

Effective Leadership Practices of Muslim Women Academic Leaders

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Abstract: Newer research on women in leadership indicated a growing trend of women to assume leadership position worldwide and the substantial progress achieved by women in assuming and holding a leadership role. This study explores the leadership practices of Muslim women academic leaders by using a qualitative approach. The study outlined in this study investigates this phenomenon through using in-depth-interviews to identify leadership practices. Participants are Muslim women academic leaders in University Putra Malaysia in Malaysia and King Abdul-Aziz University in Saudi Arabia who are holding leadership position. The researchers identified similarities and differences in practices and competencies between two cases. The findings of this study highlight in a set of the practices of which Muslim women leaders perform in leadership position. These findings broaden acceptance for a wider repertoire of these leadership practices by successful Muslim women leaders and how these practices can be optimally used for the benefit of academic departments. Moreover, some implications and recommendations for further studies were discussed.

Key words: Leadership, academic leader, Saudi and Malaysian women leaders, practice, competences

INTRODUCTION

The most significant function of an institution of higher education relies on its leadership effectiveness in creating a pleasant teaching environment for faculty and providing students with the quality of education they deserve (Al-Shuaiby, 2009). Leading universities may present a unique challenge because of the organizational complexity of the university, its multiple goals and its traditional values. The nature of leadership in higher education is ambiguous and contested (Nejati, 2010). Creating results in today's ever changing and increasingly competitive world require a very different kind of leadership from what was studied in the past (Sandbakken, 2005). In today's globalized world, leaders need to know new abilities, skills and knowledge to effectively cope with the organizational changes. In addition, working in flexible contexts and connected by real-time electronic communication, increasingly mobile employees have themselves become the critical resource of their organizations (Graetz, 2000). According to Shahmandi *et al.* (2011), leaders in an institution of higher learning IHL should improve their leadership competencies to enable their colleges and universities to survive and continually develop. These competencies include persuasive skills, leadership skills and professional skills.

In recent years, the amount of literature on women's leadership has increased; however few studies explore

leadership practices of Muslim women in academia. Most of the scholarly work on leadership both inside and outside the academy was conducted by men and focused on male leaders. As a result, male behaviors and characteristics in leadership roles have been the standard against which women leaders are assessed (Wolverton *et al.*, 2009). Male-centric leadership models and norms have served to limit women's aspirations regarding leadership as well as their access to leadership roles. The underrepresentation of women in academic administration suggests that masculine practices and leadership norms function to exclude women (Dunn *et al.*, 2014). Other researchers have determined that general leadership practices for success can be applied to either sex, yet others advance that women possess additional or a unique set of practices (Petersen and Short, 2001). Women possess great potential to be transformative leaders in the academy at a time when their talents are much needed (Dunn *et al.*, 2014). Women leadership is characterized by interpersonal skills and strong communication; professionalism and integrity; information and power-sharing; servant leadership; participatory androgynous, collaborative and transformational leadership styles (Zulu, 2011).

The underrepresentation of Muslim women in senior leadership positions in academe, is problematic, in that it results in the waste of leadership talent at a time when higher education faces serious challenges that will be met only with strong, effective leadership. Hence, the purpose

of this study is to investigate the effective practices of Muslim women leadership in higher education in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia and discuss what is being done at the higher education level to measure effectiveness of Muslim women leaders in leadership positions. Knowledge of Muslim women leaders may increase their opportunities to be effective leaders if they identify the leadership practices they use.

Literature review

Theoretical perspectives: Some researchers have studied leadership from an individual perspective in relation to the leaders' traits, characteristics or styles. Others have focused on the situation or the context of leadership and leaders' behaviors within such contexts. Some studies have investigated leadership concerning organizations and others have looked at leadership from the followers' perspective (Day and Antonakis, 2012). When this was proposed in the 1800s, one of the first proposed leadership theories was the great man theory (Denmark, 1993). This theory focused on the personal traits of a leader. It suggests that leadership is an innate ability; which is inborn not learned, wherein a man has outstanding remarkable qualities that distinguish him from his followers (Denmark, 1993). This theory did not pay attention to female leaders. Research based on this theory merely investigated male leaders and their characteristics, proposing that only men had what it took to be successful leaders (Jogulu and Wood, 2006).

