



## Islamic Leadership in Higher Education Institutions: Foundation, Traits and Principles (Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali as a Model)

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### Abstract

Leadership is the essence of an organization's success. Leadership expertise from an Islamic perspective is crucial for comprehending the organization's success, as well as the benefit of mankind in the here and hereafter. This study examined the leadership aspect in higher education institutions specifically Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), Brunei Darussalam. The researcher tries to examine the foundation, traits and principles of Islamic leadership practiced in UNISSA. The result showed that the leadership in UNISSA does apply the foundations, traits and principles of Islamic leadership in leading their followers.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Leadership, Higher Education Institutions, Leadership Principles, Leadership Traits.*

### 1. Introduction

Man was created by Allah as the caliph (leader) and therefore man can't be separated from its role as a leader who is a central role in any development effort. The role of leadership is so decisive and often becomes the size of the search for the causes of the rise and fall of an organization. In the light of the definition and nature of leadership, the actual dimensions of leadership has aspects that are very broad and is a process that involves various components in it and influence each other. (Ikhwan, 2016).

A hadith narrated by Ibnu Majah from Abdullah Ibnu Umar says that:

*"The leader is the shadow of Allah, in the face of the earth. He shelters the oppressed people of the servants of God, if it be fair then reward him, and for the people should be grateful. Conversely, when he fraudulently (dhalim) then surely it is sin for him and his people should be patient. If the leaders of the sky will not cheat its blessings. If adultery is rampant, the indigence and poverty will be rampant"*

The above hadith means that the word "shadow of Allah" hinted that the leader is the representative of Allah and must always be close to Allah. The word "people should be grateful" he said that the fair is a manifestation of gift from Allah which ought to be grateful. And that "the people should be patient" suggests that future leaders will emerge who can lead (Ikhwan, 2016).

Leadership in Islam does not imply working alone to achieve a goal. In truth, leadership is about inspiring and encouraging others to work together toward a common objective. Without leaders, the society cannot survive or operate properly. When any three Muslims go on a journey, one of them must be designated as the leader. Anarchy is the result of a lack of leadership. Leadership should strive for excellence in all endeavours. Excellence (*ihsan*) is a religious pillar (*usulud Din*) that must be manifested in whatever a Muslim undertakes. The Prophet (PBUH) advised us to strive for perfection in whatever we do (*itqan al amal*). Leadership is a science as well as an art. It's a combination of experience and knowledge. Leadership abilities are acquired rather than innate, and anybody can learn to be a successful leader. Personal characteristics separate one leader from another. For example, Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq possesses a personality that distinguishes him as a leader among men. The Prophet saw strength in Umar Ibn Al-Khattab and prayed to Allah to strengthen Islam through him (Ghusau, 2019).



On the other hand, personality and traits of leaders are crucial to leaders since they are the organization's image and represent its nature and quality. The leader is the center of power and the driving force behind the Jama'ah. In Islam, leadership is based on faith and voluntary surrender to the Creator, God. It focused on serving Him (Ghusau, 2019).

*“And We made them leaders guiding (men) by Our Command and We sent them inspiration to do good deeds to establish regular prayers and to practice regular charity; and they constantly served Us (and Us only).”*

*(Al-Anbiya, Verse: 73)*

To serve God, a Muslim leader must follow God's and His Prophet's (saw) injunctions and build a strong Islamic moral character. This moral character will be portrayed in his growing faith in God as he advances through the four stages of spiritual development: iman, Islam, taqwa, and ihsan (Ghusau, 2019). Like other organization, higher education administration is also developing. As the sector embraces a more entrepreneurial approach to how students learn, professors educate, and administrators work on campus and in their communities, innovation is having a growing influence on education. At the same time, trends in higher education indicate a number of challenges, including raising funds, meeting the needs of a diverse student population, preparing graduates for an ever-changing workforce—and, in the aftermath of COVID-19, seemingly overnight transitioning students and staff to working and learning remotely (Eastwood, 2020). Hence, this paper examines leadership in higher education institutions in Islamic perspectives focusing on the principles, foundation and traits of Islamic leadership.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University at a Glance**

