

# **Determinants of Employees' Performance in Selected Business Sector in Palestine: Moderating role of Islamic Value System**

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## **Abstract**

This paper highlights relationship between servant leadership and employee performance and moderation of Islamic value system in selected Business Sector in Palestine. Employees' performance is seemed to be related with factors like servant leadership, and Islamic value system, which were conceptually discussed. Overall, the present study offers a beneficial insight to the importance of servant leadership and value system from the view point of Islam and servant leadership behavior in business sector in order to attain excellent employee performance. Further, the results might help future research to study the effect of Islamic value system, servant leadership in producing other intended outcomes. This paper also highlights findings from its pilot study, preliminary discussion and recommendations are posted toward the end of this paper.

## **1. Introduction**

It is important to consider the culture dimensions prior to creating strategies and objectives in organizations as this helps management achieve effective performance (Cameron & Quinn, 2005). Researchers who adhere to this culture specific position often cite the individualistic nature as support for the argument that leadership theories developed in the western regions are limited in their applicability to divergent cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Adler, 1986; Smith & Peterson, 1988; Hofstede, 1993; Leung et al., 2005). However, some past researchers have pointed out that universal tendencies in leadership processes also exist in the universal culture position (Fahr et al., 1987; Dorfman & Ronen, 1991; Bass & Avolio, 1993). But none of the studies have introduced employee performance in light of Islamic value system perspective. Besides that, there is no clear evidence which shows the most effective dimensions, or the types of effective leadership apparent. Therefore, this paper focusses on Palestinian Business Sector which suffers from a rather slow economic performance.

However, there are three further important issues related to failures and problems of performance in the Gaza Strip: political, economic and cultural (Shaban, 2008). As Palestine in general, and Gaza in particular, is under occupation and siege, the political and

economic issues are difficult to control. Therefore, this paper attempts to focus on culture. This is because organizational culture includes shared values, philosophy, rules and habits which are found to be varied across different continents, race, belief and others. Nevertheless, little reference has been made to relate organizational culture with religion, specifically, the religion of Islam (Ishak, 2013). So far, instruments developed and employed are also found lacking with religion influence which is somehow crucial in certain countries. According to Ishak (2013), Islamic value system, rooted in Islamic belief system should be internalized in organizational culture. Therefore, this paper utilizes the Islamic value system as the backbone of the organizational culture (itqan and work solidity, work obligation, effort and perseverance, work spirituality, continuous improvement, service-oriented morale and justice) as moderating variables that impact employee performance in Palestine.

## **2. Literature Review**

The main purpose to organizational success and effectiveness is the competitive workforce, and the capability to overcome the challenges faced during the rapid changes in the economics. Generally, organizations will align their organizational strategies and goals with their employees' behaviors in order to stay competitive (Reave, 2005; Yukl & Heaton, 2002). Generally, employee performance is defined as “the level of productivity of an individual employee, relative to his or her peers on several job-related behaviors and outcomes” (Babin & Boles, 1998). According to Keler (2006), employee performance is the way employees being utilize to attain the main goals of an organization, as well as to link their personal behaviors to the standards of their organizations. In improving organizational effectiveness, scholars have given their attention to the way employee performance is managed and measured (Ringle et al., 2010).

In doing so, servant leadership offers a theoretical model for effective leadership (Smith et al., 2004). As suggested, this model puts the leader in a position of service orientation in their support of stakeholders (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leaders do not look at followers as being subordinate, rather he/she serves by building skills, removing barriers, encouraging innovation, and empowering the employees to solve problems creatively. From this, servant leadership is deeply rooted in Islamic culture, and many similarities can be found between pre-Islamic and early Islamic leadership styles and practices, and those of servant leadership (Sarayrah, 2004). Prophet Muhammad (SAW), as the best example served as prophetic role. Ramadan (2007) and Salie (2008) concur that any reform of Muslim societies starts by using the prophet Muhammad as exemplar. Greenleaf (as cited in Wren, 1995) also embraced “the theory of prophecy which holds that prophetic voices of great clarity, and with a quality of insight equal to that of any age, are speaking cogently all of the time”. Allegiance that followers offer freely, is considered the only genuine allegiance. This moral principle insists that followers freely offer allegiance to “leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants”. The prophet Muhammad, taught that a leader of the people is their servant (Beekun & Badawi, 2005). Furthermore, Islam encourages noble virtues and values.