At some point, researchers shifted their emphasis from the traits and characteristics of leaders to the behavior of leaders for an effective leadership. Jogulu and Wood (2006) discussed the four main behavior theories of the 20th century. The first behavioral study proposed three dimensions: autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire styles of leadership (Lewin and Lippitt, 1938). The second behavioral theory was proposed by Ohio State researchers (Kerr *et al.*, 1974). The Ohio State researchers divided leadership into two dimensions: consideration and initiating structure. Kerr *et al.* (1974) described this behavior theory in the sense that leaders needed to be considered of the opinions and feelings of their followers. The third research study was conducted by Kahn and Katz (1953). They were part of researchers at the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan who conducted research related to leadership and organizational behavior through field studies, experiments and surveys. Kahn and Katz (1953) described two dimensions of behavioral leadership. The first dimension was production-oriented where leaders focused on the production processes through their organization and coordination of their groups' tasks. The second dimension was employee-oriented, where leaders built

supportive personal relationships with their employees to motivate their productivity. They found that employee-oriented leadership led to better results of work motivation, productivity and satisfaction by employees than production-oriented leadership.

Another leadership theory presented during the 1960s was the contingency model (Ayman and Adams, 2012). According to this model, the performance of the group or followers was contingent on and an outcome of the interaction between the traits and styles of the leaders and the context or its situation (Fiedler, 1971). Fiedler's contingency model of leadership effectiveness emphasizes three salient leadership characteristics: leader-member relations, task structure and position power. Some other versions of this model which were proposed, related to the leader's actions to the outcome, e.g., normative decision-making, situational leadership and path-goal (Ayman and Adams, 2012). Ayman and Adams (2012) suggested two types of contingencies in terms of the context of the leadership process. The first type is related to intrapersonal contingencies, the leader's behavior, gender and values. The second type of contingencies is related to interpersonal contingencies, wherein the leader's effectiveness depended on the interaction at the group level within the situation. Situational leadership recognizes that the effective leader must be flexible and can adjust their styles as followers and situations change over time in the work environment and the group members are the most important factor (Mwai, 2011).

Also, there is no doubt that people, in general, can become leaders. People can learn leadership skills; this is the Transformational Leadership Theory. Transformational leadership which is one of the most modern and most successful styles of leading is the style in which the leader plays the role model, he inspires his followers and challenges them to be more involved in their research (Popa, 2012). Transformational leaders can change an employee from a worker who carries out tasks into a valuable team member. Thus, they can modify the way employees think and feel by creating an ownership mindset (Ibid.). Pounder (2001) found that the styles of leadership that reflect a combination of transactional and transformational dimensions may be most effective in providing a university with the flexibility it needs to make subsequent changes.

Leadership competences: Over the past 10 year, research in leadership development has moved towards identifying the leadership competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors) of individuals (Spendlove, 2007). Competencies have become the building blocks of

leadership selection and development processes (Horey and Fallesen, 2003). In addition, Bartram and Roe (2005) define competences as a set of behaviors that are instrumental in the delivery of desired results or outcomes. Jokinen (2005) defines competencies as personal traits, behaviors, skills, values, knowledge and many other existing frameworks.

Most leaders and those responsible for management development and learning, accept that competencies comprise a mixture of the following three elements: the skills and abilities we practice as leader in our everyday actions, knowledge and experience. Understanding that informs the decision-making, personal qualities, values or attitudes we espouse (Wilson *et al.*, 2006). A competency is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual's knowledge of the language, practical skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating (Rycken and Salganik, 2005).

The purpose in establishing competencies for leaders should be better define what functions leaders must perform to make themselves and others in their organizations effectiveness (Newsome *et al.*, 2003). Leaders need a wide range of competencies in order to face the complex challenges of today's world. For effective leadership, competency models are not a prescription but represent an attempt to capture the experience, lessons learned and knowledge of seasoned leaders to provide a guiding framework for the benefit of others and the organization (Spendlove, 2007).

A focus on leadership competencies and skill development promotes better leadership. However, skills needed for a particular position may change depending on the specific leadership level in the organization. By using a competency approach organizations can determine what positions at which levels require specific competencies (Prasanth and Solomon, 2013). Researchers (Berke *et al.*, 2008) at the Creative Center for Leadership (hence forth CCL) have identified some essential leadership competencies that are consistent among organizations. These competencies were identified through multiple research projects aimed at understanding effective leadership (Mohamad and Silong, 2010). CCL proposed the use of leadership competency models based on data that are searched and validated. Examples of these validated competencies are drawn from studies by CCL and Silong *et al.* (2008).

