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Servant Leadership from the Muslim Perspective

by
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ABSTRACT

This paper has been prepared to discuss contemporary issues in leadership, and also serves as a means of reviewing the literature in the area of Servant Leadership. Islamic leadership principles and a spiritual dimension in leadership are touched upon. The main purpose of this paper is to better understand the aforesaid leadership terms through empirical data, since most Islamic leadership theories are hardly supported by on the ground facts and realities.

This paper also modestly compares the three leadership principles from existing literature and, in the end, tests the practical issues that came into the sight of the authors from the survey results. The authors hope that this paper, to a certain extent, will be able to explore previous pioneering work that has been conducted in the field of leadership. We hope that this piece of research will stimulate specific interest in the areas of servant leadership and Islamic leadership in Muslim-minority countries in other parts of the world.

1.   INTRODUCTION

We selected the topic based on current developments with regards to spirituality in the field of organizational sciences. The topic has been receiving increased attention (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003a; and Mitroff and Denton 1999, as cited in Fry and Matherly 2006a), due to its beneficial personal outcomes, such as increased positive human health and psychological wellbeing, as well as improved employee commitment, productivity and reduced absenteeism and turnover (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003b; Fry, Vitucci, and Cedillo 2005; and Malone and Fry 2003, as cited in Fry and Matherly

2006a). In the case of the USA alone, only one in four workers in 1994 was extremely satisfied with their work, compared to 40 per cent in 1973. According to Renesch (1995), more than 40 million people in the US are seeking a more "intrinsically valued" lifestyle, and the numbers are growing (cited in Fairholm 1996). In addition, the study by Jacobson (1995), which was cited and confirmed by Fairholm (1996), further suggested that mature leaders and other workers in organizations are in quest of more than mere economic rewards on the job. They are redefining work to embrace satisfaction of their inner needs for spiritual identity and satisfaction. This is consistent with Mitroff (2003) who argues that organizations are a great human achievement, and that work is the focus of most people's lives and bound together with their souls in the quest to achieve ultimate meaning for their real selves. Therefore, today's employees who merely bring their arms and brains to work, not their souls, could consequently cause their organizations to not elicit their full creativity and potential.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Servant Leadership

There has been a growing interest in Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership theory, which advocates putting away the self-interest of leaders for the benefit of their followers (Liden et al. 2008; Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora 2008). Nonetheless, while there has been increased research in the development of conceptual models and questionnaires, little is still known about conditions that facilitate servant leadership (Yukl 2010, as cited in Freeman 2011). The literature pertaining to servant leadership is rather indeterminate, somewhat ambiguous, and mostly anecdotal (Russell and Stone 2002).

According to Greenleaf (1977), the major purpose of business should be to generate a positive impact on its employees and the community at large. The servant leader brings together service and meaning to all stakeholders. The leader should be familiar with basic spiritual values and, in serving those values, the leader serves others including colleagues, the organization, and society at large. Service, in this sense, is thus not a special case of leadership, but rather a special kind of service guided by spirituality. The framework for servant leadership consists of helping others discover their inner spirit, earning and keeping the trust of others, service over self-interest, and effective listening. The core of Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership model is based on four tenets of moral authority: (a) sacrifices, (b) inspires commitment to a worthy cause, (c) teaches others that ends and means are inseparable, and (d) introduces the world of relationships. Spears (1997), as cited in Fry (2003), stated that the best leadership is not provided by those who seek leadership roles but, instead, by those with a compelling vision and a desire to serve others first. Based on the existing literature on servant leadership, Russell and Stone (2002) classified servant leadership attributes into two types: functional attributes and accompanying attributes. These are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1:

Servant Leadership Attributes According to the Literature (Russell and Stone 2002)

Functional attributes	Accompanying attributes
1. Vision	1. Communication
2. Honesty	2. Credibility
3. Integrity	3. Competence
4. Trust	4. Stewardship
5. Service	5. Visibility
6. Modeling	6. Influence
7. Pioneering	7. Persuasion
8. Appreciation of others	8. Listening
9. Empowerment	9. Encouragement
	10. Teaching
	11. Delegation

Based on the nine functional attributes and eleven accompanying attributes in Table 1, Russell and Stone (2002) further developed what they called "working models" (as illustrated by Figure 1 and Figure 2), which are simply hypothetical constructs put forward for the purpose of generating discussion and analysis, as well as providing a basis for understanding, applying, researching and developing the servant leadership concept.