Values are all encompassing moral principles of individuals or groups based on elemental dogma and dictates what is right or wrong. Values usually relate to an ideal or standard which guides our conduct and a reference point against which we judge ourselves and

which we use to judge others (Cox & Parkinson, 1999). In particular, this study classified Islamic values system into seven dimensions. First component is Itqan and Work Solidity, the Prophet Mohammad said: "God loves you when you do the work with Itqan and accuracy". Itqan is an Arabic word meaning "quality" and refers to how good or bad something is. It is a characteristic or feature that someone or something has or something that can be noticed as a part of a person or thing. It is also can be defined as a high level of value or excellence (Ibrahim & Nor, 2013). Second is Work Obligation a social, legal, or moral requirement, such as a duty, contract, or promise that compels one to follow or avoid a particular course of action (Ibrahim & Nor, 2013), and includes obligation in the workplace. In Islam, work obligation is related to morally responsible conduct. Morally based conduct is an essential precondition for sustaining a prosperous economy and a vital business community. Thus, the components of work obligation from the above work values can be filtered including responsibility, trustworthiness, truthfulness, integrity, sincerity, accuracy, discipline, knowledgeable (Khanifar et al., 2011). Third component is Effort and Perseverance refers to the amount of exertion expended for a specified purpose, or an earnest and conscientious activity intended to do or accomplish something (Ibrahim & Nor, 2013). Effort is considered to be fruitful productivity that provides for the worker while shrinking potential social or economic problems, and is regarded as a necessary work-ethic component in Islam.

Next value in this study, is Work Spirituality, according to Weaver and Agle (2002) religious role expectations, internalized as a religious self-identity, can influence ethical behavior or the values of an individual. Religious and spiritual symbols and practices are becoming more prevalent and acceptable in the workplace, as seen by the increase in enrichment and empowerment programs, prayer meetings, holy book, religious/spiritual language, and requests for time off for religious obligations or holidays (Mitroff & Denton 1999; Laabs 1995; Gallup et.al., 2000; Digh, 1998; Conlin, 1999; Garcia, 2003).

Another component is Continuous Improvement, which is a basic requirement in Islam, this is evident in a hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim, to effect, " A successful man is (one) whose today is better than yesterday, and an unlucky one is whose today is worse than yesterday, and a deceived man is (one) whose today is the same as yesterday". Islam highlights the importance of continuous improvement and this is also stated in the Holly Quran. For example, it is mentioned that believers who do their work with righteousness and to the full extent of their ability shall enter Heaven (Quran 7:42). Service-Oriented Morale also is another Islamic value that defined as collectivist, which is individuals who are considered as a whole group. Prophet Mohammad said: "The most beloved one to God are those who are the most beneficial for people". In Islam, collectivism is derived from the root of Islam as it is a collective religion (Islamic Ummah). One of the results of religious collectivism in Islam is cooperation and collaboration in the workplace to boost economic activities.

Finally, Justice is defined as the quality or state of being equal, and generally it is an ideal of uniformity in treatment or status by those in a position to affect either (Ibrahim & Nor, 2013). In Islam, men and women are created equal in their basic humanity, and all have the shared lineage and dignity of Allah's creation and privilege of man over the other creatures of His creation. In Islam, once justice prevails, global harmony is achieved. Thus, the equality dimension in Islam rejects the theory of egoism which only focuses on

satisfying and meeting the interests of certain individuals (Shaw, 1999). In term of work treatment, every individual has the right to be treated equally regardless of gender, race, social status, etc. Workers should receive their rights in line with their obligations, while the customers should also receive their rights based on their investments. These dimensions and components are ideals which the Islamic value system expects from employers or organizations.

### 3. Hypotheses Development

Very few empirical researches have been conducted and published to examine the relationship between servant leadership and employees' outcomes or performance. Hence the positive effect of servant leadership is supporting this style for improvement of organizations' and employees' performance. In addition to that, the majority of servant leadership result has been conducted in the western culture such as in the United States, therefore it is necessary to conduct new research in other cultures in order to achieve a truly representative model (Ehrhart, 2004; Liden et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 2012), China (Han & Kakabadse, 2010; Schaubroeck et al., 2011), and Africa (Hale & Fields, 2007; Walumbwa et al., 2010). Based on this, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H1:** There is a significant relationship between servant leadership and employee performance in Palestine.

