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Investigating the effect of humility of Muslim leaders on the moral behaviours of followers and spirituality at work in Islamic society

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Organisations are increasingly involved in what they call 'ethical dilemmas', that is, the conditions under which wrongdoing and righteous deeds must be defined once again because the line between right and wrong has blurred more than ever. In general, human beings have special moral characteristics in the individual and personality dimension that shape their thoughts, speech and behaviour. It is possible that the same people in the same position and organisation could be affected differently, and their ideas, speech and behaviour affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation. Ethics can have positive or negative consequences at each organisational level. One of the effective factors on the occurrence of employees' ethical behaviours is the role of spirituality in the work environment and humility of leaders. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of humility of Muslim leaders on the moral behaviours of followers and spirituality at work in Islamic society. The statistical population of the study was 370 Muslim employees of International Islamic University Malaysia. After distributing the questionnaires among the statistical population, 352 questionnaires were returned. The validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by the content validity method, and its reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha. In this research, the structural equation modeling approach and Amos software were used to analyse the data. All hypotheses were confirmed at a 95% significance level. The results showed that the humility of leaders has a positive and significant effect on spirituality in the workplace and work ethic of followers. Spirituality in the workplace has also a positive effect on employees' work ethic.

Contribution: It is recommended that the officials of organisations should pay attention to spirituality in the workplace and the humility of managers and supervisors towards employees in order to promote work ethics. Further, it can be concluded that organisations can increase the ethical behaviours of employees by promoting the components of organisational spirituality.

Keywords: humility; leaders; Islam; Islamic society; moral behaviour; spirituality.

Introduction

One of the major challenges for efficient managers at different levels is how to create a suitable environment for people to behave ethically and adhere to the ethical principles governing their job and profession. The first step in achieving these goals is to identify a model through which the organisation's ethical values lead to ethical behaviours in the organisation (Nasution & Rafiki 2020). Ethical scandals of various businesses around the world have once again highlighted the importance of the role of organisational leadership in shaping ethical behaviours. According to the theory of organisational support, leaders are the first-line representatives of the organisation for employees. Leaders are one of the factors influencing the behaviours of members of the organisation that define values and norms and provide a picture of the organisation. Leaders play an important role in how much trust is in the organisation, building mutual respect, identifying and correcting problems and paying rewards or punishments. Leadership skills also play an important role in managing deviant behaviours (Fleming 2004). Researchers believe that leaders' humility towards employees occurs when employees understand that leaders value their participation and care about their well-being, interests and comfort, because leaders are the

representatives of the organisation and are responsible for guiding employees and evaluating their performance (Mallén et al. 2019). Humility is an important component in Islam that has been emphasised in Islamic teachings. In the Qur'an, there are direct or indirect references to the humility of individuals. For example:

> O you who believe! Whoever of you turns away from his religion, Allah will soon bring to a people whom he loves, and they love him. They are stubborn against the humble believers, stubborn against the disbelievers. (Surah Al-Ma'idah, Ayat 54)

And in another place it is stated: 'The servants [of God] the Merciful are those who walk on earth calmly and arrogantly; They are stubborn against the humble believers, stubborn against the disbelievers' (Surah Al-Ma'idah, Ayat 54). And in another place it is stated: 'The servants [of God] the Merciful are those who walk on earth calmly and arrogantly; And when the ignorant address them, they greet them with salutation' (Surah Al-Furqan, Ayat 63). 'The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) spread your wings and feathers for the believers who follow you (and be humble and kind to them)' (Surah Ash-Shu'ara, Ayat 215).

Any value that is created in the organisation first goes back to the leaders, because leaders have a direct relationship with all people in the organisation and also have a great impact on people's work experience in the work environment. Research shows that leaders' 'behaviors and activities reinforce employees' positive attitudes and feelings, and this creates a sense of ethical commitment in employees' (Kim & Vandenberghe 2021).

It is necessary to identify effective factors in improving and developing ethics among employees in studies and research, and this is important for the higher education system, which plays an effective role in the comprehensive development of the country. In fact, higher education is a professional system in which the set of human behaviours of its employees plays a role in shaping the moral atmosphere of this system, and in a way, universities are one of the most effective environments for institutionalising moral principles and values in human societies (Tuan Ibrahim, Hashim & Mohamad Ariff 2020). In the university environment, moral development is disseminated not through culture-building but through the communication actions of managers and stakeholders of the academic community, and in this regard, managers and leaders play an important role in the moral atmosphere of the entire university. Meanwhile, the International Islamic University of Malaysia, because of its high sensitivity that most of its staff and managers are Muslims, needs more attention to the principles of work ethic and Islamic components. Hence, the slightest shortcoming in this field causes a huge cost for this university and its national and international reputation, which is mixed with the Islamic approach. Therefore, considering the important role of employees' ethical behaviours in the university, the authors of this article decided to consider leaders' humility as an independent variable and a way to promote followers' ethical behaviours. In sum, the main aim of this research is investigating the effect of humility of Muslim leaders on the moral behaviours of followers and spirituality at work in Islamic society.