The CCL wheel described 20 competencies derived from thousands of responses from leaders in all organizations. These are related to three major

competency areas of "Leading Others", "Leading the Organizations" and "Leading Yourself". Each cluster of competencies is described by certain domains and specific competencies. Silong *et al.* (2008) identified 15 core competencies of public sector leadership in Malaysia. These are competencies related to communication, teamwork, problem-solving, relational skills, conflict resolution, project management, public relations, interpersonal skills, professionalism, visioning process and strategic thinking, leadership, training and coaching, technical skills, research skills and change management. Leaders who have higher competencies in these areas are likely to be more effective.

Women leaders in Islamic perspective: Today across the Islamic world, women's rights are one of the most contentious political and ideological issues facing many governments along with economic needs, political rage and social despair (Galloway, 2014). Islam recognizes a complete equality between men and women regarding their intellectual, physical potentials and spiritual aspects:

"O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in whom ye claim (your rights) of one another and toward the wombs (that bare you). Lo! Allah hath been a watcher over you"

Investigation of the teachings of Islam into the history of the Islamic civilization will surely find a clear evidence of woman's equality with man in what we call today "political rights". Badawi (1995) has extrapolated that the obstacles in the path of Muslim female leadership are "cultural practices", not Islam. Furthermore, Badawi has asserted that, even though it may be hard to do so in an Islamic way, there is actually no proof in the Holy Qur'an that prohibits Muslim women from assuming leadership roles. Muslim women enjoyed the freedom of movement and participated in many spheres of social life. They cooperated with men in both military and civil life. The freedom enabled women to develop their latent faculties (Abdulraheem, 2009). The social institutions and environment enabled them to make full use of their potentialities. That is why women excelled in the field of war, literature oratory, public administration, music, theology (Kalam), jurisprudence (Fiqh), Hadith studies (Ilm ul Hadith), mysticism (Tasawwuf), poetry, etc., (Elius, 2012).

In education, the Islamic religion encourages the education of women and girls and this remains true today in many Muslim and non-Muslim countries. The Holy

Qur'an and Hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH: Peace Be Upon Him) both obligate Muslim men and women to acquire knowledge and education. The Holy Qur'an says, "Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants, who have knowledge" (35:28), in addition, the Prophet's Hadiths (PBUH) repeatedly emphasizes the acquirement of education and knowledge for every Muslim male and female. For example, the Hadith states: "Seeking knowledge is a duty of every Muslim, man or woman" (Hadith 224, Sunan Ibn Majah) and "Seek knowledge from the cradle to grave" (Galloway, 2014). The examples in Islamic history adequate for women who have left their mark in the field of education, for instance, Ayesha (R), the wife of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was a lady of profound erudition. Many Sahaba (companions of the Prophet (PBUH)) and Tabeayen (direct followers of the Sahaba) used to come to her for learning Islamic law, theology and Hadith. Moreover, Zainab (R), the daughter of Ali (K), was a great Islamic scholar of theology (Elius, 2012). Education is the tool that will enable women in Islamic majority societies to become good mothers for the future and active members in society (Moghadam and Roudi-Fahimi, 2005).

In leadership position, women have access to reach at the highest leadership position in the society. Women have potential talents and can bring up a change and achieve such an excellent position that Holy Qur'an approves that by introducing some historical examples such as the most manifest example of women's in leadership refers to Bilqis Queen of, who Holy Qur'an explains its tale precisely. (Naml: 22-24). This woman who, was a powerful Queen, ruled the country and she had a great land and a lot of facilities, armies, politicians and captains who settle in the palace court or their military power (Bakhtyar and Rezaei, 2012). In addition, the Prophet (PBUH) consulted the women for example, in AL-Hudaibiyah Treaty, he consulted his wife Umm Salama and made an important decision. The Holy Qur'an also stresses the need for vanguards and leadership (whether male or female) for the furtherance of the Islamic movement and the unity of the large society:

"And hold fast, all of you together, to the cable of Allah and do not separate. And remember Allah's favour unto you: how ye were enemies and He made friendship between your hearts so that ye became as brothers by His grace and (how) ye were upon the brink of an abyss of fire and He did save you from it. Thus Allah maketh clear His revelations unto you, that haply ye may be guided, and there may spring from you a nation who invite to goodness and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency. Such are they

who are successful. And be ye not as those who separated and disputed after the clear proofs had come unto them. For such there is an awful doom"(Abdulraheem, 2009)

Women's leadership attributes: The quality of leadership directly affects the health and success of every organization. Leaders often have the intelligence, experience and interpersonal skills required to successfully lead an organization, but it is the understanding of how to apply that knowledge which defines competence. Azmi *et al.* (2014) indicate the factors that contribute to their career success were experience, education, seniority, interpersonal skills, ability in tackling superiors, commitment and dedication, support from superiors, colleagues and family and leadership styles. Leadership in a higher education involves promoting effective communication and trust, listening, open processes, creating interdisciplinary and self-directed teams (Madden, 2002).

Shahtalebia, Yarmohammadian and Ajamic (2011) call some factors for improving women like stabling, being social, much effort for accessing wills, supportive family, supportive husband, having friendly relationships with subgroups and colleagues, having cooperation, management and in some cases having demanding management life. Coleman's (2003) view of women's ability to "bring strengths to leadership and management, which may be particularly appropriate to effective educational leadership today" is applicable to women in leadership at all levels of education. Women are more willing to dialogue than men in the same circumstance. A woman considers that the communication and dialogue are essential to managing work and women more open to talk about their feelings, convictions and willingness to reach at the solutions of problems by dialogue. For example, Queen of Sheba did not choose war but began negotiations by sending a gift (Al-Baz, 2011).

Recent studies indicate a set of attributes that women can take advantage of them to practice leadership in the appropriate atmosphere such as participation, empathy, creativity, understanding the needs of women, the mandate and to give the authority as well as consideration, contact and relationships with others (Suwaidan and Bashrahil, 2003). Whereas AL-Baz (2011) explained that these qualities do not exist fully in one woman, women might possess the ability to participate and delegation of authority but she does not have other qualities. Hence, women should believe in themselves and their capabilities; and to develop the skills that Allah gave them or that acquired through life to be able to continue their way towards leading and harness all the difficulties that they may face. Quantitative and qualitative studies

have shown that women in top corporate positions have both redefined the rules of business and leadership and have demonstrated the following characteristics: self-confidence, emotional intelligence and an instinct to maximize change for overall benefit (Chandler, 2011).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sample of this study was comprised of 10 Muslim women, head of department and vice dean from University Putra Malaysia (UPM) in Malaysia and King Abdul-Aziz university (KAU) in Saudi Arabia. Four women leaders had experienced in different leadership position in higher education from 3-7 year and with an average of 10- 30 years as academics. All participants but four (had experience) were active in their positions at the time of the interview. A semi-structured interview was used to guide which included questions focusing on significant episodes of personal and professional experiences. The hour-long interviews were recorded and I personally transcribed the audio recordings. In addition, handwritten notes were taken to interviewers. To ensure participant anonymity, each participant selected a pseudonym.

The data of Muslim women leadership practices were coded for themes regarding leadership competencies using the process outlined by Creswell (2007). First, the researchers created a classification system by coding the interview transcripts with labels that corresponded to themes. Then, they performed a logical analysis across the themes to explore their interconnections which allowed them to generate new insights to organize the data. These are logical processes in which potential categories are created by crossing each theme with each of the others (Patton, 2002). Lastly, the researchers performed an interpretative analysis to more fully

understand the meanings in the data. Interpretation goes beyond descriptive data by attaching significance to what were found, finding meanings, offering explanations and drawing conclusions.

To ensure accuracy and transparency throughout the process of data analysis, the researchers sent both transcripts and preliminary findings to participants for their feedback. After reviewing transcripts, a few participants shared additional feedback and clarifications with me which were added to transcripts used for analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The leadership practices of Muslim women leaders outlined in this section were established from analysis of the emergent themes in the data. Participants discussed with the researchers their successes, skills and ultimately, the experiences that they gained in the process of their current leadership practices: developing academic networking skills, continuous improvement orientation, leadership competences and leadership styles. Each theme contains sub-theme. These views are illustrated in Fig. 1.