In 2007, University Islam Sultan Sharif Ali or better known as UNISSA was establish as an Islamic University of international standard that offers a variety of programmes across disciplines based on Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah. It was established in the attests to the commitment of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam in upholding Islam through education in Brunei Darussalam and towards the development of ummah (Zainal, nd; Tibok & Hiew, 2019). UNISSA as the second national university strives to produce Muslim scholars and intellectuals who contribute to the development of the ummah and the nation, in support of Brunei Darussalam's efforts towards becoming a Zikir nation with continuous blessings from Allah (Zainal, nd). The Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA) specializes in Islamic-based programs such as Islamic History and Civilization, Islamic Development Management, Shariah Law, Islamic Finance, Islamic Technologies, Halal Science, Mazhab Syafie, Islamic Agriculture and Arabic Language (Tibok & Hiew, 2019).

### **Leadership in Higher Education Institutions**

Previous research shows that the field of higher education administration is growing and become more innovative, impacting education as the industry takes a more entrepreneurial approach to the way that students learn, professors teach, and administrators collaborate both on campus and in their communities. Universities are becoming significantly more business-like in their work, and so a collective commitment is needed for everyone to succeed. (Eastwood, 2020)

According to Rob Ashgar (2013), the toughest leadership job of all is the job of University leader. Middlehurst et al (1992) identified three different higher education (HE) leadership functions which were educational, academic and administrative. The first HE function is the educational leadership, which is typically carried out on an external stage. It contributes to national and international policy debates on issues on broad educational concerns. The second HE leadership function is the academic leadership, which focus on the curriculums and the co-curriculums of the institutions. The third HE leadership function is the administrative leadership which focuses to the whole institution including staffs, finance, ranges of activities and resources and its extensive plants and equipment. It also includes the motivation of the staffs, the communication with the staffs and also the internal and external factors that could affect the leadership in HE.

In another hand, Hairuddin Mohd Ali (2016) said that in order for a university to develop, management, leaders and teachers must work together to carry out a reform for university improvement (Ali, 2016). Whereas, Brewster and Railsback (2003) mentioned that there are seven (7) act that a leader should practice in order to gain trust and collaborative hands from followers, namely shows personal integrity, care, accessible, communicate effectively, practice syura in making decision, commemorate experimentation and support risk and vulnerability reduction.



The study of Transformative Change in Brunei Higher Education by Mahani Hamdan (2017), reveals that strong leadership and team commitment are keys to the successful management of transformative change in HEIs and agreements on transparency and accountability to optimize favourable outcomes for stakeholders, including students, the public, government and business.

His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam delivered his *titah* (speech) during the first meeting with the new Cabinet Ministers in 2018 at Istana Nurul Iman, warned newly sworn-in cabinet members against falling into the trap of cronyism and nepotism. He also reminded cabinet members to have the determination to meet government targets, urging them to become wise, selfless leaders who implemented beneficial policies. Leaders who hold on tight to the national value of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Muslim Monarchy) will not be susceptible to selfishness and hunger of power, he said.

*“Ministers, deputy ministers and permanent secretaries are the government’s frontlines and are entrusted to fulfill (the goal of) being and independent nation... Work with dedication and do not deviate from this goal. Serve the country, not your own personal agendas. Do not become drunk with power that you will do anything for your own self-interests above the needs and interests of the country. This must not be allowed to happen.”* His Majesty Said. (Hazair, 2018).

The *titah* (speech) above not only applicable to the frontlines of the government but also applicable to all leaders in Brunei. It explains the traits that Muslim leaders should have in leading their organization, such as honesty, aware of personal responsibility, far-sighted and goal-centered and not worldly abusive.

All of the aforementioned topics demonstrate that good leadership is one of the main elements that will have an impact on the organization's success and future course. It is important not only for an agency, but also for higher education, since they face similar difficulties to any other organisation.

