and Abd (servant) of God" (Quran 2:30).

"The role of *Khalifah* implies that nature, the universe and all the other creations are entrusted to man for his utilization, whereas, the role of *Abd* means that man does not have any independent authority or absolute rights other than those conferred on him by Allah" (Haneef, 1997, p. 45; Kamil et al., 2011, p. 17). Undoubtedly, both these roles must be considered simultaneously and in harmony with each other. Evasion of either one would not allow man to function optimally (Haneef, 1997). In line with the Islamic viewpoint, leadership is a trust (*Amanah*) and "represents a psychological contract between a leader and his followers that he/she will try his/her best to guide them, to protect them, and to treat them justly" (Beekun & Badawi, 1999, p.vii). "In Islam, leadership is perceived to be the most significant instrument for the realization of an ideal society" (Ali, 2005, p.133). Islam views leadership as a duty, shared by all adults in society. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reinforces this idea by advocating that;

"Every one of you is a shepherd and everyone is responsible for what he is shepherd of" (Sahih Bukhari Al-Hadith, 853).

The Prophet (PBUH) further explained that just as parents are responsible for the running of their household and for theirchildren, and the Imam is responsible for his congregation's needs, an individual is responsible for his surroundings. Thus, every individual should take on a leadership role within his/her limits in his/her environment (Mohsen, 2007; Bhatti et al, 2017; Egel and Fry, 2017).

Islamic leadership, as highlighted earlier, is built upon Quranic injunctions in which the leader rallies people around him to espouse Quranic principles by adopting "*Halal*" (allowable) means and restraining himself from all that is forbidden (*Haram*) (Abdalati, 1998; Chapra, 1992; Hamid, 1999; Bhatti et al, 2017; Egel and Fry, 2017). There are common characteristics between Quranic leadership and other Islamic concepts such as economics. Four qualities mentioned in the Quran can be identified as the foundations of Islamic leadership: "Godly, Ethical, Humane and Balanced". When something attributes its authority to Allah and its end is Allah, it can be considered Godly (Mohsen, 2007; Kamil et al., 2011; Egel and Fry, 2017). When its roots lie in Islamic creed (*aqidah*), it can be considered ethical because it places ethics at the center of the system and prioritizes values over economic gains. The main aim is to do good to gain Allah's approval. It is considered humane because it identifies the existence of human nature and real life situations. It acknowledges human qualities such as strength as well as weakness. It is balanced

because it takes into account the body and soul, the mind and the heart, this life and the hereafter (Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Sulaiman et al., 2013). Interestingly, these four facets of leadership fall under the umbrella of *Taqwa*.

Leadership and Taqwa

The Islamic belief system is centered on *Taqwa* (piety). *Taqwa* and its derivatives are mentioned 258 times in the Quran and this is an important attribute for the messengers as well as the believers who follow them. *Taqwa* encompasses all the traits possessed by a good Muslim such as; faith, honesty, patience, kindness and benevolence. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH.) said; "I am the one who has the most *Taqwa*" (Sahih Muslim Al-Hadith, 1108). *Taqwa* is a key concept that all the messengers propagated to their followers (Al-Atrash, 2002). The root of the word (*Taqwa*) in Arabic is to avoid what one dislikes. (Ibn Kather, 2003). *Taqwa* means to stave off Allah's punishment by doing He commands and avoiding what He forbids (Al-Sharawi, 2004; Bhatti, 2015). Beekun and Badawi (1999, p.22) define *Taqwa* as "all-encompassing, inner consciousness of one's duty towards Allah and the awareness of one's accountability to Him". Ali (1997) clarifies that "*Taqwa* is the fear of running counter to the pleasure of Allah; it is akin to the love of Allah; for we fear to offend those we love; it results in right conduct, and those who entertain it are those who would do right".

Taqwa is considered a state in which the mind, heart and body act in unison to complete the orders of Allah (Al-Atrash, 2002). Hawa (2004) explains *Taqwa* as a spiritual state which leads to compliance with the rules laid down by Allah. The Prophet (PBUH) avowed that "there is a piece of flesh in the human body; if it is in good condition, the whole body will be well and if it is corrupted the whole body will be corrupted as well. This piece of flesh is the heart" (Sahih Muslim Al-Hadith, 1599). The heart of a *Muttaqqi* longs for Allah's presence, hopes for His acceptance, fears His punishment and hesitates in committing any wrong that might result in Allah's displeasure (Qutob, 1986). Hence, it can be asserted that "*Taqwa* is to be under the protection and shelter of Allah (SWT) by seeking refuge in Him, avoiding the forbidden, abiding by commands (a condition to be followed by believers) and having the feeling of being in the presence of Allah at all times" (Bhatti, 2015; Bhatti et al, 2015).

