

## **The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Administrator Leadership Practices: The Role of Islamic Work Ethic**

<sup>1</sup>Abdul Shukor Shamsudin, <sup>1</sup>Hamzah Abdul Rahman and <sup>2</sup>Abd Rahim Romle  
<sup>1</sup>School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok,  
Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia  
<sup>2</sup>School of Government, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok,  
Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia

**Abstract:** This study aims to examine the role of Islamic work ethic on the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practices among Malaysian public university administrators. Initially, the current higher education challenges require public universities to function effectively. Therefore, their employees need to equip themselves with several managerial skills such as leadership quality. Using the regular postal service, the questionnaires were sent directly to the identified respondents all over Malaysia. A total of 289 usable responses was received from a sample of 500 administrators. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS Version 19. The findings suggested that all emotional dimensions have significant correlation with leadership practices and it is noticed that Islamic work ethic only moderates the relationship between using of emotions and leadership practices. Finally, the limitations and possible future research were also have been discussed in this study.

**Key words:** Emotional intelligence, Islamic work ethic, leadership practices, correlation, quality

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The progress of the Malaysian higher education can be seen in the last four decades. Apart from that, many development programs have been implemented such as the infrastructure development, staff recruitment and faculty enlargement, an increasing national and international student enrollment and the diversity of curricula. In the meantime, several new market-driven academic programs have been introduced in Malaysian higher education, particularly in public universities/colleges, in order to achieve the national socioeconomic development goals.

Although, the Ministry of Higher Education (2011) (MoHE) has taken steps to ensure public universities become more attractive to both local and international students, the achievement of these institutions was being inconsistent for the past few years. For instance, according to The Times Higher Education (2007, 2016) the ranking of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) has gone up from 289-185 while the ranking of Universiti Malaya fell from 169-192. Meanwhile, it was reported that Universiti Malaya has improved its ranking from 230-180 while none of the other public universities were listed in the top 200 world universities in the year 2009.

In 2013, UKM was the only university listed in Asia university ranking top 100 (Ismail, 2014). This report has caused dissatisfaction in some quarters about the achievement of Malaysian public higher education. Meanwhile, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (2011) (MoHE) aims to place two public universities among the world's top 50 by 2020. Judging from the current challenges, MoHE realizes, among other strategies, exceptional leadership practices are very crucial in order to promote Malaysian public universities to attain an international level of excellence. In the meantime, emotional intelligence and work ethic continue to remain significant concerns in public higher education (Shamsudin *et al.*, 2013, 2015).

Besides the top management and faculty members, there are also the administrators who have important roles to play toward the attainment of national higher education objectives. In many ways, although this group has been proven to have important roles for the development of higher education institutions, however, there appears an almost complete ignorance for their job and worse still, in most cases their roles are not well recognized (Szekeres, 2004). Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine the moderating effect of Islamic work ethic on the

relationship of emotional intelligence and leadership practice among administrators in Malaysian public universities.

**Literature review:** In spite of some important issues which have been highlighted in the higher education sector, scholars strongly believe that leadership is one of the Critical Success Factors (CFSs) in this transformation process all over the world (Bolden *et al.*, 2008). At the same time, recognizing the importance of leadership skill among higher education staff, the MoHE has enlisted leadership in the higher education sector as one of the Critical Agenda Program (CAP) under the phase 2, Action Plan of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2011-2015. The effort is parallel with the National Higher Education Strategic Plan objectives of transforming Malaysian higher education, especially in promoting and developing quality human capital in this country.

Basically, the study of leadership ideas can be observed from more than a thousand years ago. However, due to its complexity, none of the single approach is satisfactory to demonstrate the concept of leadership thus far. Currently, numerous scholars suggested that the leadership theory emphasizes on follower's abilities and working skills, encourage innovative thinking of their followers and promote rationality and creativity in problem solving in the work place (Zagorsek *et al.*, 2004, 2006). Recent literature on effective leadership implied that transformational leadership and visionary leadership, have gained a great deal of attention among practitioners and scholars as well (Sashkin, 1998).

At the same time, some scholars suggested that leadership practices is equated to transformational leadership (Zagorsek *et al.*, 2004, 2006). No doubt, leadership practices approach has become prevalent among scholars, practitioners and widely utilized for management development programs all over the world (Kouzes and Posner, 2000). Kouzes and Posner (1993) deeply believe that leaders are not born but can be developed, suggesting the 5 practices, that are common criteria found in successful leaders.

Consequently, a number of research findings illustrate that effective leadership are influenced by several features such as emotional skills, attributes of the leader and demographic characteristics, culture and organizational business model (Anand and Suriyan, 2010; Barbuto and Burbach, 2006; Barling *et al.*, 2000; Schaffer, 2010).

In the meantime, emotional intelligence has caught much attention over the past decades and is a growing

theme in behavioral research (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Originally, emotional intelligence is the work of Salovey and Mayer (1990) that started to emphasize on the potential benefits of the subject which later arouse the interest of management and practitioners (Anand and Suriyan, 2010). Emotional intelligence is something to do with the ability to identify, manage and perceive emotions. For now, many researchers have suggested that emotional intelligence is getting enormous attention in the study of leadership (Barbuto and Burbach, 2006; Barling *et al.*, 2000; Mayer *et al.*, 2000).

