

A Model of Imam's Leadership and Mosque Performance in Malaysia

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss three major arguments. First, mosque performance could be measured at least by using two dimensions; number of regular jamaah (congregants) of the mosque and number of religious classes organized by the mosque. Second, the association of imams' leadership and mosque performance is centralized on the issue of how imams' leadership traits influence their effective leadership behavior capacity in predicting their performance as mosque leaders. Third, the association of imams leadership traits, leadership behavior, and mosque performance could be moderated by the level of autonomy the imams' have. This study applies content analysis approach to analyze researches and theories in organizational leadership field of study as well as mosque performance. Based on the analysis conducted, this study proposes a model of imams' leadership and mosque performance association to be applied in researches concerning imams' leadership and mosque performance in Malaysia or elsewhere.

Keywords: Leadership behavior; Imams; Mosque performance

Introduction

This article aims to discuss the issue of imams' leadership in Malaysia based on the factor that the group of leaders (imams)

was recently dragged into the issue of mosque management and performance in the country (Ahmad Kamil, 1991; Mokhtar, 2003; Roslan, 2004; Azman, 2008; Wan Mohamad, 2008). As a respond to the issue, this article found there are at least two critiques brought forward by Muslim academics and government officials in Malaysia. One aspect of the critiques pointed to the issue of imams should be credited with greater responsibility and autonomy as officers or leaders of mosques in order to enable them functioning optimally (Ahmad Kamil, 1991; Mokhtar, 2003; Ahmad Zaki, 2007; Wan Mohamad, 2008). Another aspect of the critiques pointed to some important individual qualities that imams should possess in order to increase their performance (Ahmad Kamil, 1991; Hasni & Abdullah, 2004; Roslan, 2004; Abdullah, 2009; Wan Mohamad, 2008). In relation to this issue, there are at least two individual qualities that imams should possess. First, imams and other mosque officers should have leadership and management knowledge and not only religious knowledge (Hasni & Abdullah, 2004; Abdullah, 2009). Second, imams and mosque officers need also to have good and exemplary personalities that are suitable with the religious position they are holding (Ahmad Kamil, 1991; Wan Mohamad, 2008). It is also important to note that the critiques on imams' leadership and performance were mostly based on some general observations (Mahazan & Abdullah, 2011,2013; Wan Mohamad, 2008; Idris Ahmad et al., 1997) that found mosques in Malaysia, where the imams' function, are not frequently

visited by Muslims' around the institution particularly to perform congregational *solah* (prayers). Perhaps, one might argue that the critique on mosque leadership was too hasty or quickly made. This is because, there are many factors that have resulted this problem to occur, for example changes in Malaysia Muslims' style of living, working conditions, increasing number of Musallas or Suraus, and so forth.

Despite of the factors that could contribute to the problem of low rate of mosque attendance in Malaysia, this analysis, in its limited capacity, tried to explore the issue from the standpoint of leadership field of study. The subject of this study or the imams, should not be regarded as the sole contributor to the problem but, based on previous researches and analyses conducted on them (Mokhtar, 2003; Wall & Callister, 1999; Ahmad Kamil, 1991; Rogers, 1975) we could understand that imams' are important to mosque organization and Muslims' community in Malaysia or elsewhere. Hence, based on this factor, it seems to be justifiable for this article to analyze leadership of imams in Malaysia as well as its outcomes with regard to mosque performance in the country. It is expected that this study could at least produce two major contributions. First, this study could provide some information on how leadership theories and findings could be applied to increase the effectiveness of mosque leadership in Malaysia. Secondly, this study could provide some information on how the subjects or the imams' leadership practices could make us understand the phenomena of religious and community leadership further.

Review of Theories and Researches: Leadership of Imam's and Mosque Performance

The theoretical framework or model proposed by this article could be viewed in figure 1. As explained above, in general, this analysis aims to explore leadership from at least three directions. First, this analysis aims to explore the association of imams' leadership behavior and

mosque performance. Secondly, this analysis aims to explore the association of leadership traits and behavior of imams. Thirdly, this analysis also explores one situational element or imams' job autonomy as a potential moderator for the imams' leadership traits, behavior, and mosque performance association.