According to Ibrahim (1997), Bhatti (2015) and Sulaiman et al (2015), a believer must display *Taqwa* in all aspects of life. Al-Sharawi (2004) identified that Quranic verses 2:3-4 and 2:177 elucidate the characteristics of people who have *Taqwa* and these individuals are referred to as *Muttaqqeen* by Allah in the Quran. It

is also evident from the Quranic verses that the characteristics of the *Muttaqqeen* fall under the umbrella of *Taqwa*, categorized as; Islamic Spirituality and Islamic Social responsibility. Bhatti et al. (2016b) also affirms that Islamic Spirituality comprises of Belief (*Iman*), worship (*Ibadat*) and Repentance (*Tawbah*). Whereas Islamic social responsibility entails; patience (*Sabr*), Emotional control, Forgivingness, Justice, Fulfillment of covenants, Sadaqah (*Charity*), Integrity and Truthfulness (Honesty) (Mohsen, 2007; Kamil et al., 2011; Bhatti, 2015).

Sulaiman et al (2015, p.316) advocates that "Islamic spirituality and social responsibility are the basic traits of a believer or a leader. Spirituality is rooted in Iman (faith) and can be established by observing Islamic rituals of prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and zakah. These rituals help a believer/leader to form a strong relationship with Allah and the people". Moreover, fulfilling of rituals also supports a believer in reaching the highest state of spiritual and physical fitness (Ibrahim, 1997; Mohsen, 2007). Hence, it can be inferred that it is compulsory for a Muslim leader to possess spirituality as it brings him/her closer to Allah. In addition, "the key responsibilities of a believer and especially a leader in Islamic society are to lead the prayers (Imam); to provide guidance; to deliver directions; espouse justice; and enforce ethics" (Sulaiman et al., 2015, p.316). Ali (2005, p.7) points out that "those in a position of responsibility are tasked with a moral and social duty to narrow the gap between the haves and the have-nots".

An Islamic leader has the moral duty to be considerate towards his subordinates. The Prophet (PBUH) asserted that "Whoever becomes a leader among Muslims and deals with them with mercy, may Allah reward him, otherwise, may Allah punish him" (Sahih Muslim Al-Hadith, 1828). A leader must be equitable towards his subordinates at all times, The Prophet (PBUH) stressed that "your subordinates are your brothers. Leaders should provide food and clothes for their subordinates and never assign them with tasks above their capabilities and if they must do so, leaders should help them out" (Sahih Bukhari Al-Hadith, 30; Sahih Muslim Al-Hadith, 1661). Additionally, a person in a leadership role should be quick to apologize to his subordinates as well as accept their apologies in case of a mistake (Ibn Kather, 2003). A leader should show respect to his subordinates and treat them with dignity as narrated in Sahih Bukhari (Al-Hadith, 6064) and Sahih Muslim (Al-Hadith, 2563). The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Muslims are brothers and they should be just to each other, treat each other with respect".

Research suggests that spirituality and social responsibility are key attributes of a Muslim leader. Iman, worship, repentance, controlling anger, being sympa-

thetic, paying zakah, giving sadakah, being just and equitable, having integrity and being patient are some of the key traits that a Muslim leader must demonstrate towards other Muslims as well as non- Muslims (Mohsen, 2007; Kamil et al., 2011; Bhatti, 2015). In addition, it is important to recognize that according to the Islamic viewpoint, the aim of doing business is not to merely earn profit. In fact, delivering goods and services that can offer members of society a good life is what is required by a true believer and a leader (Egel and Fry, 2017). And a leader in the Islamic tradition must place all their efforts to reach the highest level of Taqwa. He/she must cater to the needs of society and provide fellow employees with the opportunity to achieve self-actualization and a good livelihood (Mohsen, 2007).

It can be inferred from the above literature that Islamic leadership is a very inclusive and comprehensive construct. Nevertheless, further attempts are required to improve the overall understanding of Islamic leadership. As the literature on Islamic leadership remains   slightly vague in terms of its conceptualization and composition (Ahmad, 2008; Egel and Fry, 2017). Therefore, the next section of the current paper attempts to understand Islamic leadership more precisely and submit a comprehensive framework clarifying leadership traits from an Islamic perspective.

Research Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative research approach in order to appreciate the opinions and views of respondents on the subject matter. It was assured that respondents are presented with no prior information nor possible answers or ideas. A semi-structured interviewing technique was adopted and respondents were requested to express their own views and judgments on each question presented. According to Berg (2007) and Bhatti et al (2016a), "standardized interviews are based on formally structured questions. This aids the collection of responses which are comparable". In addition, for effective and efficient data collection, the researchers employed essential questions, probing questions and throw-away questions. The key questions focused on the primary themes of the study - Understanding Leadership from an Islamic Viewpoint, Leadership and *Taqwa*, Islamic Spirituality and Leadership, Islamic social responsibility and Leadership, Consultation and Intellectual Competence. Questions also focused on sub-themes— Belief (*Iman*), Worship (*Ibadat*), Repentance (*Tawbah*), Patience (*Sabr*), Emotional control, Forgivingness, Justice, Fulfillment of covenant, Sadaqah (*Charity*), Integrity and Truthfulness (Honesty). During the interviews, probing questions were asked to seek additional information from respondents. It is customary to use throw-away questions to build a rapport with participants hence the same was applied for this research.