Academic leadership networking skills

Communicating effectively: Leadership communication uses the full range of communication skills and resources to overcome interferences, deliver and create messages. These messages guide, inspire, direct or motivate others to action (Barrett, 2006). All of the participants agreed that effective communication skills undoubtedly top the list of most important leadership practices. The participants expressed that their ability to communicate with their staffs, students, colleagues and senior was in a large part due to how they made themselves accessible. This could

Academic Leadership Networking skills	Changing & Development	Leadership competencies	Leadership style	Traits & ethics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating effectively • Developing and Maintaining Relationships • Enhancing Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the organization. • Development of the Individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence & Persuasion • Solving Problem • Decision Making • Building up Teamwork • Increasing the Capacity to Knowledge. • Professionalism skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible and adaptive • Participative 	

Fig. 1: Leadership practices of muslim women academic leaders

be done by being able to listen actively and elicit information and using several ways to communicate whether written by using technology or personal meeting communication. Nai described the way that she used to communicate with others:

“I used all the ways of technology whether was a telephone or WhatsApp. if someone contact me, I go back and contact him again. In the past, we did not have such technologies we use nowadays but we did use home visits to know his/her problems and trying to help them all the ways of communication”

Listening is a skill that underlies all leadership skills. It is the key to developing and maintaining relationships, decision making and problem solving (Rynders, 1999). Sit explain that leaders must have listening skill by using the techniques of clarification to understand the situation and avoid any confusion:

“For me, a good leader must have a good listening skill. When said a good listening skill means you listen when you have supposed to do when you listen you understand the situation and avoid any confusion”

Developing and maintaining relationships: Women are more willing to dialogue than men in the same circumstances, they consider that the communication and dialogue are essential to manage work and women are more open to talk about their feelings and convictions (Al-Baz, 2011). All of these Muslim women cited developing and maintaining relationships as a key component of their leadership. They described how they build and maintain a good relationship in workplace environments with their followers and other persons through mutual respect, mutual understanding, mutual help, care, guidance, accept criticism, encourages, listen to them and dialogue. Abe, a Saudi woman leader, explained the significance of relationship in her position and how she gained a good relationship:

“Leader requires to have a good relationship and to be effective more than to sit on a chair. She/he has to participate in activities when someone asks her/him to participate, don't refuse. Also a leader should go outside the office in order to be close to the people, know their problems, listen to them, dialogue with them, not to sit in the office just to finish the papers in hand. Leaders must find something useful to offer to the surrounding society and at the same time gain the experiences and develop themselves”

Enhancing trust: In this study, Sonnenberg (1994) posited that when confidence is high in an organization, morale and performance are higher, turnover is lower, information is shared more freely, innovative ideas are more frequent and criticism is accepted more freely without retaliation. Sonnenberg cautioned, though that trust does not come about easily. Trust must be “nurtured, sought and reinforced”. Two Malaysian participants pointed to the importance of trust for the leader. They said that confidence can only be on how leaders act and how leaders perform, then others trust and follow them. Wan said:

“You know why people will follow you, if they can trust you, understand 'trust', they have confidence in you. So, as a Muslim and non-Muslim people as long as you be yourself and put yourself in the right path and people see what you do every day, what you say everyday according to the path. Then, people start trusting you. You cannot say please trust me, I cannot trust you but people will say I can trust her, the way I see her, the way she acts”

Leadership competencies: According to Silong *et al.*, (2008), leaders who have higher competencies such as teamwork, problem-solving, relational skills, conflict resolution, project management, public relations, interpersonal skills, professionalism, visioning process and strategic thinking, leadership, training and coaching, technical skills, research skills and change management are likely to be more effective. The second theme displays by Muslim women leaders' perception on demonstrating leadership through their leadership competencies, especially by: Influence and Persuasion; solving problem; decision making; building up teamwork, increasing the capacity to knowledge and professionalism skills.