Figure 1:

Abridged Servant Leadership Model 1 (Russell and Stone 2002)
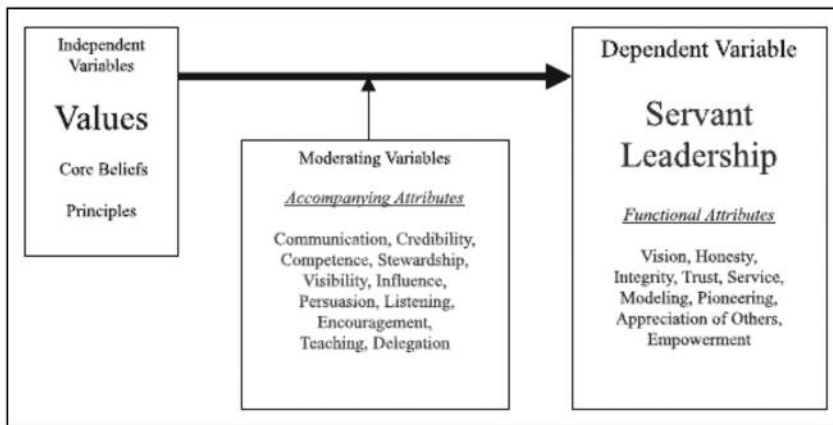
According to Russell and Stone (2002), the abridged Model 1 (Figure 1, above) covers the relationship between the value of leaders (the core beliefs that determine an individual's principles) and the manifest servant leadership (which is determined by the functional attributes of servant leaders) that are moderated by accompanying attributes (translation of values into functional attributes impacted by the accompanying attributes). Whereas, the elaborated Model 2 in Figure 2 (below), which was claimed by Russell and Stone (2002) to be a more encompassing model of servant leadership, has

included organizational performance as the subsequent dependent variable that could be affected by servant leadership (which now becomes an independent variable). In this model, organizational culture and employee attitudes become mediating or intervening variables that could influence the effectiveness of servant leadership.

As a result, this elaborated model pioneered by Greenleaf and developed by Russell and Stone (2002) has indeed provided practitioners and researchers with opportunities for the study and application of servant leadership, which was espoused by various researchers as a valid, postmodern theory of organizational leadership.

Figure 2:
Elaborated Servant Leadership Model 2 (Russell and Stone 2002)
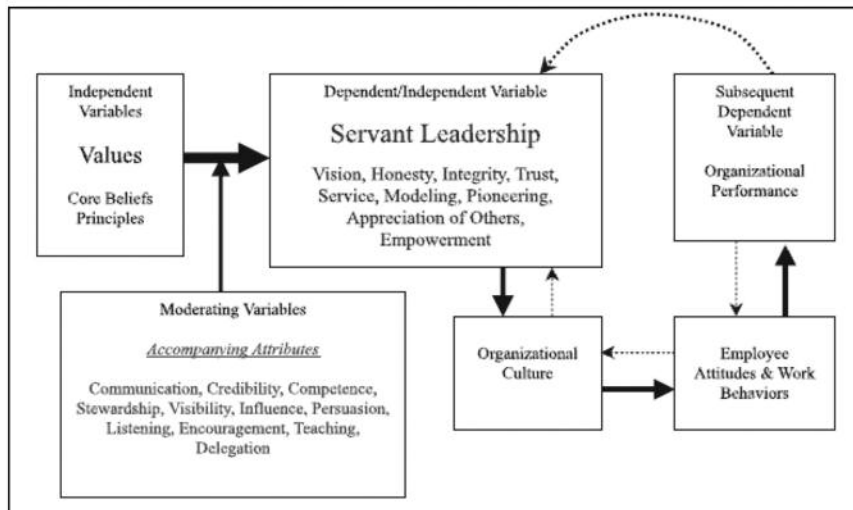
2.2 Spiritual Leadership

To date, the literature advocating workplace spiritual consciousness is growing. Management scholars have shown interest in intangible issues such as spirituality in the contexts of contemporary organization, as an integral part of the research on servant leadership in the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. Even so, studies in spiritual leadership are still lacking (Usman and Danish 2010; Aydin and Ceyland 2009). Apparently, many scholars argue on the distinction between spirituality and spiritual leadership. These words have different meanings but are interconnected with one another. Spiritual leadership is not a leadership type with spirituality injected into it. Spirituality is not a means, but is rather an attribute of the leader. Therefore, the spiritual leader need not affect others with spirituality but, instead, should move on with others in an environment of self-conscience (Blanchard 1999). Thus, spiritual leadership is not merely a type of leadership but, rather, a way of life built upon God-consciousness.