Research Participants

For the present study, a sample of 16 well experienced academicians and practitioners from renowned private organizations and academic institutions were selected. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, as the researcher aimed to comprehensively improve the understanding of leadership from an Islamic viewpoint. The researcher selected knowledgeable and experienced professionals from Turkey, Malaysia and Pakistan by utilizing his personal and professional networks. Respondents were from senior managerial positions like; CEO's, General-Managers, Management / business consultants, Departmental heads and Full Professor's with no less than 17 years of employment experience. Notably, all respondents contributing to this research were Muslims. Hence, religious principles, beliefs, ethics and values played a key role in framing their overall behavior.

Table 1. Participant's profile

Respondent	Gender	Title and Organization	Age	Work Experience
Respondent 1	Male	Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (Multinational)	63	38 years
Respondent 2	Male	Chief Financial Officer (CFO) (Multinational)	56	32 years
Respondent 3	Female	General Manger HR (Banking Multinational)	56	30 years
Respondent 4	Male	Director Marketing and Sales (Aerospace Engineering / Manufacturing)	57	32 years
Respondent 5	Male	Vice President of International Trade (Industrial Manufacturing)	55	30 years
Respondent 6	Male	General Manager Operations (Industrial Manufacturing)	46	22 years
Respondent 7	Male	General Manager Quality Assurance (Multinational)	44	19 years
Respondent 8	Male	Emeritus Professor/ Former Dean (Higher Education)	73	48 years

Respondent 9	Female	Marketing manager (Telecommunication)	45	20 years
Respondent 10	Female	Manager Customer relationship (Multinational Bank)	40	15 years
Respondent 11	Male	Director Purchasing (Industrial Manufacturing)	42	17 years
Respondent 12	Female	Professor (Higher Education)	52	25 years
Respondent 13	Male	Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (Construction Enterprise)	51	27 years
Respondent 14	Male	Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (Construction Enterprise)	46	21 years
Respondent 15	Male	Professor (Higher Education)	64	39 years
Respondent 16	Female	Professor (Higher Education)	58	31 years

Data collection and analysis

Interviews with respondents were conducted through Skype as well as in person. These sessions lasted approximately between 40 and 45 minutes. Respondents were asked key questions and probing questions. They were also presented with throw-away questions. All interviews, including Skype interviews, were audio taped with the consent of the respondents and later transcribed. The transcribed data were coded and scaled down to meaningful themes as stressed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Bhatti et al., (2016a). In addition, participants were encouraged by the researcher to state and express their feelings openly on the subject matter. As highlighted in the table, respondents include eleven males and five females, having sound knowledge and experience, belonging to different sectors such as; manufacturing, telecommunications, aerospace, construction, banking and education.

Findings and Discussions

The current section covers the results of this exploratory study, organized as per the research objective. The following themes were extracted from the interviews.

Leadership from an Islamic Viewpoint

Quite a few explanations were presented by the respondents that exhibited their understanding of Islamic Leadership. In explaining Leadership in general, Re-

spondent 8 affirmed that "Leadership is a subject that has a major universal appeal. Indeed, much has been written about leadership and especially business leadership in general press and academic texts. Regardless of the rich literature available on the topic, it still presented a major challenge for consultants, practitioners and academicians to fully understand the true nature of leadership because of its complexity. Interestingly, over the years, leadership has been defined and conceptualized in a different manner. Yet the most simple and common explanation provided in conventional literature about leadership is that "leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". In view of the current debate, it is important to restate that the field of leadership is still evolving and progressing. Recently the field of management and leadership has witnessed a great deal of inclination towards religion and spirituality. Hence, it being vital that leadership is revisited from a religious lens, specifically from an Islamic perspective, as the literature is still limited and disjointed".

Respondent, 1,12,13,15 and 16 while explaining Islamic Leadership stated that "leadership in an Islamic view point is very much similar to conventional leadership, though the basic premise of Islamic leadership diverges on the basis of religious, spiritual, moral and human pedigree". Religious, spiritual and moral values shape the overall theory of Islamic Leadership. Importantly, primary sources that set the foundation of Islamic Leadership are the Quran and Sunnah (Sayings and actions of Prophet (PBUH))". Particularly, "Allah has sent Man as a *Khalifah* (vicegerent) and *abd* (servant) of God on earth. On the basis of this paradigm, the worldview of leadership changes in the context of Islam. It is indeed evident that Islam endorses the theory of "stewardship of Allah's creation", where a leader is given the responsibility by Allah to be of service to Mankind or his fellow brothers. Hence, this makes the overall relationship between a leader and a follower very compelling. Subsequently, a leader needs to pay full attention to the needs and wants of his/her followers" as clarified by Respondent 2, 3, 4 and 9.