Influence and persuasion: The ability to be persuasive is directly related to how much people trust you and how good your communication and relationships are. Persuasion (also called influence) is a good example of an essential leadership skill. Influence and persuasion are considered by Yukl (1994) as two of the primary functions of leaders. It is presumed in Yukl's comments that the leader is influencing and persuading followers to work towards the completion of the organization's mission and objectives. The ability to influence others and cause them to move in a particular direction is a highly important skill in leadership. All participants use similar ways to persuade people and they describe how they use their ability to influence others by having a combination of

interpersonal trust, communication, presentation skills, using hard evidence, follow the regulations and having good relationships to get support. Nob said:

“I have to sell my idea to a few of “what it calls” influential people in the meeting just telling them the idea during the meeting, when I open up to the idea, I will try to make them understandable first. So, at least we have people giving me some support in terms of the idea but also I have to tell them the consequences of applying it”

Waf illustrated pros and cons of problems and expected results before convincing others during official meetings at the university; she described her experience when convincing others in a new idea:

“Usually in the annual or monthly meetings, I take the opportunity to put the idea forward that I want to convince others, I explain what the positive impact for students are. If the idea is related to administration staffs, I also put the idea forward. So, I prepare the appropriate climate to put the idea forward and explain the advantages, challenges, problems and benefits”

Problem solving: One of the key leadership practices, which are crucial to community leaders is related to problem solving. The communities face both social and economic problems. The leaders have to solve the problems through identifying the problems faced by the community, finding the solutions and acting on the problem (Mohamad and Silong, 2010). Women leaders are more willing to reach at the problems solutions by dialogue) (Al-Baz, 2011). Participants indicated that examining a problem from different angles must be through gathering the information from various resources, understanding the whole situation, then suggesting solutions and their consequences. All Muslim women leaders believe that gaining trust and sharing ideas with a team, then making a collective decision lead to solving problem. San described her way when she faced problems in her position. She explained:

“Any problem I face, first I collect the information about the problem, its causes and the source of the problem and then I make a study of the problem”

Daw identifies her manner when dealing with a problem by saying:

“I don’t look at the problems as barriers or obstacles, I consider them as a challenge needs to look at it from another angle because the solution

is existed either how we have to solve the problem or there are advisory committees at the level of women. We display the difficulties that encountered by women or achievements. All these display on the dialogue table, we benefit from our experiences. Thus, the good experiences are moved among the leaders”

Decision making: A mechanism for making choices at each step of the problem-solving process. It is very important task in the leadership process. Participants indicate that making decision is easy but difficult to choose effective decision. They describe steps that they follow to activate the appropriate decision such as the importance of women leaders to be able to wade through information, comprehend what is relevant, make a well-considered decision, consulting others who have experiences to obtain useful information, making meetings to discuss the decision and take action based on that decision. They emphasize that the decision must be a collective one, making decisions too quickly or too slowly will impede leadership effectiveness. Nob expressed that her open door policy invites the institution committee to share or talk about their concerns or thoughts. Wan Malaysian woman leader confirms the importance of gathering information and understanding the problem to make or support her decision by saying:

“Onmaking a decision, of course, I have to get a lot of information, if I don’t have, I have to do it by myself. I believe that before you solve that problem you must fully understand, the problem. That is what I required for information. When I understood that, then I can start thinking on how the strategy to make others accept that decision or at least to support that decision. It will never be my own decision, I never ac bias what I think, I discuss with others. You can see my officers surround here, I bring them for discussion”

Women in Saudi Arabia use the same process when they make a decision but they mention that decision-making is not easy for them because they have to follow the highest authority that is related to the male section. Daw Saudi woman illustrates her experience:

“It’s difficult to skip the official tracks when we make a decision. First, the issue is spreading the culture of good professorate and its standardizations. We have to put things on professional tracks. We need to be patient. In governmental systems, we are ruled by the highest resolutions. The space of freedom is not

like that of the private sectors. The size of the programs and the size of the sectors make us think of all the possible probabilities. She adds “also understanding the situation and its diagnosis. Understanding of imbalance place is 90% from the solution and making decision”

Building up teamwork: Team building is another important quality that Muslim women leaders must possess. Team building is a process dealt with improving the performance of the team and involves activities designed to foster communication and encourages cooperation. This supported the former studies (Silong *et al.*, 2008). About half of the participants from both cases ranked it as one of the most critical leadership competencies for the success of women leaders. They should communicate with members of the team as well as show team members how to work well with each other to achieve the goals of a university. All members should be encouraged to participate in the group. Nob clarified that leader should ensure that team members have the necessary skills and abilities to do their job and achieve the vision.