Imam's Leadership Behavior and Mosque Performance

Muslim scholars in Malaysia (Ahmad Kamil, 1991; Mohamad Tajuddin, 1998) stressed that performance of mosque institution could be measured from many aspects for example, number of jamaah (congregants) whom regularly visit the institution, activities organized by the mosque, financial stability, and physical appearances. Nevertheless, among all of the criteria of mosque performance, mosque attendance could be argued as the most important criteria.

It is not for the Mushrikun (polytheist, idolaters, pagans, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah), to maintain the Mosque of Allah (i.e. to pray and worship Allah therein, to look after their cleanliness and their building), while they witness against their own selves of disbelief. The works of such are in vain and in Fire shall they abide. The Mosques of Allah shall be maintained only by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day; perform As-Salat (Iqamat-as-Salat), and give Zakat and fear none but Allah. It is they who are on true guidance" (At-Taubah: 17 & 18).

And be steadfast in prayer; practise regular charity; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship) (Al-Baqarah: 43)

According to Qurtubi (d. 671h), verse 43 of Al-Baqarah above stressed that Muslims should never be in sameness with *Ahl Kitab* with respect to *solah*, where the teachings of Muhammad in relation to *solah* stress on the quality of *a'bid*, *khudu'*, and *khushu'* which carry the truly meaning of obedience or worship

toward Allah swt as the only Creator or God. Furthermore, the action of solah above should always be performed in *jama'ah* and not in isolation, except if the Muslims have valid reasons not to perform the solah in congregation for examples due to sickness and so forth. In general, the elaboration of verse 43 of Surah Al-Baqarah above is consistent with other sunni scholars for instance Al-Razi (d. 606h). Thus, referring to the above verses, the practice of performing solah in congregation at mosques should not be regarded as carrying minimal roles in helping us to measure the quality of Muslims community nowadays.

In addition to the above, in Islam it is clear to us that the ordainment of visiting mosques particularly to perform compulsory congregational prayers (solatul jamaah) is important and could be argued as so fundamental to develop piety, faith and obedience toward Islam. In another word, despite of the rewards promised by Allah swt for those who maintain their relationship with the house of Allah (mosques), there are also punishments promised by Allah (s.w.t) for those who ignore the calls of solatul jamaah or Adhan. Al-Jaziri (2003) has concluded that according to the four major sects (mazahib) in Islam, the jurisdiction of performing compulsory prayers in congregation at mosques could be concluded as sunnatun muakkadatun or "highly recommended due to the actions were rarely left by the Prophet Muhammad saw" and should never be ignored by Muslims. This indicates that even tough performing prayers individually is acceptable in Islam, stressing on adjusting once daily routine according to mosque major activities particularly solatul jamaah is a must.

Hence, based on the above discussions concerning solatul jamaah in Islam, it is not an exaggeration if, any socio-religious researches focusing on to explore Muslims' attitude toward their religion, to use mosque attendance in solatul jamaah and perhaps other activities, as a measure of Muslims' attitude toward their religion. In fact, Brenner (2011) has found that, attendance of holy places and in his case