Respondent 6, 7, 10 and 11 in the same context, endorsed that "Man being Allah's vicegerent holds a great deal of responsibility. A leader, according to the Islamic view point is not simply free to act however they wish. In fact, he/she must perform in such a way that ensures the commandments of Allah are implemented properly on the ground. A leader must guide his followers or fellow men according to the instructions of Allah. He/she must inspire people to do good deeds (that are Halal) and restrain him/herself as well as his followers from all that is forbidden (Haram). Thus, one must refer to the Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH): "*leadership in*

Islam is not reserved for an elite, rather depending on the situation every person is the shepherd of his flocks and occupies a position of leadership" (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith 3.733) as quoted by Respondent 8. Likewise, Respondent 5 and 11 highlighted that Islamic leadership is a trilateral relationship between Allah, leader and the follower. Allah provides leaders with the vision and the responsibility to lead in a manner that he/she does not exert his/her power beyond the given guidelines (guidelines as per Quran and Sunnah). And that the followers in turn are answerable to Allah for the actions and duties delegated to them by their leader.

Islam is a comprehensive religion which covers all facets of life. Based on the justifications and arguments presented by the respondents, it can be inferred that the trusteeship that Allah has given to human beings is deeply entrenched in Islamic leadership. It symbolizes a religious and a spiritual contract that exists between a leader and his/her followers. The leader guides, protects and treats his/her fellow members and supports them with parity and fairness. Islamic Leadership centers on doing good and refraining from all that is forbidden in order to attain the blessings of Allah. Hence, a leader must be a role-model though his/her personality, attitude, character and competence. And notably, only those may be selected as leaders who are high in piety and goodness.

Leadership and Taqwa

Believers in Islam are required to possess *Taqwa* according to the revelation of Allah (Bhatti et al 2016b). The word *Taqwa* and its derivates have been mentioned 258 times in the Quran, indicating its immense importance in Islam (Bhatti, 2015).

Respondent 8 asserted that "Islam places great stress on fairness and equality. It is evident from the verses of the Quran that no one is superior to another except in *Taqwa*. The simplest explanation of *Taqwa* is to be under the "protection of Allah (SWT) by seeking shelter in Him. *Taqwa* is a constant realization of the presence and existence of Allah". Respondent 12 in view of the same matter explained that *Taqwa* is to protect oneself from all that has been forbidden in order to avoid Allah's punishment. In the Quran Allah states "*O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah are those who have Taqwa. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware*" (Quran, 49:13). Certainly it is evident from this Quranic verse that *Taqwa* is one of the most essential attributes of a believer, and even more importantly, of a believer in a leadership role as avowed by Respondent 15 and 16.

Furthermore, Respondent 1, 2, 13 and 14 stressed that *Taqwa* is one of the major traits of a Muslim. The same applies if one has to appreciate leadership from an Islamic viewpoint. Principally, the concept of Islamic leadership is based on *Taqwa*. Respondent 5, 6 and 9 acknowledged that Leaders with *Taqwa* receive help and guidance from Allah in all times, directing them to make the right judgments and decisions. Thus, *Taqwa* is an essential trait for all leaders and believers.

Nevertheless, it is vital to recognize that the people of *Taqwa* are also called *Motaqeen*. The attributes of the *Motaqeen* are very clearly explained in the Quran. These characteristics define *Taqwa*. The understanding of *Taqwa* has been founded on the characteristics of the *Motaqeen*. These may be categorized into two parts: Spirituality and Social responsibility as affirmed by Respondent 8 and 15. Hence, it is important to recognize these traits to develop a deeper explanation and understanding of Islamic leadership.

Islamic Spirituality and Leadership

Respondent 1 stated that "Islam does not in any way reject spiritual and material pursuit. The magnificence of Islam as a complete religion is that it creates a beautiful balance between the worldly and divine quest. Islam supports and encourages leaders to express their devotion to Allah in all their actions and activities of life". Respondent 5, 6, and 10 underlined that "Spirituality is an essential element for a leader as it can raise him/her closer to Allah - making him/her a more valuable and an effective member of society. Leaders who are high in spirituality will showcase patience, persistence, strong performance and seek forgiveness from Allah often. Indeed, spirituality helps a leader to strengthen his/her main purpose of life by acting as Allah's Khalifah (vicegerent) and servant on earth". Islamic spirituality being a component of Taqwa comprises of Belief (*Iman*), worship (*Ibadat*) and Repentance/Seeking forgivingness (*Tawbah*)" as argued by Respondent 8, 12, 15 and 16. Notably all these sub-factors become vital traits for an Islamic Leader.

Belief (Iman) and Leadership

Respondent 14 stressed that "The key principle that serves as the basis of the Islamic faith is *Iman*. *Iman* means to "have faith in Allah". It means accepting that there is no god but Allah, He is the Creator of all things and is the one to be worshiped and that He is has absolute power to dispose of all affairs. Thus, Unity or *Tawhid* is the primary basis for Islamic leadership". Respondent 2, 3 6 and 7, validated the same argument. They asserted that *Tawhid* is a key trait for a leader. In short, all respondents agreed that putting their trust in Allah is the foundation of Isla-

mic belief. It motivates a leader towards goodness and virtue. Virtue and goodness imply making the right decisions, being just, having clarity of goals and objectives, evading transgression and upholding equality amongst people. Further, *Iman* also provides a leader with an opportunity to conduct a self-analysis to understand his real role as Allah's vicegerent and servant on earth. Thus, *Iman* being a key leadership trait guides the leader to follow the right path set out by Allah and to avoid all that has been forbidden.