According to Fairholm (1996), a working definition of spiritual leadership must include ideas like teaching employees/followers correct principles, and the application of techniques that enable self-governance based on the internal locus of control. It (spiritual leadership) involves the creation of circumstances in which employees/ followers can function freely with the leader and within their work subject, but only to broad accountability. Fairholm (1998) stated that the very mind of the spiritual leader has shifted, and this shifted mind affects the leader and others to achieve a higher purpose together in life. Therefore, the spiritual leader may depend on the spiritual resources of his or her shifted mind while leading followers (Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin, and Kakabadse 2002) and while uniting workers towards a mission and vision (Fairholm 1998). This mental shift may also create a shift in the leader's role from being a simple manager to a spiritual guide (Konz and Ryan 1999).

Fry (2003) argued that a causal model of spiritual leadership theory (SLT) is developed within an intrinsic motivation model that integrates vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival (as illustrated by Figure 3 and Figure 4). He added that SLT requires (1) creating a vision in which members of the organization experience a sense of calling (in that their eternal life has meaning and makes a difference); and (2) establishing a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both themselves and others, thereby producing a sense of membership and belonging along with feelings of being understood and appreciated.

Figure 3:

Causal Model of Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT) (Fry 2003)

Figure 4:

Qualities of Spiritual Leadership (Fry 2003)

Qualities of spiritual leadership		
Vision	Altruistic love	Hope/faith
Broad appeal to key stakeholders	Forgiveness	Endurance
Defines the destination and journey	Kindness	Perseverance
Reflects high ideals	Integrity	Do what it takes
Encourages hope/faith	Empathy/compassion	Stretch goals
Establishes a standard of excellence	Honesty	Expectation of
	Patience	reward/victory
	Courage	
	Trust/loyalty	
	Humility	

Fry (2003) then explained spiritual leadership as comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviours that are necessary to enable self-governance and intrinsically motivate oneself and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival. This includes teaching followers correct principles and their application in real life. Fleischman (1994) and Maddock and Fulton (1998), as cited in Fry (2003), complemented the aforesaid explanation by stating that spiritual leadership taps into the fundamental needs of both leader and follower for spiritual survival through calling (a sense that one's life has meaning and makes a difference), and membership (a sense that one is understood, appreciated, and accepted unconditionally).

2.3 Islamic Leadership

Allah (the Almighty) said: *"And We made them chiefs (leaders) who guide by Our command, and We inspired in them the doing of good deeds and the right establishment of worship and the giving of alms, and they were worshippers of Us (alone)" (Qur'an 21:73).*

Apparently, from this verse of the Quran, a leader must act in accordance with Allah's law (*syari'h*); he/she has no absolute freedom to act as desired by fulfilling sensual pleasure or succumbing to the desires of any pressure group. Altalib (1991) and Chowdhury (2001), as cited in Adnan (2006), stated that leadership in Islam is a process of inspiring and coaching voluntary followers in an effort to fulfil a clear and shared vision. The ultimate objective of Islamic leadership is to act according to Islam in order to be syari'h compliant.

According to Adlouni and Sweidan (2007), leadership in Islam serves as a bridge used by leaders to influence their members' attitudes and behaviours to achieve organizational objectives (Ali 2007, as cited in Khaliq and Ogunsola 2011). The leader must be a visionary to lead an organization to success (Khaliq 2009). Kader (1973), as cited in Adnan (2006), highlighted that the focus of leadership in Islam is doing good deeds for the sake of Allah (s.w.t.), the Muslim community, and humankind. Beekun and Badawi (1998) stressed that leadership in Islam is a trust (amanah). It signifies a psychological bond between a leader and his/her followers that he/she will try his/her best to guide them, to protect them and to treat them fairly and with justice. This is supplemented by Chowdhury (2002), cited in Adnan (2006), who argued that Islamic leadership is both guardianship and service-oriented.