### Foundation of Islamic Leadership

The basic notion of Islamic leadership is to lead in order to accomplish and compete to be better than others in order to seek the measure of Allah and happiness in the hereafter (Gazi, 2010). In Islam, leadership is based on believing in and voluntarily submitted to Allah swt. It puts serving Him first. Muslim authors have constructed an unending array of Islamic leadership ideas. It is determined by a variety of factors, including trust and believe in Allah, knowledge and wisdom, courage and resolve, mutual consultation, morality and piety, patience, expression of thanks, and perseverance. The main responsibilities of leaders are to uphold Allah's din and carry out good acts (Al-Quran 21:73). Every leader should be aware that the Holy Quran solely upholds the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet as the one and only proper manner to carry out leadership duties. The main foundation of Islamic leadership and moral basement according to Md Abu Issa Gazi are as follows (Ogunbado, 2019; Ahmad & Ogunsola, 2011)

- i. **Iman (Utmost faith in Allah):** A leader's trust in Allah, or Iman, is the root of his belief in Allah. The Prophet states the following about Iman: (It is) that you may believe in Allah, in His Angels in His Books, in His Messenger, in the Day if Resurrection, and you affirm your faith in the Devine Decree about good and bad (Sahih Muslim, Hadith -1)
- ii. **Islam (Code of Life):** Allah says in the holy Quran “Only Islam is the complete code of life”. Islam means peace and submission. Islam means the reaching of peace with Allah, to accept responsibility for himself and with the creation of God, through willing submission to Him. The Prophet states the following about Islam; Islam implies that you testify that there is no god but Allah, and you establish prayer, pay Zakat, Observe the fast of Ramadhan and perform pilgrimage to the if you are solvent enough the journey (Reported by Allah ibn Úmar Ibn Al-Khattab – Shahih Muslim).
- iii. **Taqwa (Fear of Allah):** Taqwa is the fear of Allah and the feeling of Allah’s presence. This is very important for Islamic leader. Taqwa was mentioned 257 times in the holy Quran. Taqwa is the all-encompassing, inner awareness of one’s duty toward Allah and the awareness of one’s accountability toward Allah. Allah says ‘Hiz awe and fear of Allah will lead him to be proactive, and avoid any behavior that may be outside the limits prescribed by Allah. Those who have taqwa are described as those who believe in the Quran (Al-Quran 2:2-5)”. “Taqwa restrain Muslim leaders or followers from behaving unislamically whether to community members, to customers, to suppliers, or to anybody else...(Al-Quran 16:90).



- iv. **Ihsan (Love of Allah):** Ihsan is the love of Allah. This love of Allah encourages the individual Muslim to work toward attaining Allah's pleasure. The constant feeling that Allah is watching is likely to prompt a person with Ihsan to behave at his best. In a hadith reported by Abu Huraira, Rasulullah SAW pronounces Ihsan as follows: "To worship Allah as if you see Allah and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion, then you must consider that Allah is looking at you."

### Traits of Islamic Leadership

According to Ibnu Khaldun In *Muqaddimah* as cited by Ogunbado, characteristics expected of a leader are numerous; however, few of them are mentioned as follows (Ogunbado, 2019):

1. **Ma'rifah (Knowledgeable):** A leader's first necessity is knowledge. Leaders must be well-versed in order to make autonomous decisions and avoid falling into the group of blind imitators. (Ogunbado, 2019)
2. **Probity (Sidaqat):** A leader must be truthful and trustworthy not only to himself, but also to the entire community or organization that he leads. (Ogunbado, 2019) Probity in Islam will be reflected by honesty in intention, speech and behavior. Allah Subhanahu Wa Taala said in the Quran, Surah Al-Nahl, verse 105: "Only those who do not believe in signs of God forge falsehoods; such men are liar". Imam Ali stated "The sign of faith is to tell the truth, even if it harms, and do not tell lies, even if it benefits. Never speak of anything beyond your knowledge and information. Fear Allah and never talk behind others' back." (Sadr, Mirakhor & Iqbal, 2020)
3. **Competence:** Ibn Khaldun believes that a leader must be suitably or highly qualified physically and mentally (Ogunbado 2019). The importance of competence in Islamic leadership has been emphasized by the Prophet's own words. In a hadith transmitted by Al-Hakim as cited in Ibn Taymiyyah, our Prophet(s) said: "Whosoever delegates a position to someone whereas he sees someone else is more competent (for the position), verily he has cheated Allah and His Apostle and all the Muslims" (Beekun, 2011)
4. **Physical Soundness or fitness:** According to Ibn Khaldun, a leader must be devoid of flaws or incapacitations that range from lunacy, blindness, muteness, to deafness and infirmity of any portion of the body (Ogunbado, 2019). As Allah Subhanahu Wa Taala said in the Quran (28:26) which means "Truly the best men for you to employ is the man who is strong and trustworthy." A hadith narrated by Sunan An-Nasai "A strong believer is better than the believer who is weak in physical strength" (Hoque, Mamun & Kabir, 2010). This means that physical soundness is important for a leader to be able to perform his responsibilities at his best.
5. **Mildness:** Ibn Khaldun stresses this quality several times in his *Muqaddimah* as "a must" quality of a leader (Ogunbado, 2019). Allah Subhanahu Wa Taala said in Surah Al-Imran, verse 159, which means "It is out of Allah's mercy that you 'O Prophet have been lenient with them. Had you been cruel or hard-hearted, they would have certainly abandoned you. So pardon them, ask Allah's forgiveness for them, and consult with them in conducting matters. Once you make a decision, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust in Him."