Worship (Ibadat) and Leadership

In the Quran, Allah says "And be steadfast in Salah (prayer), and pay Zakah, and bow down with those who bow down"…"O you who believe! fasting is prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may ward off evil" (Quran, 2: 43-183). All Respondents approved that Worship (i.e. Prayers pilgrimage, fasting and charity in Allah's way) guide a leader towards cultivating devotion, goodness & righteousness, peace & tranquility, compassion, honesty, perseverance as well as fear of Allah. Hence, *Ibadat* (worship) acts as a constant reminder for a leader to follow the guidelines set by Allah. Through *Ibadat*, a leader realizes that he/she is responsible and accountable for all his/her actions. This also helps a leader understand that any wrong doing would not only dissatisfy his followers but also displease Allah.

In general, all respondents agreed that *Ibadat* (i.e. prayers, pilgrimage, fasting and charity in Allah's way) is a key trait for an Islamic leader.

Repentance (Tawbah) and Leadership

The Quran also states: "Ask your Lord for forgiveness and then turn in repentance to Him" (Quran, 11:3), "O you who believe! Turn in sincere repentance to Allah" (Quran, 66:8), and "Surely Allah loves those who repent" (Quran, 2:222). Respondent 8 affirmed that "Certainly Allah is most merciful and forgiving. It is important for a believer and a leader that he/she should not lose hope in times of difficulty. The benefit of *Tawbah* is that it makes one realize his/her own deficiencies and weaknesses. This allows the believer to be humble and ask forgiveness of Allah as well his companions for mistakes made both unintentionally and intentionally". Essentially, all respondents agreed that repentance is a crucial trait for a leader. Respondent 6, 7, 11 and 14 advocated that "surely man can make mistakes as no one is perfect, but a good leader would always be honest, open and sincere to admit his/her errors. And once he/she realizes his/her faults, it would be easier to seek forgiveness/ *Tawbah* of Allah and strive to improve him/herself. Respondents 8,

12, 15 and 16 affirmed that *Tawbah* is also imperative for a leader to be effective and efficient. Pursuing forgiveness from Allah cultivates a positive improvement in a leader's character and personality. "With *Tawbah* a leader can move in the direction of self betterment, making him/her more forbearing to the failures and challenges of life and business" as highlighted by Respondent 1, 2, 5 and 13.

In brief it can be inferred from the arguments that Allah in His mercy forgives the mistakes and shortcomings of man, providing him/her with the opportunity to improve him/herself. Hence, *Tawbah*, as one of the important traits of an Islamic leader, encourages him/her to seek forgiveness at all times. This can also help him/her to abstain from all that is forbidden, be humble and take feedback positively.

Islamic Social Responsibility and Leadership

As stated earlier, *Taqwa* covers Islamic spirituality and Islamic social responsibility. "Islamic social responsibility is the obligation to one's self and to other human beings and nature at large" (Bhatti, 2015). Respondents 15, 16, 1 and 3 all mentioned that in an Islamic society, the leader is expected to lead prayers, provide guidance and direction, uphold justice and implement ethics and morality". Respondents 5, 6, 7 and 9, added that a leader in Islam has the moral commitment to narrow the gap between the haves and have-nots. A leader should try his/her best to provide equal opportunities to his followers/subordinates. He/she should ensure a secure future for them and coach them to excel in life. Respondent 8 affirmed that "Allah places great stress on believers to be socially responsible. Being socially responsible is one of the major traits of a *Motaqeen*. Without a doubt, the Quran is full of verses which elucidate this". However, when examining social responsibility in the context of Islamic leadership, it is important to note that Islamic Social responsibility has been divided into sub-constructs. These sub-constructs (i.e., developing patience, emotional control, forgiveness, giving zakah and sadakah, fulfillment of covenants and ensuring justice and integrity) together form the key traits of an Islamic leader as affirmed by Respondents 2, 10, 11, 12 and 14.

Patience (Sabr) and Leadership

Respondent 8 affirmed that the word patience in Arabic means "*Sabr*", which means to stop, hold, or desist. One of the most vital traits of a believer who possesses *Taqwa* is patience. Respondents 1, 2, 4 and 5 stated that a Muslim leader must be an example of patience by controlling his/her anger and stress in challenging times. No doubt that patience is an important trait for an Islamic leader and its significance can be validated by the Quranic verse where Allah states that; "And we

appointed from among them leaders giving them guidance under Our command so long as they persevered with patience and continued to have faith in Our signs" (Quran, 32:24). Respondents 7, 8, 10 and 11 explained that for a leader to be effective and efficient "patience" is the key, since everything can be achieved with *Sabr* and persistence. Respondents 13, 15 and 16 advocated that man will be tested by Allah in this world and the same applies for a leader. However, successful would be that leader who holds on to *Iman* and patience.