churches is a good and validated measure of individual's religiosity. In the research, after comparing two measures of religiosity or first directly reported religious attendance and often claimed as a bias measure due to over reporters, and secondly validated-stylized religiosity measure, Brenner (2011, p. 112) concluded that "both groups find religion and their religious identity important in their lives". The same situation could be argued exist in Muslims' society and this argument should be interpreted carefully due to the theological and religious fundamental differences between Islam and Christianity. This could also be seen from one research conducted by Neyrinck et al. (2006) that found religious motivation only associated positively with engagement in specific religious behavior but not frequent attendance to churches. This somehow indicates the differences between Islam and Christianity if we refer to the Quranic verses and Ahadith concerning the ordainment of Allah and His Prophet for Muslims to perform prayers in congregation at mosque. Nonetheless, this article tries to argue the instrument used by Brenner (2011) in order to assess one's religiosity could be applied in Islamic context. This is because, as explained above, based on the Quranic verses and Ahadith of Prophet Muhammad saw, frequent attendance toward mosques is an indicator of one's piety and attachment to the religion of Islam. Even though, this argument could be said as simplistic due to the factor that we don't get specific details concerning one's religious feelings that associated with piety when a Muslim attending mosques (particularly to perform congregational prayers), the measure at least could explains the behavior of the believers based on the Quran and Ahadith of the Prophet. Nonetheless, this article suggests that the question of how frequent attendance at mosques could contribute to the development of a Muslims' piety as explained in the Quran and Ahadith to be explored further by using multiple research approaches.

Therefore, it is justifiable for scholars to argue that mosques in Malaysia as not performing

enough based on the number of Muslims' whom regularly visit mosques for congregational prayers is low (Mahazan & Abdullah, 2011, 2013; Ahmad Kamil, 1991; Mokhtar, 2003). Furthermore, based on some observations in Kuala Lumpur (Mohammad, 2008; Roslan, 2003), it is understood that mosques in the capital city of Malaysia frequently organized various religious programs and this has resulted some increase in mosque attendance. The finding could be said as consistent with Yusmini and Mohd. Anwarulhaq (2004) who concluded that Muslims' congregants of State Mosques around Peninsular Malaysia gave positive feedbacks toward religious classes organized by the mosques. This seems to indicate that, based on the researches, organizing various religious classes and other activities at mosques are important and desirable. Hence, based on the researches, it is justifiable for scholars (Abdullah, 2009; Wan Mohammad, 2008) to argue that in addition to have a strong religious personality and knowledge, imams should also capable to manage and organize various religious activities to attract more Muslims' to visit the institution frequently.

In sum, based on the arguments above (Abdullah, 2009; Wan Mohamad, 2008), this article proposes that imams in Malaysia and perhaps elsewhere should practice list of behaviors that have been found as significant for organizational leaders. Researches concerning positive influence of effective leadership behavior toward organizational performance are numerous (Yukl, 1989; 2006). Nevertheless, in addition to the influence of effective leadership behavior toward mosque performance, this article also argues that leadership behavior of imams mediate the influence of imams leadership traits or general cognitive ability, personality, religiosity, past leadership experiences, and motivation to lead toward mosque performance. This argument is based on Yukl (1989; 2006) as well as Zaccaro et al. (2004) concerning traits of leaders could only influence leadership outcomes through the function of leadership behavior.

Leadership Traits and Leadership behavior

Some leadership scholars insisted that the study of leadership should not be separated from the study of leaders' characteristics (Zaccaro et al., 2004; Zaccaro, 2007). Even though, leader traits perspectives were once regarded as insufficient to explain the phenomena of effective leadership due to pessimistic review of Stogdil (1948) and Mann (1959), Zaccaro et al. (2004) stressed that the issue should not be dragged to the demise of leadership traits research. This is due to the reason that leadership traits scholars (Zaccaro et al., 2004; House & Aditya, 1997; Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991) found that leadership traits findings are still relevant to provide us with information concerning effective leadership if the traits researches are integrated with other significant leadership variables for example leadership performance and situations. The idea is consistent with Yukl (1989; 2006). Furthermore, House and Aditya (1997) as well as Zaccaro et al. (2004) have summarized list of leaders' traits that have been found as significant in most of the previous leadership researches. Based on the summaries provided by the scholars (Zaccaro et al., 2004; House & Aditya, 1997), recent researches conducted in the field of leadership traits, as well as arguments concerning suitable traits of imams (Wan Mohamad, 2008; Mokhtar, 2003; Ahmad Kamil 1991), this research highlighted several leadership traits that imams in Malaysia should possess. The leadership traits are, *General Cognitive Ability, Personality, Religiosity, Motivation to Lead, and Past Leadership Experiences*.