According to the findings, by Ishak et al. (2013) Islamic value system, rooted in Islamic belief system should be internalized in organizational culture. However, researchers pay inadequate attention to mediators and moderators that link organizational culture with performance (Denison, 1990; Yilmaz et al., 2005; Gregory et al., 2009; Zheng et al., 2010). Likewise, theorists argue that culture and performance studies can benefit from paying more attention to the process that links culture to outcomes (Saffold 1988; Wilderom et al., 2000). On the other hand, values flow from a philosophic position or worldview. When only values are considered, each religion reveals some levels of agreement with servant leadership (Wallace, 2007).

What is missing is a consideration of the hot buttons associated with each of the five religions' worldview. These hot buttons are part of the greater worldview associated with each religion and raise questions about whether or not a specific values comparison alone is sufficient (Wallace, 2007). These values also serve as a foundation or standard which determine a person's action, attitude, evaluation, moral judgment, and justification of self and others (Rokeach 1968, 1973). In this regard, values are integrated in every aspect of life and may influence, determine and facilitate relationships between individuals, organizations, institutions, and society (Meglino & Ravlin 1998). In this regard, Islamic perspective and traditions offer some ways to overcome the problems of different interpretation of values since the Islamic value system is built upon basic absolute values which bring about congruence of values in all aspects of life, including personal (private) life and life at work (Abdullah, 2013). Based on this, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

**H2:** Islamic value system moderates the association of servant leadership and employee performance in Palestine.

#### 4. Research Framework

Based on the literature review, the conceptual framework for the study is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

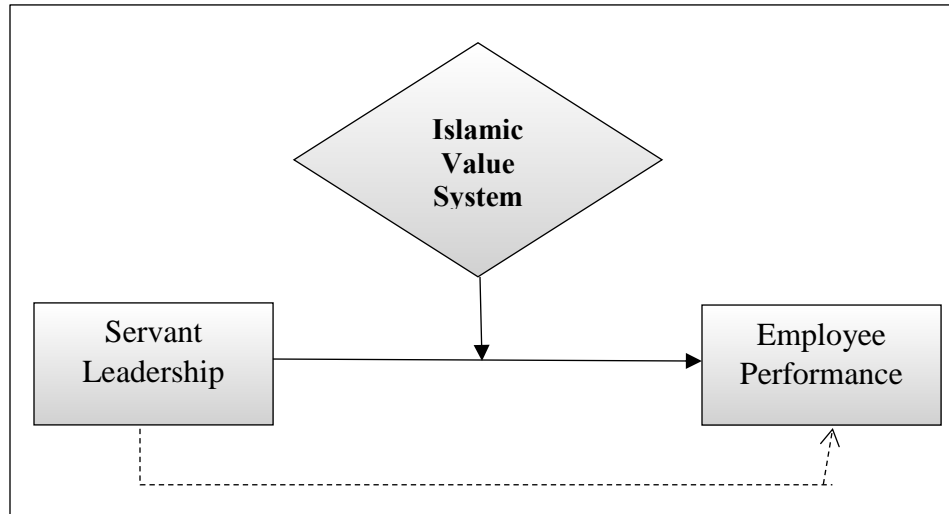


Figure1: Conceptual framework of the Study

#### 5. Methodology

The primary data was collected through the quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire design. This is most suitable and appropriate when structural equation modeling (SEM) is used as the main method of analysis (Hair et al., 2010). This study aimed to examine the moderating effect of Islamic value system towards the association of servant leadership and employee performance. It employed a self-administered cross-sectional survey to collect the data from respondents and each section is measured using 1-5 point Likert scale. Target population of this study refers to the companies whose leaders are members of the Palestinian Businessmen Association. Therefore, the unit of analysis in the study is the individuals.

Meanwhile, the respondents of this study were only the employees who are in non-supervisory positions. Employees inclusion criteria were those of non-supervisory employees (full-time, part time or contract), regularly available and currently working in business sector in Palestine. The dataset coded and saved into the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences SPSS version 22 and analysed using structural equation modeling (SEM) (Hair et al., 2010). A pilot test was conducted to ensure accuracy and consistency of the responses gathered by the questionnaires. The data was collected from the selected employees of six organisations in Palestine, and a total of 30 employees involved in the pilot test. Based on the responses that have been gathered the results of testing validity and reliability of measurement of constructs indicated that Cronbach's coefficient alpha for all constructs ranged between 0.907 and 0.950. Therefore, all the values for reliability

(Cronbach's alpha) were greater than the recommended value of above 0.60 (Hair, et al., 2010; Bagozzi & Yi, 1989). Table 1 and Table 2 demonstrated the questionnaire design and the summary of reliability of Cronbach's Alpha from Pilot Test.