Theoretical foundations of research
Humility of leaders

Humility in Arabic means soil, and because other virtues grow through it, it is called fertile soil (Chen et al. 2018). Humility has two dimensions: intrapersonal and interpersonal. In the intrapersonal dimension, humility includes having a correct and accurate view of oneself and being aware of one's strengths, weaknesses and limitations, and in the interpersonal dimension, it includes the ability to control self-centred feelings and behaviours and cultivates altruistic feelings and behaviours (Dwiwardani et al. 2017). Humble leadership is defined as an interpersonal trait that emerges in the social sphere and includes objective self-judgment, appreciation of others' strengths and ability to learn (Carnevale, Huang & Paterson 2019). The organisation and supervisors are confident in their ability and want to reward their efforts when the organisation values employee collaboration. Employees feel more supported and committed to the organisation, and in addition to doing their best to fulfill their responsibilities, they go beyond the organisation's goals (Chiang & Hsieh 2014).

Ethical behaviours

Work ethic is a set of ethical actions and reactions accepted in the organisation that can provide the most desirable social relationships for its members in the performance of professional duties. Work ethic deals with ethical issues and questions as well as the ethical principles and methods of a professional system and oversees the voluntary actions of the members of the organisation in the field of their professional activities. In management and organisation, work ethic refers to a person's ethical responsibilities in terms of job. With these interpretations, it can be said that work ethic includes a set of value judgments, duties, behaviours and instructions to perform in the organisation and the workplace. Many behaviours and actions of members of the organisation are influenced by moral values that are rooted in ethics (Pourkarimi et al. 2019).

Poor work ethic affects the attitude of people towards the job, organisation and managers, and it can affect individual group and organisational performance. The rule of work ethic in the organisation is able to significantly help the organisation to reduce tensions and succeed in achieving the goal effectively and making the organisation accountable. There are various references to moral behaviours in the holy Qur'an. In some verses, moral virtues are mentioned, and in others, moral vices are mentioned. For example: 'O you who believe, do not do anything before God and His Messenger, and fear God, for God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing' (Surah Al-Hujurat, Ayat 1). And it is stated:

> O you who believe, do not raise your voice louder than the voice of the Prophet, and do not speak loudly to him as some of you

speak to others, lest you know that your deeds will be ruined. (Surah Al-Hujurat, Ayat 2)

It is stated elsewhere: 'And whoever trusts in God, he suffices his command, God obeys His command, and God has set a measure for everything' (Surah At-Talaq, Ayat 3). Also: 'If you are grateful, I will increase [my blessings] upon you, and if you are ungrateful, I will be severely punished' (Surah Ibrahim, Ayat 7).

One of the good behaviours that has been emphasised in the Qur'an is patience and perseverance. For example: 'Be patient, for God is with those who persevere' (Surah Al-Anfal, Ayat 46). In addition, there are several commandments in the Qur'an for repentance and repentance of sin:

O you who believe, repent to God, pure repentance, hope [*by doing so*] your Lord will forgive your sins and admit you to Gardens of Paradise which the streams flow beneath its trees. (Surah At-Tahrim, Ayat 8)

The Qur'an does not mention moral behaviours limited to the verses mentioned, and it refers to numerous moral behaviours such as avarice, lying, jealousy, oppression, promotion of ugliness, faultfinding and so on.

Spirituality at work

Spirituality is the desire to find the ultimate and desirable goal and live according to these goals (Purnamasaria & Amaliahb 2015). According to Islamic principles, spirituality focuses on the inside of the theoretical and practical teachings of religion and, in general, paying attention to the inside and the unseen of the universe and dressing the soul from belonging to the material and adorning it with the clergy (Amiri 2013). Spirituality in the workplace is the tendency to seek the ultimate goal in life, to establish strong relationships with colleagues and other people who are related to the work of individuals and the compatibility between the core values of the individual and the values of the organisation (Adawiyah & Pramuka 2017).