General Cognitive Ability and Leadership Behavior

Leadership researchers have found various cognitive constructs are possible to influence leadership performance (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007). In general, there are three common areas of cognitive ability that have been found as important antecedents of leadership. The three areas of cognitive

ability are: (1) general cognitive ability; (2) creative reasoning abilities; (3) complex problem-solving skills (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004; Zaccaro, 2007). In addition to the above, another aspect of cognitive ability that has been found as significant to predict leadership, particularly leadership self-efficacy and goal orientation, is analytical ability (Chan, 1999). Moreover, in another research, creativity has been found correlated significantly with innovative leadership (Makri & Scandura, 2010). One aspect of cognitive ability that should be focused is general cognitive ability. General cognitive ability was found as one of the predictors of leadership in some previous researches (Bedell-Avers et al., 2008; Connelly et al., 2000; Zaccaro, 2001). Even though scholars have stated general intelligence and cognitive variables consistently predict leadership (Zaccaro et al., 2004; Zaccaro, 2007), there were some researches that found cognitive variables have only minimal to moderate influence toward leadership (Connelly et al., 2000; Kickul & Neuman, 2000; Marshall et al., 2000). In addition, there were also some researches that found other individual qualities for example leadership skills, personality, and motivation influenced leadership more than cognitive variables (Chan, 1999; Connelly et al., 2000; Chan & Drasgow, 2001). This seems to indicate the influence of cognitive variables toward leadership is inconsistent and inconclusive. Nonetheless, based on the reviews made by scholars (House & Aditya, 1997; Zaccaro et al., 2004), this article concludes that cognitive variable stand as one of the predictors of imams' leadership. The hypothesis is supported by Rogers (1975) who found that imams should have sufficient education. The finding could be said as consistent with some critiques (Wan Mohamad, 2008; Abdullah, 2009). Moreover, Chan (1999) argued that level of education could be used as a measure of individuals' general cognitive concern.

Personality and Leadership Behavior

In the theory of five factor model (FFM) of

personality or the big five (Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1987; 1991), personality consists of five broad and complex categories of human traits. The five categories of traits are (1) Neuroticism (or Emotional Stability); (2) Extraversion; (3) Openness to experience; (4) Agreeableness; (5) Conscientiousness (Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1987; 1991). Generally, leadership researchers found that the dimensions of Five-Factor Model of Personality or FFM (Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1987; 1991) have significance influenced toward leadership behavior (Zaccaro, 2007). Based on this factor, personality has been one of the most common factors that are used by researchers to measure leadership (Hogan et al., 1994; Bono & Judge, 2004). There are some reasons for the adoption of personality scale in leadership studies. First, behavior is a function of personality (Hogan et al., 1994; Mount & Barrick, 1998). Second, personality has a trait-like nature, which means personality is consistent across adulthood and has longitudinal predictive power (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009). Third, along the history line of leadership research, personality has never been neglected by researchers. In fact, the earlier studies of leadership concentrated on the relationship between traits and leadership (Yukl, 1989; 2006; Zaccaro et al., 2004). These three points suggest that personality should not be neglected by leadership researchers. This could be viewed from numerous researches that investigated the association of personality and leadership. This has made this analysis to select the imams' personality as one of the variable that could predict their leadership behavior. The argument could be said as consistent with Wan Mohamad (2008) who argued that imams in Malaysia should concern with their personality.