Adnan (2006) stated that the Islamic code of leadership, which was extracted primarily from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (the biography of the Prophet Mohammad, s.a.w., and his companions) as well as from the Islamic *syari'h*, is the point of reference for people's affairs and the construction of good and ethical leadership. Hence, the Qur'an, *Sunnah*, and Islamic jurisprudence are definitely the main sources of a comprehensive code of laws (social, moral, political, administrative, economic, civil, religious), and an ethical guide to the Islamic leaders to run Islamic organizations appropriately and effectively. This is aligned with Khaliq (2007a, b), as cited in Khaliq and Ogunsola (2011), who argued that Islamic leadership principles are derived from the doctrine of *Tawheed* (monotheism) as practiced by the Prophet (s.a.w.), which promotes a culture of

God-consciousness and justice within the organization while guarding against tyranny and oppression (Khaliq 2009). Khan (2007) also highlighted that Islamic leadership principles are primarily derived from four essential sources: the Holy Quran, the Holy Prophet (*Sirah, Sunnah and Hadith*), the Wise Caliphs and the Pious Followers. He further added that Islamic leadership principles are indeed wonderful and excellent because they were extracted from Quranic wisdom, the life of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and his sayings, the exemplary conduct of the Caliphs and the traits of the pious followers.

According to Khaliq and Ogunsola (2011), the list of Islamic leadership principles compiled by many Muslim authors is endless. Such instances include Adnan (2006), who developed the nine components of Islamic leadership principles based on a review of the literature. The nine Islamic leadership components are:

1. Leadership in Islam is rooted in belief and willing submission to Allah, the Creator of all mankind. It is centred on serving Him.

2. Leaders have to provide direction (a vision) to their organization.

3. Leaders should communicate their vision to others in ways designed to generate strong commitment needed to support the achievement of the desired goals.

4. Leaders have a major role to play in creating and maintaining the culture of their organization.

5. Leaders also have the role of sustaining the organization over the long-term.

6. Leaders should maintain unity and cooperation among followers in their organization, and the momentum of their progress.

7. Leaders should provide space for, and even invite, constructive criticism.

8. Leaders should initiate, guide, and control change in order to achieve the stated objectives.

9. Effective Islamic leaders should have some leadership qualities (conviction, justice, and trust).

Khan (1998) also discussed ten effective Islamic leadership principles practiced by the Prophet (s.a.w.), which are: to begin from the possible, to see advantage in disadvantage, to change the place of action, to make a friend out of an enemy, to turn a minus into a plus, the power of peace is stronger than the power of violence, not to be a dichotomous thinker, to bring the battle into one's own favourable field, gradualism instead of radicalism, and to be pragmatic in controversial matters.

Figure 5:
Framework for Islamic Leadership Theory (Toor 2008)
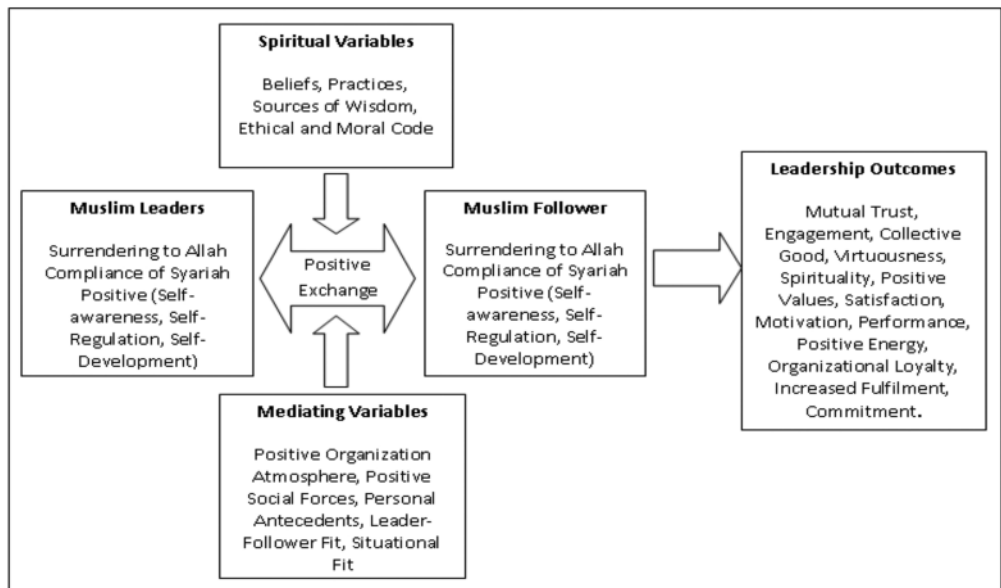
Obviously, Islamic leadership principles possess a very strong foundation (as previously discussed) and, according to Toor (2008), the world was looking at Muslim management scholars to contribute to mainstream literature. Thus, the development of the Islamic Leadership Theory by Toor (2008) was deemed the right move to put Islamic leadership in the mainstream literature. Figure 5 (above) illustrates the proposed constructs for a framework of Islamic Leadership Theory that includes several correlated variables, such as Muslim leaders and followers, spiritual variables, mediating variables, and leadership outcomes. Toor (2008) concluded that research in Islamic leadership could be developed further with regards to the constructs presented in his framework. He added that the time was appropriate for Muslim management scholars to formulate and test Islamic leadership constructs and gradually integrate them within Islamic management practices. Thus, additional studies were conducted to verify the adherence to Islamic leadership principles by Muslim administrators, and whether or not these principles were working well as an alternative to mainstream leadership theories. Thus, an empirical study was conducted in the Malaysian and Saudi Arabian environments to help in the understanding of the Muslim perspective of leadership.