The introduction of concepts such as ethics, honesty, altruism, semantics at work and solidarity with colleagues in research and managerial and business practices refers to a new paradigm called workplace spirituality or organisational spirituality (Cavanagh 1999). Based on this, it can be said that spirituality is defined as a religious commitment and the way of excellence within and outside the human being, as well as behaviour that is guided by specific principles and values (Long & Mills 2010) and the dimensions of spirituality for this. The identified variables include meaningful work at the individual level, a sense of solidarity at the group level and alignment of values at the organisational level (Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson 2003).

Theoretical framework of research

Leaders' humility sends a message to employees that the organisation and supervisors are confident in their abilities,

and employees often think of the activities that supervisors and managers perform in the organisation as the organisation's actions rather than as an individual action by the supervisor or manager. Based on this personalisation of behaviour, an employee who observes a particular behaviour from his or her supervisor considers it as a representative of the organisation, cites the whole organisation and sees the organisation as a supporter of that behaviour.

In addition, the needs of employees today have changed in terms of type and volume, and current organisations can be successful if they meet the biological, social, psychological and spiritual needs of employees; one of the concepts that can be effective in meeting these needs is spirituality in the workplace (Kale & Shrivastava 2003). Spirituality in the organisation includes honesty, trust, moral influence, honest communication, humility and spiritual behaviour, including respect for others, caring for others and listening responsibly to the audience, and appreciating the help of others.

It is worth mentioning that spirituality in the workplace will increase intrinsic motivation in people by influencing people's attitudes because of a sense of meaning at work, a sense of connection with the organisation and others, a sense of alignment and unity of values and goals with the organisation and others. High intrinsic motivation, both directly and through increasing employee motivation, leads to better performance of assigned tasks and even behaviours beyond job duties. Thus, individuals organise their activities and actions depending on the intensity of motivation and the intensity of the forces created in them, as far as they can play their roles well and correctly. In societies where most people are religious and with an approach that considers spirituality in following a particular religion, the possibility of strengthening spirituality in organisations and the workplace is greater, and as a result, the ethical behaviours of employees increase. According to the theoretical framework of the research, the research hypotheses are presented as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Leaders' humility has a significant effect on the moral behaviours of followers.

Hypothesis 2: Leaders' humility has a significant effect on spirituality in the workplace.

Hypothesis 3: Spirituality in the workplace has a significant effect on the moral behaviours of followers.

Research method

The statistical population of the study was 370 Muslim employees of International Islamic University Malaysia. After distributing the questionnaires among the statistical population, 352 questionnaires were completed correctly and the rest of the questionnaires removed from the analysis as they had not been filled out completely (Aghiqi 2019). The questionnaire was used to measure the humility of leaders. In addition, Milliman et al. (2003) and Petty's (1995) questionnaires have been used in this research. The validity

TABLE 1: Normality of variables.

Test	Shapiro–Wilk test		Kolmogorov–Smirinov test		Status
Variable	Statistics	Coefficient	Statistics	Coefficient	
Humility of leaders	0.073	0.188	0.99	0.537	Normal
Work ethics	0.047	0.200	0.993	0.8	Normal
Organisational spirituality	0.081	0.067	0.976	0.057	Normal

TABLE 2: Pearson correlation coefficient.

Variable	Coefficient	Humility of leaders	Work ethics	Organisational spirituality
Humility of leaders	Pearson correlation coefficient	Sqr. AVE = 0.731	-	-
	Level of s.g.		-	-
Work ethics	Pearson correlation coefficient	0.724	Sqr. AVE = 0.742	-
	Level of s.g.	0.000		-
Organisational spirituality	Pearson correlation coefficient	0.557	0.628	Sqr. AVE = 0.727
	Level of s.g.	0.000	0.000	

Sqr. AVE, square root of average variance extracted; s.g., significance.

TABLE 3: Status of research hypotheses.

Hypotheses	Path coefficient	*t*-value	Status of hypotheses
Hypothesis 1: Leaders' humility has a significant effect on the moral behaviours of followers.	5.32	0.77	Confirmed
Hypothesis 2: Leaders' humility has a significant effect on spirituality in the workplace.	4.62	0.62	Confirmed
Hypothesis 3: Spirituality in the workplace has a significant effect on the moral behaviours of followers.	3.49	0.49	Confirmed

of the questionnaire was obtained using construct validity in confirmatory factor analysis. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire; the results indicate that the questionnaire has good reliability, the total reliability being 0.942.

