

# The Moderating of Islamic Work Ethic on Relationship of Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Practice: A Proposed Framework

Abdul Shukor Shamsudin, Hamzah Abdul Rahman, and A. Rahim Romle

**Abstract**—The purpose of this article is to propose a framework on the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practice when Islamic Work Ethic is practiced in Malaysian public universities. Initially, the main challenges in public universities in Malaysia are providing a market driven academic programs and at the same time able to respond to the fast changing needs of economic sectors. Apparently, the recent challenges require the staff of the said universities to equip themselves with leadership quality in order to fulfill the organizational vision. Many previous studies have shown several factors (such as emotional intelligence) had influenced effective leadership. Besides effectiveness, another significant issue in leadership research is ethical behaviors of leaders. The respondents will consist of middle administrators in Malaysian public universities. Most of the past results had suggested that there were significant relationships between these variables. The findings are expected to have some contributions both to the practical and theoretical aspects and enable public universities to improve their leadership development programs.

**Index Terms**—Emotional intelligence, Islamic work ethic, leadership practice, middle administrator.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The development of higher education in Malaysia can be traced back to the last 40 years. The multidimensional development that took place included the development of infrastructure, staff recruitment and faculty enlargement, student enrollment and the diversity of curricula. Noran Fauziah and Ahmad Mahdzan [1] described that the variety of objectives and directions pursued in achieving socioeconomic development were illustrated with the introduction of several new academic programs in higher institutions.

According to the Second Malaysia Plan [2], the objectives of the national education system have been employed as a main guideline in all national development plans. Interestingly, the Malaysian education system objectives have remained unchanged since then even though the focus is different to fit with the current socioeconomic challenges [3].

Manuscript received December 28, 2014; revised March 4, 2015. This work was supported in part by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia under Grant RAGS.

A. S. Shamsudin and H. Abdul Rahman are with the School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia (e-mail: shukor@uum.edu.my, hamzahd@uum.edu.my).

A. R. Romle is with the College of Law, Government & International Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia (e-mail: abd.rahim@uum.edu.my).

Meanwhile, the Malaysian international education sector has grown notably in the 1990s. Malaysia is able to offer a relatively excellent international education at an affordable cost [4]. Parallel with the development in higher education, the Ministry has announced the Malaysian Government decision to make the country as a center of higher education excellence [3]. Since then, the then Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) had introduced several reforms in higher education to encourage the entry of international students into Malaysia.

However, the performance of public universities in Malaysia was found to be inconsistent in the past few years. In 2006, the ranking of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) went up from 289 to 185 while the ranking of Universiti Malaya plunged from 169 to 192 [5]. In 2009 Universiti Malaya moved its ranking from 230 to 180 while none of the other public universities were in the top 200 world universities [6]. Meanwhile, in 2013 UKM is the only university listed in Asia University Ranking top 100 [7]. This report has caused dissatisfaction in some quarters over the quality of local public universities.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Besides several important issues which have been highlighted in this sector, many believe that leadership is one of the critical success factors (CFSs) in the higher education transformation effort all over the world [8]. Realizing the importance of the leadership skill among higher education staff, the MoHE had established the Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT) in 2008. The move was in line with the National Higher Education Strategic Plan goals of transforming higher education in Malaysia, especially in promoting and producing quality human capital.

The contemporary leadership theory accentuates on followers' abilities and working skills, encouraging followers to challenge the present systems, and promote rationality and creativity in organizational problem solving [9]. Whereas, the literature on effective leadership has suggested that transformational leadership theory and visionary leadership theory has obtained wide acceptance among scholars and practitioners as well [10]. Some scholars suggest that leadership practice is equated to transformational leadership [11]. Consequently, numerous research findings indicated that effective leadership was influenced by several factors such as emotional skills, leader's attribute and demographic characteristics, culture, and organizational business model [12]-[16].