### Principles of Islamic Leadership

The Quran defines the specific status of human as twofold, one as a servant of Allah and another as His vicegerent (Mohsen, 2007). Allah says "I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve Me. (Al-Quran 51:56)". "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: I will create a vicegerent on earth (Al-Quran 2:30)". Subsequently, there are some principles were identified as related to leadership, namely consultation, competency and Taqwa and others. It is saintly because it originates its authority from Allah and its end is Allah. It is based on the Islamic creed. It is ethical because it places ethics at the core of its system and never gives priority of economic gains over values. (Gazi, 2010).

1. **Syura (Consultation):** Allah SWT has directed Rasulullah SAW to consult with his companions. Allah says: "And those who have answered the call of their lord and establish prayer and who conduct their affairs by consultation and spend out what we bestow on them for sustenance" (Al-Quran 42:38). Islam has established a method of decision-making (al-syura). Before making any decisions, Islamic leaders must confer with their followers. When major choices have been taken since the inception of Islam, a collaborative method has been used. Islam establishes a formal body of authority known as Majlis As-Syura for the mutual consultation of statecraft.
2. **Al-Adl (Justice):** Islam always urges for doing justice to all. Allah ordered "O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is informed of what ye do (AL-Quran: 7:29)".



3. **Al-Amanah (Trust):** An Islamic leader must have the public trust. A leader must enjoy this trust with highest degree of responsibility. Allah says “Lo! Allah commanded you that ye restore deposits (amanah) to their owners, and, if ye judge between mankind, that ye judge justly. Lo! Comely is this which Allah admonishes you. Lo! Allah is ever Hearer, Seer”(Al-Quran 4:58). Quran explain that Islamic system motivates every member of the organization in general and leadership in particular to be a trustworthy person.
4. **Al-Sidq (Honesty):** The leader must believe in the core Islamic beliefs, and must be reflected as a true Muslim by his words and deeds. Islamic leader’s sacred duty is to rely on Allah for the successful outcome of his works. If anyone does not believe in Islamic beliefs and ideology, he must not be considered as a leader of Muslim as Allah directly declares- “Allah will judge between you at the Day of Resurrection, and Allah will not give the disbelievers any way (of success or leadership) against the believers” (Al-Quran 4:14).

### 3. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to identify the foundation, principles and traits of Islamic leadership practiced in Higher Education Institutions (Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University).

### 4. Limitation of the Study

Leadership is a diverse field. This study is, however, limited to Islamic leadership principles, traits and foundation in Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). This study was conducted on the basis of primary data but focus only in UNISSA. Other sources of data were also collected from various related published books, Holy Quran, Hadith previously published literature, journals and different allied research study.

### 5. Methodology

A combination of revealed sources of knowledge (the Quran and Sunnah) and literature reviews were used to document Islamic leadership principles. Then, an online questionnaire-based survey was distributed among the assistant registrars and officers of faculties and centres in order to identify the Islamic principles, traits and foundation of Islamic leadership used in the university. The data was then analysed statistically by using SPSS.