According to Mayer *et al.* (2000) unlike natural intelligence, emotional intelligence can be erudite and improved from time to time. Although, there are many emotional intelligence models available out there, however an ability model and a mixed model are the two most popular models used thus far. The model contains four factors namely perceiving emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions and managing emotions.

Judging from its popularity, this study will only highlight on an ability-based model of emotional intelligence. The model is broadly used due to its convincing theoretical basis, uniqueness of the measurement and its systematic appraisal and supported by empirical data obtained from numerous researches. In addition, ethical behavior is another important subject in leadership research (Ali, 2009). The recent ethical misconduct which has taken place all over the globe has raised society awareness on the importance of the ethical behavior in the community (Ali, 2009). Subsequently, Ali (2009) implied that ethical elements are also having a vital influence in public and private organization's day-to-day business activities. Hence, although there were many studies on emotional intelligence and leadership (Barbuto and Burbach, 2006; Barling *et al.*, 2000; Ali, 2009; Zaccaro *et al.*, 2004), there is still lack of study about the relationship between emotional intelligence, Islamic work ethic and leadership practices in Malaysian public universities as a single research model.

A large body of research on leadership attributes have highlighted on motivation, personality, cognitive abilities and social capabilities as major qualities that differentiate between leaders and non-leaders (Zaccaro *et al.*, 2004). Lately, many research on leadership attributes have been using emotional intelligence constructs to examine leadership behaviors, traits or competencies. Besides that, several previous studies also have suggested that emotional intelligence was positively related to leadership practices (Barbuto and Burbach, 2006; Barling *et al.*, 2000; Tang *et al.*, 2010; Batool, 2013).

Barbuto and Burbach (2006) suggested there were significant relationships between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership behavior. Batool (2013) found a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership style. Meanwhile, there is also a significant predictive relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership practices (Alston *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, Tang *et al.* (2010) indicated that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with leadership practices.

Meanwhile, Baron and Kenny (1986) have suggested that a moderator is a variable that modifies the strength or the direction of the relationship between the two studied variables. Numerous of previous study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership (Barbuto and Burbach, 2006; Barling *et al.*, 2000; Batool, 2013) between emotional intelligence and culture/values (Mesmer-Magnus *et al.*, 2008) and between culture/value and leadership (Kennedy and Mansor, 2000; Zagorsek *et al.*, 2004). Additionally, authentic transformational leadership supports high values of fairness, loyalty, honesty, equality, justice and human rights. Nevertheless, previous studies have managed to support the relationship between the independent, dependent and the moderating variables, however, the moderating effect of Islamic work Ethic on the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practices is still little known.

**The research model and hypotheses:** Subsequently, based on the above discussion, the following research model is proposed. From the above mentioned Fig. 1, the following hypotheses are developed.

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between perceiving emotions and leadership practices among administrators in Malaysian public universities
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between using emotions and leadership practices among administrators in Malaysian public universities
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between understanding emotions and leadership practices among administrators in Malaysian public universities
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant relationship between managing emotions and leadership practices among administrators in Malaysian public universities
- H<sub>5</sub>: Islamic work ethic moderates the relationship between perceiving emotions and leadership practices among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities

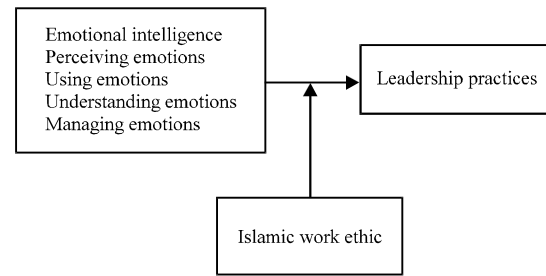


Fig. 1: Research model

- H<sub>6</sub>: Islamic work ethic moderates the relationship between using emotions and leadership practices among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities
- H<sub>7</sub>: Islamic work ethic moderates the relationship between understanding emotions and leadership practices among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities
- H<sub>8</sub>: Islamic work ethic moderates the relationship between managing emotions and leadership practices among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, data were gathered using a cross sectional self-administered questionnaires. By using proportionate stratified random sampling technique, a total of 500 questionnaires was sent to the respondents by surface mail and subsequently 289 usable replies were obtained. For the purpose of data collection, a survey instrument is developed purposely for the individual unit of analysis. The 25-item leadership practices inventory (Kouzes and Posner, 1993) (LPI) was used to measure leadership practices. The 16-item scale was used to measure emotional intelligence and Islamic work ethic was measured using five-item scale (Mohamed *et al.*, 2010). The internal consistency score for emotional intelligence is 0.90, Islamic work ethic is 82 and leadership practices are 0.95.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The response rate for this study was 57.8% (289 replies). The distribution of respondents by region indicated that 10.73% from the northern region, 47.75% from the central region, 19.38% from the southern region, 11.76% from the eastern region and 10.38% from East Malaysia. A total of 58.48% of the respondents are

women and 41.52% are men. Most of the respondents, 60.55% had been working for <10 years, 21.11% between 11-15 years, 7.27% between 16-20 year, 6.57% between 21-25 year and 4.50% for >26 year. Of the respondents, 15.57% are <30 year old, 30.80% between the ages of 30- 35 years, 17.65% between 36-40 years, 17.65% between 41- 45 year, 6.57% between 46-50 years and 11.76% above 51 years. The majority of the respondents are well educated, with 70.93% holding at least a bachelor's degree.