Table 1. Questionnaire Design

No.	Variable	Items	Scale
1	Demography	6	Nominal/Ordinal
2	Employee Performance	7	Likert (1-5)
3	Servant Leadership	10	Likert (1-5)
4	Islamic Value System	56	Likert (1-5)

## 6. Preliminary Discussion

After conducting the pilot test, it was essential to examine the way respondents answered the survey questions related to the constructs presented in the conceptual framework. The term "reliability" in this study refers to the extent to which the measurement produces the same results with repeated measurement (Malhotra & Brik, 2003). The measurement of reliability provides internal consistency in the measurement of variables (Kim & Cha, 2002). The instrument's reliability is revealed to be more than 0.60 which is acceptable (Hair et al., 2010; Sekaran, 2003).

Table 2. Summary of Reliability of Cronbach's Alpha from Pilot Test

Name of Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Servant Leadership	10	0.910
Employee Performance	7	0.907
Itqan and Work Solidity	12	0.922
Work Obligation	8	0.915
Effort and Perseverance	7	0.929
Work Spirituality	8	0.953
Continuous Improvement	13	0.920
Service-Oriented Morale	4	0.928
Justice	3	0.932

This study conducted reliability tests Cronbach's alpha via the use of SPSS version 22. The current study indicates the reliability (Cronbach's alpha) values ranged from 0.907 to 0.953. Therefore, all values for reliability constructs were greater than the recommended value of above 0.60. Table 2 presents Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) statistics.

The analysis was performed on 72 items that measured the component of servant leadership, employee performance, and Islamic value system. Similarly, descriptive statistics for constructs mean and standard deviation (S.D) of the measurement scales were calculated. This study used a five-point likert scale ranging from "1" strongly disagree to

“5” strongly agree. The main goal of the study was to explore the moderating effect of Islamic value system between servant leadership and employee performance.

Table 3 below shows that the highest mean for moderating factors is Itqan and Work Solidity with 4.784 and Work Obligation with 4.645 out of a maximum 5. This is followed by Work Spirituality and Continuous Improvement at 4.631 and 4.612 respectively. Justice has the lowest mean with 4.292. Service-Oriented Morale with 4.531. While, Effort and Perseverance 4.589. This means that the respondents agreed that all variables (Itqan and Work Solidity, Work Obligation, Effort and Perseverance, Work Spirituality, Continuous Improvement, Service-Oriented Morale and Justice) are important factors for moderating effects between servant leadership and employee performance.

However, employee performance (dependent variable) has the highest mean with 4.570 out of a maximum 5. This is followed by Servant Leadership (independent variable) with 4.505. This means that the respective respondents agreed that servant leadership is essential in order to enhance employee performance. In addition, the standard deviations (S.D) for all variables range from 0.526 to 0.993, which reflects existence of considerable acceptable variability within the data set. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for all constructs.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for all constructs.

Constructs	Code	No. Items	Mean	S.D
Servant Leadership	SL	10	4.505	0.773
Employee Performance	EMP	7	4.570	0.942
Itqan and Work Solidity	IWS	12	4.784	0.536
Work Obligation	WO	8	4.645	0.526
Effort and Perseverance	EP	7	4.589	0.550
Work Spirituality	WSM	8	4.631	0.555
Continuous Improvement	CI	13	4.612	0.536
Service- Oriented Morale	SOM	4	4.531	0.650
Justice	JU	3	4.292	0.993

## 7. Recommendation and Conclusions

This attempt was to examine the relationship between servant leadership and employee performance as well as to examine the moderation effect of Islamic value system on the relationship between servant leadership and employee performance. It was also designed to provide some insights on the influencing factors in enhancing employees’ performance by including Islamic value system among Palestinian employees.

For future research, the proposed model is still in the conceptual stage which needed to be tested empirically in Palestine to provide more reliable data analysis for significant findings. In addition to that, it is strongly recommended to relate value system from Islamic perspectives to be considered for future exploration to establish other relationships to enhance employee performance.

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