Religiosity and Leadership Behavior

As argued by some researchers and scholars (Rogers, 1975; Hasni & Abdullah, 2004; Roslan, 2004; Wan Mohamad, 2008; Abdullah, 2009), imams in Malaysia should be religious. This argument is consistent with the general

expectation of the Muslim population in Malaysia who regard their imams as the community religious leaders (Rogers, 1975; Wall & Callister, 1999). Moreover, religiosity has been found as a significance predictor of leadership behavior in Christian religious organizations (Shee et al., 2002; Bird et al., 2004; Miles & Naumann, 2007). In addition to the researches, Jouili and Amir-Moazami (2006) found that religious educational practices have resulted Muslim women in France and Germany to be empowered with religious leadership responsibility. Thus, based on the researches, this article hypothesized Islamic religiosity dimensions have some influences toward imams' leadership behavior. Furthermore, this study aimed to increase our understanding on the influence of religiosity toward leadership behavior. This is based on the reason that this study investigated the influence of religiosity together with other leadership traits (general cognitive ability, personality, past leadership experiences, and MTL) toward leadership behavior of imams. Previous researches (Shee et al., 2002; Bird et al., 2004; Jouili & Amir-Moazami, 2006; Miles & Naumann, 2007) investigated only the bivariate relationship of religiosity and leadership without including some other predictors.

Past Leadership Experiences and Leadership Behavior

Specific kind of leader experiences was found to be related with various indices of leader performance (Ligon et al., 2008). One recent research that investigated the relationship of past leadership experiences as a mediating antecedent for leadership behavior is Iddekinge et al. (2009). In relation to past leadership experiences, Iddekinge et al. (2009) found leadership experiences significantly predicted knowledge, skills, and abilities of leaders (KSAs) in predicting leadership performance. Earlier than Iddekinge et al. (2009), Chan (1999) found past leadership experiences and leadership self-efficacy mediated the association of distal antecedents (general cognitive

ability, personality, and values) with MTL in predicting leadership potential. The same was also found by Chan and Drasgow (2001) in their leadership behavior research. Thus, based on these researches, we could see that past leadership experiences had been found as more proximal toward leadership potential and leadership behavior. Therefore, in sum, based on the previous researches this study hypothesized past leadership experiences work as a proxy to the association of distal traits (general cognitive ability, personality, and religiosity) with leadership behavior. In relation to another distal variable or religiosity, even though there was no research investigated the association of religiosity and past leadership experiences in predicting leadership behavior, we could see religiosity stands as one of the distal trait variables based on the strong association of religiosity and personality found in previous researches (Azimi et al., 2007; Ho Ji & Ibrahim, 2007; Krauss et al., 2007). Furthermore, religiosity could be grouped under the category of leadership value, which is one of leaders' distal traits as theorized by leadership scholars (Zaccaro et al., 2004; Yukl, 2006).

Motivation to Lead (MTL) and Leadership Behavior

Rogers (1975) found that imams in Malaysia should have some motivation to function as religious leaders. This article sees that a specific leadership motivation concept called the motivation to lead or MTL (Chan, 1999; Chan & Drasgow, 2001) could be used to explore imams' leadership motivation. Chan and Drasgow (2001, p.481) stated, "various non-cognitive ability constructs such as personality and values relate to leader behaviors through the individual's motivation to lead (MTL), which in turns affects the individual's participation in leadership roles and activities" (p.2). Based on the definition, we could see Chan (1999) and Chan and Drasgow (2001) posited MTL is an antecedent of leadership behavior and also function as the mediator for leadership traits and leadership behavior

relationship. This is the reason of why this article hypothesized MTL as a mediator for the influence of leadership traits toward leadership behavior. Furthermore, other scholars (House & Aditya, 1997; Zaccaro et al., 2004; Barrick & Mount, 2005; Yukl, 2006) also argued the same. They argued motivational constructs normally function as mediator for traits and leadership or organizational performance relationship. Therefore, based on previous researches that generally found MTL has direct positive effects to leadership variables above and beyond other predictors of leadership (Chan, 1999; Chan & Drasgow, 2001), this article hypothesized MTL as a mediator to the association of personality and leadership behavior. Furthermore, based on Hendricks and Payne (2007) whom found slightly inconsistent result with other researches (Chan 1999; Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Sanchez, 2003; Amit et al., 2007) it is suggested that MTL should be further investigated.