Therefore it is evident from the arguments that a leader with strong spiritual conviction must also have patience as a key trait to achieve organizational goals and objectives.

Emotional Control and Leadership

All respondents agreed that restraining anger and exhibiting emotional control is a major trait for an Islamic leader. Leaders may face different situations that might be difficult and troublesome. These situations can, to some degree, provoke him/her to lose his/her temper and to respond emotionally when challenged. However, an effective leader is one who can hold his/her ground firmly and control his/her frustration by remaining calm and composed. Certainly, managing emotions and remaining composed are the real tests of a true believer. Controlling one's anger reflects the virtue and righteousness of a leader. In addition, if a leader is not emotionally stable and is unable to control his/her anger, it would have serious repercussions on his/her intellectual and rational reasoning, thus, making him/her less effective and efficient. Hence, it is deemed that a believer would not allow emotions to overcome them, especially in a leadership role.

Forgiveness and Leadership

According to the Quran, Allah says: "Show forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the foolish (i.e. don't punish them)" (Quran, 7:199), "To forgive is closer to Taqwa. And forget not kindness among yourselves. Allah see what you do" (Quran, 2:237). Respondents 8 and 16 affirmed that it is evident from the Quranic verses that a believer must exercise forgiveness towards others and humanity at large. It is very natural for anyone to feel sad or disappointed when hurt by someone. Yet the best amongst people is one who can forgive and forget. Respondents 5, 6, 7, and 10 avowed that a leader must be forgiving and should not hold grudges against his/her coworkers. In fact, forgiveness cultivates a strong relationship between the leader and his followers, thus improving employee engagement and efficiency. Additionally, employees will develop and excel further in their careers

if they feel that their leader is forgiving, kind and empathetic. Importantly, it will help the leader to achieve better employee and organizational performance as advocated by Respondents 2, 9 and 13.

In short, it can be concluded that one of the necessary attributes of an Islamic leader is to be forgiving and tolerant. This trait makes a leader more effective and efficient. Additionally, it assists in fostering an employee's talent, fulfillment and innovation, as well as organizational performance overall.

Justice and Leadership

Respondent 8 affirmed that "the word justice in the Arabic language is "*Adl*", which refers to equity, fairness, justice and honesty. *Adl* is clarified comprehensively in Islam as encompassing the concepts of honesty, equality and uprightness in one's actions and deeds. Justice needs to be an integral part of an Islamic leader and must be observed especially when passing judgment, handling of official or family responsibilities, dealings with coworkers, friends, family and so forth. In fact, Islam insists that leaders must take good care of their followers by providing them with necessities such as food, shelter and clothing. They must also not burden them with work beyond their capacity or capability as confirmed by Respondents 1,3,12 and 15. Respondents 6, 10 and 16 also endorsed that "certainly Islam presents a leader with a working structure which represents justice, value, dignity and mutual consent". Hence it can be implied that all respondents agreed that justice is a very important trait for a Muslim leader and that a leader must be just in all his/her dealings, be they private or public.

Fulfillment of Covenant

Respondents 8, 12, 15 and 16 asserted that fulfillment of covenants is an essential trait for an Islamic leader. In Islam, believers and especially leaders are strongly encouraged to fulfill their promises even if it concerns their opponents or rivals. So much so, that the breach of a covenant or promise is considered a quality unworthy of a true believer as expressed by Respondents 2, 4, 9 and 13. Similarly, failing to fulfill a covenant is akin to breaking a trusted relationship. In the Quran Allah (SWT) says: "Yes, whoever fulfills his pledge and fears Allah much; verily, then Allah loves those who are Al-*Motaqeen*" (Quran, 3:76). Respondent 1 referring to this Quranic verse argued that fulfilling of covenants is one of the key characteristics of the pious, and it is one of the best means of achieving *Taqwa* (Piety). In conclusion, all Respondents agreed that a leader must keep his/her promises at all times.

Sadaqah (Zakat/Charity) and Leadership

Respondent 8 affirmed that "Zakat/*Sadaqah* is the third pillar of Islam. *Sadaqah* in general is also alluded to as charity, assistance or donation. *Zakat* in Arabic means "purification" and theobjective of *Zakat* is to purify one's heart from "overwhelming desires for more, selfishness and greed".

It was agreed by all the Respondents that in line with the Islamic world view, an individual's wealth is deemed a gift from Allah. And Allah has set a portion of that wealth for those who are in need, deprived or underprivileged. Further, charity in Islam is also sharing of valuable advice, saying kind word, doing service, sharing knowledge as well as giving away materialistic things or objects. A leader in Islam is expected to advise, share knowledge, provide justice, sound remuneration and train his/her employees in a way that they can excel intellectually and professionally. Notably, these may be considered charitable acts for a leader. By and large, according to the conventional view point, large profits make a company successful. However, Islam does not merely consider large profits as a standard of success in business. Instead, profits must be achieved alongside acts of *Sadaqah* to dub an Islamic leader and a Muslim organization as successful.