Research findings

Test of normality of variables

The Shapiro–Wilk test and the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to test the normality of the data. Considering the output of the two tests and the significance above 0.05 in the tests, it can be concluded that the variables have a normal distribution (Table 1).

Correlation analysis of research variables

As the results of Table 2 in SPSS show, there is a positive and significant relationship between all research variables. The significance level of all research variables is less than 0.05, so Hypothesis 0 is rejected and Hypothesis 1, that is, the existence of a significant relationship, is confirmed.

As shown in Table 2, all correlations had values less than 0.85, so the existence of multiple common linear relationships between variables is ruled out. The highest correlation coefficient between the two variables of leaders' humility and work ethic (0.774) is at a strong level, and the lowest correlation coefficient between the two variables of leaders' humility and work ethic (0.557) is above average.

Structural equation modeling in SPSS Amos

The *p*-value between the two variables of leaders' humility and work ethic is 0.000, which is less than 0.05; therefore, it can be concluded that this hypothesis is accepted with 0.90 confidence, and in other words, it can be stated that with 0.90 confidence, there is a significant relationship between leaders' humility and work ethic. According to the shape of the path coefficient, the path coefficient between leaders' humility and work ethic variables is 0.77. It can be argued that the humility of leaders has a good and direct effect on work ethic. The *p*-value between the two variables of leaders' humility and organisational spirituality is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Also, the critical value between these two variables is 4.62, which is a value greater than 1.96; therefore, it can be concluded that this hypothesis is accepted with 0.90 confidence, and in other words, it can be said that with 0.90 confidence, there is a significant relationship between leaders' humility and organisational spirituality. The path coefficient between the humility variable of leaders and organisational

spirituality is 0.62. Given that the coefficient is greater than 0.6, then it can be argued that the humility of leaders has a strong and direct impact on organisational spirituality. The *p*-value between the two variables of work ethic and organisational spirituality is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. The critical value between these two variables is 3.49, which is greater than 1.96. Therefore, it can be concluded that this hypothesis is accepted with 0.90 confidence, and in other words, it can be stated that with 0.90 confidence, there is a significant relationship between work ethic and organisational spirituality. The path coefficient between the two variables of work ethic and organisational spirituality is 0.49. Given that the coefficient is greater than 0.3, then it can be argued that work ethic has a good and direct effect on organisational spirituality. A summary of the hypotheses of the results is given in Table 3.

Discussion

Humility is an adornment for human behaviour and a blessing that brings pride to the individual. In the meantime, it is more appropriate and necessary to beautify the behaviour of the managers and agents of the Islamic government with this ornament. It is necessary to maintain humility in all situations, especially when it is attributed to a direction. People respect the manager, and this appreciation by the people sometimes has a negative effect on the manager; that is, he considers himself superior and the people inferior.

If a manager is arrogant, on the one hand, his relationship with God is severed, and his relationship with his people and employees is strained. The arrogant manager does not see dealing with those around him as being commensurate with the dignity of his position, and people gradually distance

themselves from such a person. In order to avoid such a disaster, the manager must be careful to be more humble towards the people and his employees as his position rises and to respect the people more than before.

Humility is an attribute that beautifies everyone, but it is more beautiful and necessary for leaders and those who are in charge of the life and religion of the people. It is clear that social status is a ground for creating a state of superiority over others, and if this plague is not controlled, it will cause fatal harm to society and people. The guides and propagandists of their message will be effective when they are far from being arrogant and have shade and fruitfulness like a fruitful tree and leaves, not only on a specific individual or group but on everyone. In addition, the concept of spirituality in the context of religions like Islam and others means deepening religiosity. If acts of religiosity are performed according to their meaning and purpose, depth of religiosity is achieved.

Islamic spirituality is humanism. Islamic spirituality considers humanity worthy and deserving of approaching God and introduces them directly in relation to God, having the talent of the divine caliphate and the manifestation of divine attributes. The holy Qur'an is the last and most complete divine book revealed by God Almighty to guide human beings; in this charter of life, everything related to the perfection and happiness of human beings is pledged.