3.　　EMPIRICAL STUDY ON LEADERSHIP INCLUDING SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The main objective of the study, as well as its broader research agenda, is to document some Islamic leadership principles on the ground. The study examines the leadership function adopted by some academic administrators within Islamic institutions of higher learning in Malaysia (the International Islamic University Malaysia, or IIUM for

short), and Saudi Arabia (KFUPM). The whole process is an attempt to conduct an empirical study of the important roles of leadership from an Islamic perspective.

Specifically, we have tried to come up with answers to the following questions:

1. Which Servant Leadership findings in the Malaysian experience at IIUM can be applied elsewhere in a Muslim-majority country?

2. Which leadership approach is used within the organizational structure of KFUPM, Saudi Arabia?

3. From what sources do university administrative staff at both institutions derive their use of leadership or followership principles?

3.1   Research Instruments:

The main research instrument used in our study was a questionnaire (in both Arabic and English in Saudi Arabia, and in English only in Malaysia). The design and questions used were mainly constructed to collect data about the perception of academic administrators (managers) regarding leadership principles and ways to improve management. The data enabled us to formulate the comparative research project and conduct the statistical analysis necessary to reciprocate the Malaysian experience elsewhere. This helped us to arrive at a conclusion and share results from this comparative study with the Saudi Arabian institution.

3.2   Data Collection:

We administered an Arabic (5-point scale) questionnaire, and an English (5-point scale) questionnaire. We distributed these questionnaires to the following types of administrators: directors, assistant managers, academic chairmen and other managerial position holders. The administrators were instructed to use the questionnaires to assess their superiors. We used the SPSS package, version 18.0, in the analysis of the responses.

Three hundred questionnaires were sent out to middle and first-line academic administrative staff at the academic institution in Malaysia. The selected population represented approximately 25% of the entire university administrative staff. Unfortunately, the sample size from the academic institution in Saudi Arabia was not very large due to the low number of responses received. Furthermore, although individuals receiving the questionnaires in both countries subscribed to the same faith (Islam), the socio-economic environment in Saudi Arabia is different from the Malaysian environment.

In Malaysia, about 68% of respondents were female, aged between 26 and 30 years old. The rest were male with the majority being over 30 years old. The rationale for choosing IIUM was based on the University's vision and mission statement. The

University's mission is described as Integration, Islamization, Internationalization and Comprehensive Excellence (IIICE), and reflects the Islamic orientation of the institution. Theoretically, the university employs Muslims imbued with Islamic principles and therefore represents an interesting study. Respondents were only middle and first-line administrative staff, and they were asked to assess the supervisor, team leader, coach, or other person to whom they are accountable. Most of these are academic administrators. In the case of Saudi Arabia, most respondents were male and married, with of 91.3% aged between 26 and 50 years old. The rest were single, unmarried individuals. In terms of qualifications, 82.6 % Saudis were graduates while the remaining 17.4% were diploma holders. Employee work experience at the Saudi institution ranged from 3 years to 35 years.