Hence, it can be agreed based on the arguments of all the Respondents that *Sadaqah* is another important trait of Islamic leadership.

Integrity and Truthfulness (Honesty)

In the Quran, Allah (SWT) says: "O you who believe, fear Allah, and be in the company of the truthful" (Quran, 9:119). Respondent 12 stated that amongst all the traits of a *Motaqeen,* the most noble and virtuous is integrity and truthfulness. It is important for a leader that he/she should maintain his/her integrity and be honest at all times, as deviance from the two would send a leader on the road to destruction. An Islamic leader would always hold onto integrity regardless of all hardships or circumstances. Respondent 8 affirmed that "In Quran, Allah says: "And do not confound truth with falsehood, and do not knowingly hide the truth" (Quran, 2:42). Respondents 1, 2 and 4 affirmed that one of the characteristics of a true believer is his/her honesty. And for a leader to be a true believer, goodness, decency and honesty should be reflected in his/her devotion towards Allah, as well as, in his/her speech, dealings, commitments, etc. Truthfully, an Islamic leader would not indulge in any kind of cheating, misrepresenting of facts or falsifying information as endorsed by respondent 10, 11 and 13.

Similarly, giving fellow colleagues and others the right direction and guidance also reflects the integrity of a leader. Respondents 3, 5, and 7 emphasized that integrity may be defined as a good work ethic, so all tasks are performed with perfection, sincerity and seriousness. For a leader it is important that he/she should view his/her work as worship and display the highest level of commitment and excellence. Respondent 14 acknowledged that "integrity is an essential facet required in today's business leaders for taking business further. When employees are able to place trust and confidence in their leader, they are likely to give their best to their jobs as well as their organization. Respondent 8 confirmed that an Islamic leader must be an example for all, but especially for his/her followers. A leader maintaining his/her integrity at all times and exhibiting honesty would be able to harness a healthy relationship between him/herself and his/her followers, thus, leading the organization to towards efficiency and sustainability".

Consultation and Leadership

"....and ask forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs. Then when you have made a decision, put your trust in Allah. For Allah loves those who put their trust in Him" (Quran, 3: 159).

All Respondents acknowledged that consultation holds a great weight in Islam. It is deemed that if a leader does not exercise consultation with his/her followers he/she directly disqualifies as a leader. Respondent 8 affirmed that the concept of Islamic consultation especially in decision-making process is very much similar to the Japanese concept of *nemawashi* (key part of Japanese daily lives where all key decisions are made by group consensus). Notably, it is compulsory for an Islamic leader that all policies, long-term objectives/strategies and decisions should be framed and finalized through mutual consultation. Respondent 10, 11, 13 and 14 in this context advocated that it is obligatory for a leader to reassure *Ijma* (consensus) among followers and members when dealing with challenging issues. Moreover, the process of consultation needs to fair and just. And all members can freely agree or disagree to the views, proposals or prepositions presented by the leader. Importantly, differences/grievances should be dealt in an honorable manner where reasons and solutions should be provided in the light of the Quran, Sunnah and Maqasid Al Sharia (Islamic jurisprudence). Respondent 15 and 16 added that the Prophet (PBUH) often requested his companion's suggestions. The Prophet (PBUH) invariably gave full attention through active listening, guiding and role-modelling during the consultation process. Hence, the same must be practiced by Islamic leaders.

Respondent 8, 2, 5 and 6 further added that research affirms that participative leadership is superior and can bring far more promising results then autocratic leadership because it improves the overall employee involvement, decision making, teamwork and so forth. And with consultation being a key trait of an Islamic leader, the same can be achieved if followed with full devotion and religious zeal.

Based on the reasoning presented by the respondents it can be inferred that consultation is a key trait for an Islamic leader. However, the process of consultation should not lead to unnecessary delays in decision making. Indeed, Islam encourages leaders that once they take a decision on the bases of consultation then they should leave the rest to Allah's will.

"Those who respond to their Lord and establish prayers; who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation" (Quran, 42: 37).

Intellectual Competence and Leadership

"Those truly fear Allah (SWT), among His servants, who have knowledge, for Allah (SWT) is exalted in Might, Oft-forgiving" (Quran, 35:28)

All respondents agreed that Intellectual competence is a must for any leader. It is expected that leaders must be knowledgeable, educated, competent, experienced and well informed. Intellectual competence assists a leader to become more humble and eager to explore new areas. Respondent 8 stressed that "the first word that was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) was "*Iqra*", meaning "Read". This indeed shows the importance and significance of knowledge and seeking knowledge. Further, it also clarifies that a believer must use his/her intellectual and spiritual abilities to recognize the signs of Allah that are apparent throughout His creation".

It was also endorsed by the Respondents that the attaining of knowledge and wisdom is mandatory for a leader and a believer. Relaying on intelligence, logic, rational thinking and constant inner self-actualization, would direct a Muslim leader to reject all irrational thinking and would lead him/her to fully submit to the oneness of Allah. So much so that a leader must be sound in Islamic law, the current political state of affairs, modern trends of global education and politics, proper utilization of limited resources, demands and psychological needs of his followers and so forth. Hence, it is vital that a leader must seek knowledge in all areas in order to be more effective and efficient. And the same applies when it comes to selecting a leader that the followers or supporters must look upon his/her intellectual competence.