It was the work of Mayer and Salovey, and Goleman that started to emphasize on the potential benefits of the emotional intelligence, which later rouse the interest of management and practitioners [12]. Basically, emotional intelligence is something to do with the ability to identify, manage and perceive emotions. Besides the above arguments, many scholars also suggested that emotional intelligence is getting vast attention in the study of leadership presently [12], [13], [17], [18]. Whereas, unlike natural intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence can be learned and strengthened over time [19]. Even though scholars have suggested many models to describe the concept of emotional intelligence, an ability model and a mixed model are the two most common emotional intelligence models used thus far [20].

Judging from its popularity, this article will only highlight on an emotional intelligence ability-based model. The model is widely used due to some reasons such as strong theoretical foundation, uniqueness of the measurement, and its systematic appraisal and supported by empirical data obtained from numerous researches [20].

The literature has demonstrated that a growing number of studies were done on emotional intelligence and leadership behavior which gave inconsistent findings on the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership [21]-[26]. Meanwhile, another significant issue in leadership research is ethical behaviors [25]. The recent ethical misconduct which occurred all over the globe has increased the awareness of the ethical issue in the community [28]-[30]. Therefore, although there were extensive studies on emotional intelligence and leadership [12], [13], [16], there is still much unknown about the relationship between emotional intelligence, ethic (especially on Islamic work ethic) and leadership practice in Malaysian public universities [31], [32].

Although the administrators have been proven to have significant roles in the development of higher education institutions, they appear to be ignorant of their job, and in most cases the contributions of these administrative staff were less recognized [33]. According to Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser [34], the primary sources of middle level administrators' frustrations are the nature of their daily role, the lack of recognition for their contribution, and very little opportunity for career advancement. Meanwhile, several authors have observed that only a small number of articles were dedicated to the administrative staff development nationally and internationally thus far [32]-[34].

### III. HYPOTHESIS STATEMENT

The main objective of this article is to propose a research framework of the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practice when the Islamic work ethic is practiced among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities. Therefore, several research hypotheses are proposed for further empirical investigation.

#### *A. The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Practice*

Basically, research on leadership attributes focused on motivation, personality, cognitive abilities, and social capabilities as major qualities that differentiate between

leaders and non-leaders [35]. Lately, numerous researches in leadership attributes have been using emotional intelligence constructs to examine leadership behaviors, traits or competencies [25]. Besides that, several previous studies suggested that emotional intelligence was positively related to leadership practices [12], [25], [36]. Barbuto & Burbach [13] suggested there were significant relationships between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership behavior. Barling *et al.* [14] discovered a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and three behavioral elements of transformational leadership. Meanwhile, Alston *et al.* [36] found a significant predictive relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership practices. Similarly, Tang *et al.* [25] suggested emotional intelligence to be positively correlated with leadership practice.

In this study, the four elements of emotional intelligence as proposed by Mayer and Salovey [35], namely appraisal of emotion, expression of emotion, regulation of emotion, and utilization of emotion were used as an independent variables and leadership practices was the dependent variable. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated.

H1: The appraisal of emotion in self or others has a significant relationship with leadership practice among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities.

H2: The expression of emotion has a significant relationship with leadership practice among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities.

H3: The regulating of emotion in self and others has a significant relationship with leadership practice among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities.

H4: The utilization of emotion in problem solving has a significant relationship with leadership practice among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities.

#### *B. Moderating Effect of Islamic Work Ethic on the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Practice*

Moderating variable is one that has a strong contingent effect on the relationship of independent and dependent variables [38]. Meanwhile, Baron and Kenny [11] suggested that a moderator is a variable that modifies the strength or the direction of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Although this study managed to support the relationship between the independent, dependent and the moderating variables, however, the effect of Islamic Work Ethic as moderator of the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practice as a single model is little known.