3.3   Findings:

One of the objectives of the study focused on the three leadership approaches. From the literature and data analysis above, it was found that, for the three leadership approaches (transformational, transactional, and servant-leadership) the results were not very clear within the institution in Saudi Arabia, as evident from Table 2 (below). However, analysing the ranking within the Saudi sample to determine which of these approaches supersede one another, we found that the administrators in the institution most often used the Transformational leadership approach. In contrast, administrators at the Malaysian institution most often used the Servant leadership approach. The mean score for each approach in both countries is shown in the table below:

Table 2:

Comparisons between Saudi and Malaysian Leadership Styles

Approach	Mean Score (Malaysia)	Mean Score (Saudi Arabia)
Transformational	20.11	23.83
	(4.02)	(4.77)
Transactional	18.06	19.96
	(3.61)	(3.99)
Servant-leadership	20.48	22.43
	(4.10)	(4.49)

We looked at the top 10 statements that achieved the highest mean, and their source. The fact that the top statements included three statements ("guide towards outstanding behaviour", "caring for subordinates" and "trust and listens to suggestions") out of many statements that relate to servant leadership is very significant. This implies that, to a certain extent in Malaysia, servant leadership is practiced by the institution's administrators and managers. Another implication from the scores is that transformational leadership, to a certain extent, complements servant leadership. This finding is in agreement with the conclusions of Beekun and Badawi (1998). Also implied from the scores is that transactional leadership is not very popular and not practiced at the institutions in either country.

In fact, if one looks at the top score for the highest item that describes transactional leadership (a mean of 3.82 for "monitors errors needing corrections"), this score does not even match the lowest score for items describing transformational leadership; it barely matches the two lowest scores for items describing servant leadership.

Table 3:
Islamic leadership principles

Principles	Mean (Malaysia)	Mean (Saudi Arabia)
Faith and belief in God	4.21	3.13
Mutual consultation	4.17	2.39
Knowledge and wisdom	4.11	2.39
Courage and determination	4.09	3.09
Endurance	4.02	2.91
Morality and piety	4.00	2.61
Express gratitude	3.91	2.39
Patience	3.88	2.65

With reference to another objective, determination of the sources from which university administrative staff derive their use of leadership or followership principles, respondents were given nine possible items to evaluate as their sources of leadership principles. Using SPSS, we calculated the statistical mean score of all responses on the eight sources.

Findings also show that the Islamic revealed sources of knowledge (Qur'an and *Hadith*) had the highest mean score of 4.00. The second highest was the influence of someone around the individual in his/her life at 3.70. School training ranked lowest with a mean score of 2.43. The employees, who depend on their qualifications, training, and experience, had equal means (3.09). In the same context, the number of respondents who believed they were born to be leaders was above average (2.96). Most of the respondents believed the source of their leadership was due to experience, because they were born to be leaders or from the influence of some person in their lives.

4.   CONCLUSION

This paper began by reviewing the relevant literature regarding spiritual leadership, servant leadership and Islamic leadership. Obviously, a substantial amount of research has been conducted in these fields of leadership. Management scholars, including Islamic scholars from all over the world, have postulated various theories pertaining to these areas. Nonetheless, the literature suggests that research related to a comparison between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia is still relatively scarce and underdeveloped.

Although research pertaining to leadership styles has been a concern for generations, the rigorous theory-based social scientific study of servant leadership as a means

for spiritual leadership, including Islamic leadership, is comparatively new. Notwithstanding its newness, all three areas of research have great potential for Muslim management scholars. Recent developments with regards to constructs and measures in these areas of research indicate that Muslim management scholars can quite promptly undertake a servant leadership study by incorporating spiritual leadership elements, including Islamic leadership aspects, into their research agendas.

From a personal viewpoint as a future research plan, the opportunity to conduct research in Islamic leadership is wide open. Although we have already conducted two studies in mainly Muslim-majority countries, studies on a similar basis have yet to be done in Muslim-minority countries.

In conclusion, this paper serves its main purpose of providing a better understanding of the issues being discussed through the review of a reasonable amount of relevant literature. This paper, to a certain extent, explores previous work done in the field of servant leadership. It modestly compares the leadership styles in the Malaysian and Saudi Arabian contexts and, in the end, responds to the issue that emerged in the author's mind. The scope for future research would be to conduct a survey in countries where Muslims are in the minority since the above two countries are Muslim-majority countries.

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