Conclusion

The present study makes an effort to understand Islamic leadership in an in-depth manner and to identify the traits that are essential for an Islamic leader. It is evident from the results of the study that leadership is a key responsibility that Allah has bestowed upon man. According to Islamic teachings, a leader is expected to guide and protect his/her followers and treat them with fairness and equality at all times. Indeed, he/she needs to be a role model with all the qualities that have been highlighted by the Quran and Sunnah. While existing literature on Islamic leadership is fragmented, this study goes a long way in demonstrating that the key traits of an Islamic leader are of utmost significance for success in the corporate world. It also advocates that *Taqwa* (which encompasses both Islamic spirituality and Islamic Social Responsibility), Consultation and Intellectual competence are perhaps the most crucial traits of a leader. Figure 1 helps illustrate that *Taqwa* forms the bedrock of Islamic leadership and from *Taqwa* springs forth eleven vital Islamic values contemplated in this study. The study concludes that presence of Taqwa in a person appears to make effective Islamic leadership achievable. This style of leadership appears to optimize employee performance and happiness which enables an entire organization to reap rewards in monetary as well as spiritual and emotional terms.
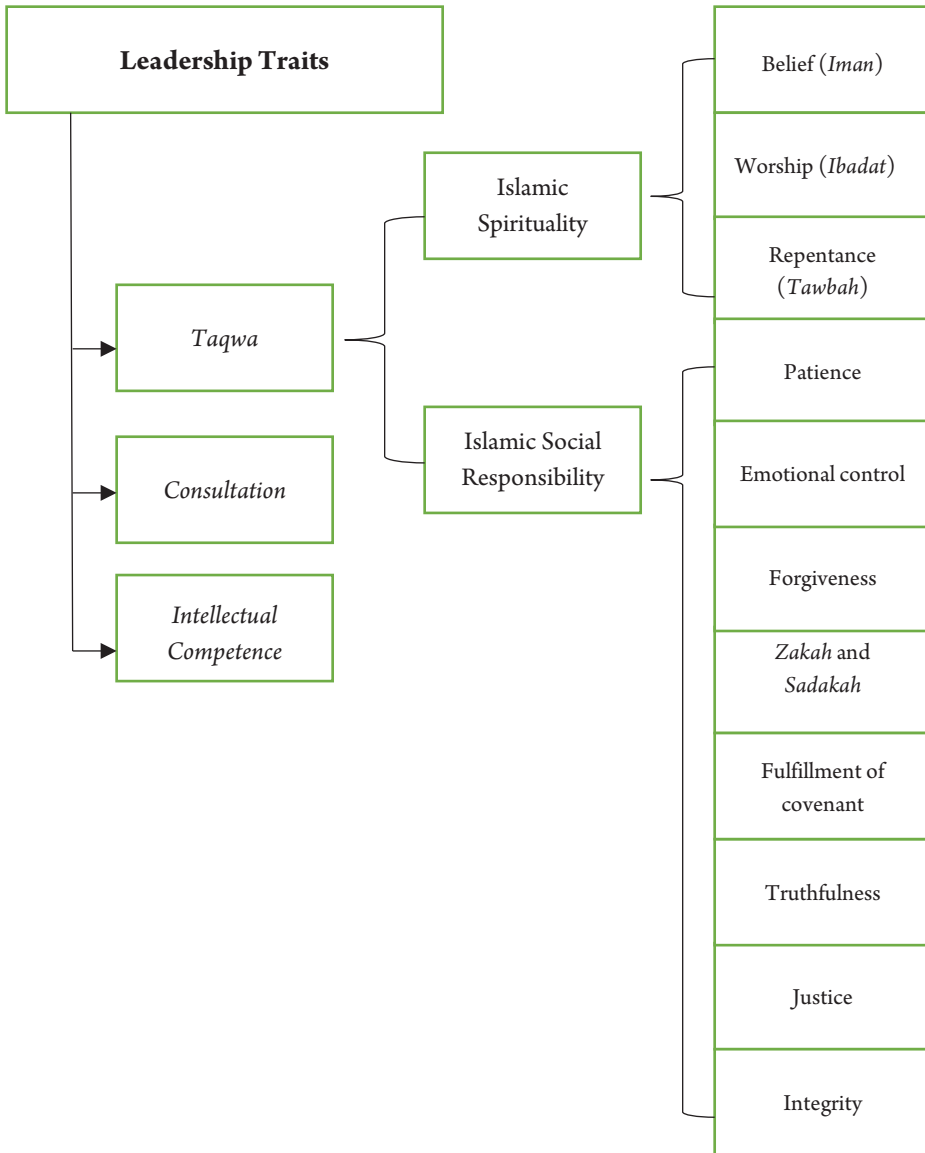
Figure 1. Traits of an Islamic Leader

(Source: Authors Computation)

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