Job Autonomy, Leadership Traits, Leadership Behavior, and Mosque Performance

There were scholars and government officials argued that imams in Malaysia should be given with higher autonomy (Ahmad Kamil, 1991; Wan Mohamad, 2008). According to most leadership and organization scholars, situational variables function as moderator in organizational behavior as well as organizational leadership researches (Weiss & Adler, 1990; Antonakis, et al., 2004). Based on the understanding, this article argues that high and low job autonomous situation could moderate the association of leadership traits, leadership behavior of those imams, and mosque performance. Furthermore, this article also argues that high and low job autonomy of imams might influence their performance particularly in the aspect of program organization and thus could affect the rate of mosque attendance in Malaysia. This argument is consistent with the theory of Path-Goal Leadership (Evans, 1970; 1974; House, 1971; 1996; House & Mitchell, 1974) and the theory that explains phenomenon of job autonomy affecting personnel and work

outcomes by Turner and Lawrence (1965) and Hackman and Lawler (1971) (as cited in Hackman & Oldham, 1975). This is because, in one hand, the theory of Path-Goal Leadership explains two aspects of moderating variables that influence leadership processes are nature of tasks and nature of followers (Yukl, 2006) and job autonomy could be included in the category of nature of tasks of leaders. On the other hand, the theory explained by Turner and Lawrence (1965) and Hackman and Lawler (1971) (as cited in Hackman & Oldham, 1975) detailed job autonomy could influence one of the three critical psychological states, or experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work. The other two critical psychological states for workers are experienced meaningfulness of the work and knowledge of the actual results of the work activities. In general, these three critical psychological states could affect individual's personal and work outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Based on these two theories, the inclusion of job autonomy as a moderating variable for the imams' leadership traits and behavior association as well as the imams' leadership behavior and mosque performance association should be justified.

Based on the above analysis on related theories and researches, this article argues that a model of Imams' Leadership and Mosque Performance could be introduced. Figure 1 summarizes the details of the model further.

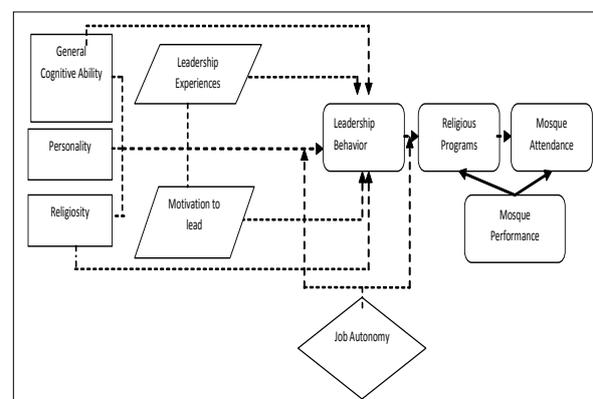


Figure 1: A Model of Imams' Leadership and Mosque Performance in Malaysia

Conclusion

In general, this article argues that the issue of mosque performance in Malaysia should also be investigated from the standpoint of organizational leadership theories and practices. The model displayed in figure 1 above suggests that there is a direct influence of imams', as mosque leaders, toward the performance of mosque. Nonetheless, in order to ensure the association of imams' leadership and mosque performance could be better grasped and operationalized, this article proposes that the traits of imams' function as the most fundamental elements to enable the imams perform as effective mosque leaders. Specifically, figure 1 stated that the leadership traits of imams could influence the performance of mosque through their leadership behaviors. Moreover, based on the understanding that situation and leadership outcomes are associated, the model argues that some situational variables and in this article, job autonomy, could be a significant moderator for the imams' leadership traits, behavior, and mosque performance association. In sum, it is expected from this analysis, the issue of mosque performance and imams' leadership could be understood further by bringing the issue to be investigated empirically from various perspectives and in this article from organizational leadership standpoint.

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