Subsequently, to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practices, Pearson correlation test is employed. It was observed that all dimensions of emotional intelligence were found to have positive significant correlation with leadership practices as illustrated in Table 1.

Meanwhile, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in order to further examine the moderating effect of Islamic work ethic on the relationship between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and leadership practices. The results suggested that using emotions ( $\beta = 0.484$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and understanding emotions ( $\beta = 0.202$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) influence significantly leadership practices. However, It is noticed that Islamic work ethic only moderate the relationship between using emotions ( $\beta = 1.794$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and leadership practices. The results of hierarchical regression analysis were shown in Table 2.

A debate on the relationship between emotional intelligence continues over to what extend its influences leadership effectiveness. It is noticed that positive correlation between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and leadership practices. These findings are parallel with the numerous previous studies on this subject (Anand and Suriyan, 2010; Barbuto and Burbach, 2006; Alston *et al.*, 2010; Batool, 2013). These findings support the arguments that emotional intelligence can enhance the leadership effectiveness of the individual in the workplace. Other interesting findings of this study is that Islamic work ethic only moderates the relationship between the dimension of using emotions and leadership practices. This is an evidence that leaders are responsible in instilling ethical behavior in the workplace.

There are several possible reasons to explain the findings. First, the majority of the respondents who are working at public universities possess a higher education qualification. Therefore, they not only aware the challenges faced by the higher education sector but also understand how to exercise their responsibilities well in the workplace.

Table 1: Pearson's correlation coefficient

Variables	Islamic work ethic	Leadership practices
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>		
Perceiving emotions	0.379**	0.351**
Using emotions	0.418**	0.594**
Understanding emotions	0.219**	0.416**
Managing emotions	0.271**	0.312**

\*\*p<0.01

Table 2: Hierarchical regression analysis

Variables	Std. beta		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Independence variable</b>			
Perceiving Emotions (PE)	0.032	-0.005	0.694
Using Emotions (UE)	0.484**	0.436**	-0.532
Understanding Emotions (UsE)	0.202**	0.202**	1.1289*
Managing Emotions (ME)	0.043	0.025	0.246
<b>Moderating variable</b>			
IWE		0.175**	0.605
<b>Interaction term</b>			
IWE_PE			-0.967
IWE_UE			1.794*
IWE_UsE			1.371
IWE_ME			-.289
R <sup>2</sup>	0.396	0.420	0.439
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.388	0.410	0.421
R <sup>2</sup> change	0.396	0.024	0.019
Sig. F Change	0.000	0.001	0.051

\*\*, \*p<0.01, 0.05

Second, perhaps due to the historical notion of the strong colonial legacy, mixed with economic factor such as foreign investments by Western and Eastern countries has changed the traditional management and leadership style in Malaysia (Sin, 1991). In addition, the national industrialization policy together with the surging number of business joint ventures always been connected with a westernization of several management practices in Malaysia (Kennedy and Mansor, 2000).

## CONCLUSION

This study supported the previous findings on the significant relationship between emotional intelligence dimensions and leadership practice. It is also observed that Islamic work ethic only moderate the relationship between the dimension of using emotion and leadership practices. As such, the findings provide useful information, particularly for Malaysian public universities to develop and implement an effective leadership development program. Besides that, emotional intelligence also has to be given some considerable attention in the development program as many scholars are recognizing that emotional intelligence is very important in an individual's career advancement and social life as well.

## LIMITATIONS

Firstly, a self-rating scale was used in this study which automatically raise an immediate concern because

often it is very difficult for the people to assess accurately their own behavior. The results in this study really depend on the respondent's honesty. The main disadvantage of self-rating scales is that the researcher is unable to guarantee the possibility of respondents to exaggerate views of themselves, nor hinder the subjects from giving desirable answers rather than the most honest feedbacks (Bradberry and Greaves, 2005). Therefore the use of multi-rater scales in conducting survey could have produced different result (Alston *et al.*, 2010). It has been suggested that multi-rater is an alternative way of measuring human behavior.

Secondly, the generalization of the present findings could be questionable due to the nature of the chosen sample. The sample was obtained from public universities whereas all private universities omitted in this study. In this connection, the limitation might restrict the generalization for the entire Malaysian universities. For future study, the researchers propose that private universities should also be invited to participate in the study. This may expand and broaden the research perspectives on the subject.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This study was funded by Grant RAGS from the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia. We would like to thank Universiti Utara Malaysia for the support during the writing of this study.

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