### 6. Results and discussion

The researcher managed to distribute and get all feedback from 20 assistant registrars and officers in UNISSA. Among the 20 respondents, 30% of them are males, whereas 70% were female. The rationale behind choosing this sampling was based on the vision and mission statement of the university. The university’s mission was described to produce righteous and capable leaders who contribute to the development of the Ummah through academic excellence, research and community services. Whereas, the vision is to become an Islamic Higher Education Hub in Asia. Thus, the researcher considered the university to be a large employer of Muslim workers likely imbued with Islamic principles and a good example of a visible field of study. The result of the data analysis is tabulated below:

	Iman	Islam	Taqwa	Ihsan	Knowle dgeable	Probity	Compet ence	Physica l Soundn ess	Syura	Adl	Amana h	Siddq
N Valid	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
Missin g	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	6.45	6.05	5.85	5.75	5.60	5.30	5.70	5.75	5.70	5.05	5.90	5.45
Std. Deviation	.759	1.050	1.348	1.293	1.231	1.302	1.081	1.118	1.081	1.638	1.119	1.395

Table 1: Descriptive Statistic

Based on previous reviews on Islamic principle, traits and foundation on leadership literatures, the researcher developed and tested four Islamic leadership principles, four Islamic leadership traits and four Islamic leadership foundation. Malhotra and Birks (1999) stressed that reliability refers to the extent to which measurement of a particular test are repeatable. It means that the outcomes of the measurement have the consistency if used repeatedly (Malhotra N.T and Birks D.F, 1999). The value range of co-efficient is between 0 and 1. The closer the value to 1 indicate the





greater reliability. The value of Cronbach's ( ) for this survey is 0.957, which was above the traditional acceptable value of 0.70. It means that all construct has the internal consistency.

*Islamic Leadership Principles:* Respondents were asked to identify the types of leadership principles practiced by their leaders. From the analysis, it was found that all of the academic administrators practiced Islamic leadership principles in their leadership. Analyzing the degree at which these principles supersede each other, we found that academic administrators in the university apply most often *iman* in their leadership. The mean score for each approach as shown in Table 1 below is as follows: 6.45 for Iman, 6.05 for Islam, 5.85 for Taqwa and 5.75 for Ihsan.

*Islamic Leadership Traits:* This factor consists of 4 traits which were adopted from characteristics of Islamic leadership according to Ibn Khaldun. This construct tries to identify the traits or the characteristics of Islamic leadership practiced in the university. The researcher calculated the statistical mean score of all responses on the four traits. Findings revealed that the physical soundness had the highest mean score of 5.75. close to this were: competence 5.70, followed by knowledgeable 5.60 and probity 5.30. The researcher concluded that the physical soundness is the highest traits among the education administrators in the university.

*Foundations of Islamic Leadership:* The researcher calculated the statistical mean score of all response on the four Islamic leadership foundation. The result shows that the highest mean score amanah 5.90. followed by syura 5.70, siddq 5.45 and adl 5.05. From this analysis, it can be concluded that the amanah is the highest Islamic leadership foundation practiced in the university.

## 7. Conclusions

Islam is indeed a comprehensive, integrated and holistic religion that governs and interweaves with regards to all aspects of life whether it is dunya (everyday life) or akhirah (hereafter). The ultimate goal in a muslim life is to seek for Allah's pleasure. This is not an exception in leadership; leadership in Islam has been seen as one of the approaches that assists the individual in attaining happiness in both worlds. It utilize human resource properly in order to serve society in achieving happiness. Islam requires Muslim to conduct their affairs properly either as leaders or subordinates in their respective position. Some of the general ways to further improve and create an enabling internal environment for Islamic leadership development in university is by practicing the concept of syura not only among the higher management but also with the lower line employee and while recruiting employees, justice is to be adopted. Employees should be given tasks accordance to both their technical and personal qualifications. Tasks should be clearly defined so that everyone knows what their role is. The main focus of this study is to identify the traits, principles and foundation of Islamic leadership practiced in Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University. However, further study in characteristics of effective Islamic leadership will help to fully integrate our knowledge on Islam and leadership from Islamic perspectives.

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