But it is worth mentioning that truths related to the final perfection and reaching the peak of spiritual perception are scattered throughout its verses in the form of codes and references, and finding the key to these codes depends on choosing the right path. Spirituality, from the perspective of the holy Qur'an, is so intertwined with the human soul and being that neglecting it is as if it is tied to forgetting God, and the point is that people forget and lose their right through forgetfulness. The purpose of Islamic and God-centered spirituality is not to attain extraordinary powers and only desirable mental states, but rather it offers a transcendent truth beyond all manifestations of existence and gives a special meaning to all existence. Belief in the existence of truth, which has absolute goodness and infinite perfection and is the infinite source of mercy, beauty and independence, gives existence and life glory and meaning. The infinite capacity of man, if it flows in the direction of knowledge and worship of the truth, flourishes and leads to the attainment of faith and righteous deeds. In addition, one of the most important cultural values that may affect economic success is the Islamic work ethic. In organisations, addressing ethics and ethical values is one of the requirements. In general, human beings have special moral characteristics in the individual and personality dimension that shape their thoughts, speech and behaviour. So in a simple definition of Islamic work ethic, it can be said that Islamic work ethic refers to the observance of the principles of work ethics based on the Bible and the words of the Prophet (PBUH). Ethics in organisations is a system of values and do's and don'ts, based on which the good and bad of the organisation are identified

and bad action is distinguished from good. Findings show that the Islamic work ethic in organisations causes financial health, organisational profitability, employee participation in organisational decisions and appreciation of employee participation in work.

The research findings confirm the hypothesis of leaders' humility on the moral behaviours of followers. The path coefficient between the variables of leaders' humility and work ethic is 0.77, which is confirmed by the significant number of 5.32, and it can be claimed that leaders' humility has a strong and direct effect on work ethic. The path coefficient between the humility variable of leaders and organisational spirituality was 0.62, which was confirmed based on the significance number of 4.62, which is more than the critical value of 1.96, and considering that the coefficient is more than 0.3, then it can be claimed that the humility of leaders has a strong and direct impact on organisational spirituality.

The path coefficient between the two variables of work ethic and organisational spirituality is 0.49 and based on a significant number of 3.49 which is not in the critical range (between 1.96 and –1.96), this hypothesis was confirmed. Since the value of this coefficient is more than 0.3, it can be claimed that work ethic has a good and direct effect on organisational spirituality. Humility is one of the key characteristics of leaders in Islamic society. Leaders who are self-aware and appreciative of the strengths of others, for example, are more likely to behave similarly to service leaders who, with their unique, conventional and powerful orientations, can express humble behaviours.

Conclusion

Humble leaders, because of their self-appreciation and careful self-assessment, are more likely to support others and achieve participatory leadership, thereby increasing employee engagement, motivation and satisfaction and ultimately the ethical behaviours of followers. Owens and Hekman (2016) also consider leadership humility to increase employee commitment and ethics, which is consistent with the findings of the present hypothesis. Also, Zarei Matin et al. (2015) in their research state that humility of leaders improves employee performance, so it can be concluded that organisations can improve the ethical behaviours of followers by promoting honesty, self-awareness and empathy of leaders. Research findings also show that leaders' humility affects spirituality in an Islamic organisation. Spirituality in the organisation includes helping and respecting others, honesty and engaging in spiritual activities. Humble leaders with empathy and attention to the feelings and emotions of employees will increase their readiness to follow them, and strengthening empathy will increase compromised behaviours and community-friendly behaviours. On the other hand, managers having humility protects them from the need for flattery (which is one of the moral vices according to the Qur'an) and thus increases the honesty of employees. In this regard, Paine et al. (2015) state that leaders' humility has

a potential contribution to consistent relationships and employee spiritual growth. Also, LaBouff et al. (2012) state that humility promotes empathetic and altruistic practices and behaviours among individuals. Therefore, it can be said that managers through humility can create an atmosphere of honesty, empathy and cooperation in the organisation. Also, according to the research findings, it can be argued that by utilising and strengthening spirituality in the workplace, the moral growth of employees can be promoted. Employees who have a deep sense of meaning in their work will put more effort into doing the job properly and will act spontaneously and in a self-controlled manner. It is also natural for employees who believe that human beings are connected to each other to be more involved in the work and to help other members of the organisation perform their duties better. Employees who align their values and goals with the values and mission of the organisation consider the organisation as their supporter and do not separate themselves from the organisation. So by enthusiastically helping others, they improve the performance of other employees. In this regard, Ebrahimpour, Roshandel and Sokhandan (2017) state that spirituality in the workplace increases intrinsic motivation by influencing people's attitudes, and this provides the basis for strengthening ethics in organisations. In addition, Amiri (2013) showed in their research results that organisational spirituality causes employees to act more ethically in their communication and work, so according to the present hypothesis, it can be concluded that organisations can increase the components of organisational spirituality.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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