Previous study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership [12]-[14], [26], [36], [39], between emotional intelligence and culture/values [40], [42], and between culture/value and leadership [41], [39]. Besides that, authentic transformational leadership supports high values of fairness, loyalty, honesty, equality, justice, and human rights [43]. Therefore, the present study intends to investigate the possible relationship (interacting effect) of Islamic work ethic with leadership practices and this attempt can be assumed as exploratory. In this case, Sekaran and Bougie [38] suggested non-directional hypothesis should be formulated if a relationship has never been explored because

there is no basis to demonstrate the direction. The following non-directional hypotheses are suggested in this study.

H5: Islamic Work Ethic moderates the relationship between appraisal of emotion in self or others and leadership practice among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities.

H6: Islamic Work Ethic moderates the relationship between expressions of emotion and leadership practice among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities.

H7: Islamic Work Ethic moderates the relationship between regulation of emotion in self and others and leadership practice among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities.

H8: Islamic Work Ethic moderates the relationship between utilization of emotion in problem solving and leadership practice among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities.

#### IV. A PROPOSED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Based on the above discussion, the following research framework is proposed.

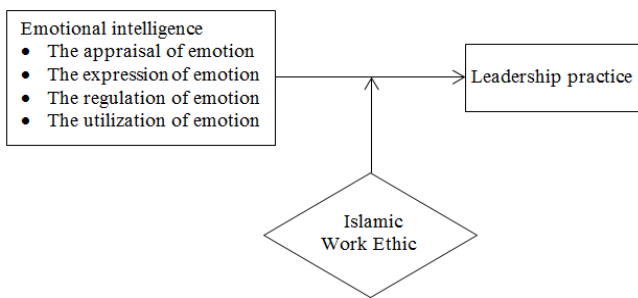


Fig. 1. A Proposed research framework.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, the study of leadership behavior has made a remarkable progress in this field. Hence, the primary objective of this article is to develop a research framework of the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practice when the Islamic work ethic is practiced in Malaysian public universities and Figure 1 illustrated a proposed research framework. Apparently, this framework will guide and give a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between all variables and will lead to empirical research in the future. Finally, we expect the findings to reflect some aspects of cultural influence on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank School of Business Management, and Research and Innovation Management Centre, Universiti Utara Malaysia for the support and assistance during the writing of this article.

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**Abdul Shukor Shamsudin** is a senior lecturer at School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia. He obtained his DBA from Universiti Utara Malaysia in 2012.

His current research interests are in the area of leadership, emotional intelligence, work ethic, and organizational behavior. He actively participates as a presenter in various international and national conferences, seminars, and workshops.

Dr. Abdul Shukor's research works have appeared in various national and international refereed journals such as *Jurnal Pengurusan Awam*, *INTAN Management Journal*, *The Journal of Global Business Management*, and *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*.



**Hamzah Abdul Rahman** is an associate professor at School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia. He obtained his PhD from the University of Manchester, United Kingdom. He has held various positions with the university.

He is actively involved with research, publication and consultation projects. His teaching and research area of interests includes the area of strategic management, technology management and

entrepreneurship.

Dr. Hamzah also participates as a presenter in various international and national conferences, seminars, and workshops. His research works have appeared in various national and international refereed journals.



**A. Rahim Romle** is a senior lecturer at School of Government, College of Law, Government and International Studies. He obtained his PhD (management) from Universiti Utara Malaysia.

His current research interests are in the area of quality management, education, performance measurement, service quality, customer satisfaction, commitment and loyalty. He actively participates as a presenter in various international and national conferences, seminars, workshops that His current research interests are in the area of quality management, education, performance measurement, service quality, customer satisfaction, commitment and loyalty.

Dr. A. Rahim actively participates as a presenter in various international and national conferences, seminars, workshops that held in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, India, South Africa, Indonesia and Thailand. His research works have appeared in various national and international refereed journals such as *Jurnal Pengurusan Awam*, *Intan Management Journal*, *The Journal of Global Business Management*, and *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*. He also organizes and facilitates in management training and development, in research and publications that directly involves with the public sector.