“Leaders have to ensure “especially in the academic position, that all the staffs have the skill, so, you as a leader, you have to make sure that they know what they supposed to do. If a staffs don’t know, then you need to educate them, you need to encourage them, it’s your responsibility”

Daw, a Saudi woman leader, agrees with perception of Nob. Daw confirms that by building up and developing leadership skills within a team, women leaders can create an environment where a woman leader can achieve visions and goals of the university in the long term. Daw said:

“When there is a positive spirit team and collective team, we will move strongly to achieve the goals and visions of the university. Also, building up and developing a good team work skill give you a space to convert some tasks to a good team. In addition, taking an advantage of all the capabilities available in your sector, selecting active members, encouraging teamwork and considering others’ opinions to your vision and message are very important for a leader”

Increasing the capacity to knowledge: The majority of the participants believe in the women leaders must have two types of knowledge: religion Knowledge and professional knowledge. Participants also arrested that an effective woman leader should have knowledge of university life,

understanding of how the organization system works, understanding of processes, knowledge to the purpose of the organization (its goals and objectives) and at the same time the purpose of the group. One of Saudi’s participant believes that:

“Every leader must have Knowledge of the organization and its goals, purposes, strategies and system processes, because if you don’t know the strategic goals of the organization, you may be in the wrong line”

Furthermore, participants indicate to the role that religions have been acknowledged recently in the fields of culture, politics, economics and the different domains of social life. They stressed that Muslim women leaders must be ambassador and a good example for Muslim through their knowledge of the Islamic religion. Mai goes into further details:

“I think Muslim leaders must be pious. You must have knowledge on religion that is very important because people will look at you as Muslim. So, pious, tenets and principles of Islam you follow represent not just as a leader, but a Muslim leader who people look at”

Waf has the same perception, she affirms that:

“Muslim women leaders should be the best ambassadors for our religion. Muslim women can take Khadija and Aisha (may Allah be pleased with them) are good example for others in her style, her treatment with others which is characterized by justice and correct Islam with Muslim and non-Muslim”

Daw even speaks out about her believes that religious culture owned by the Muslim women leaders reflected on their performance, saying:

“ For Muslim, women have the best internal balance in terms of strength of character, in terms of the internal genes that imbibed from their culture and great heritage that reflected on their performance”.(Daw)

Professionalism skills: This was the strongest theme in three interviews. All the respondents had held many posts of leadership in their university. However, women explained that it was not merely leadership experience but experience in a university setting or the experience of being an academic that were important prerequisites for reach the post of leadership. Int from Malaysia elaborates her experience:

“I will give you an example regarding the experience that they have. We have ministry of science and then you looking for a leader in one of the departments. That department is interested in science and technology. Thus, are you going to take somebody from social science for example? Of course, there is no unique technology. So, you want to choose somebody who having that professional background and experience. Experience is very important because when you go to experience you going to be more effective”

Waf also gives some tips for women leaders:

“Women leaders should have experience in their position because if they don't have the experience, it will be difficult for them to achieve their goals”

Friction and benefit with others experiences add many advantages for women as Daw indicates:

“Sometimes the experience, keeping contact with others' experiences and engaging in attitudes and practical experiences reveal us a lot of benefits for women leaders, especially, academies. We are far from the administrative field”

Changing and developing: The fourth theme of this study is concerned with how the Muslim women leaders look for incremental improvements in work processes and results of university working condition to achieve the desired goals for change. Muslim women provide two ways to develop and make change in their environment work by developing organization and individual.

Development of the organization: Transformational leaders have complete influence over organizational changes. This type of leadership can draw a better and clearer picture for future, determine its vision for followers more effectively and the followers will accept their vision as a fact interestingly (Jandaghi *et al.*, 2009). Muslim women in Saudi and Malaysia emphasized that leader should be able to develop, lead and enable the process of change and transition while helping others to deal with their effects. Waf vice dean in Saudi described the achievements of her college when she holds a leadership position:

“We try to make development within the college and links to other colleges in the same university as well as of course, King Abdul Aziz University consider as Bench Mark for other colleges.

Our college in particular Bench Mark is very important. So, thank God, I were as supervisor department, we started the stages of accreditation, thank God, when I am a Vice Dean, we get accreditation now in March 2015. So, of course my work is to keep the level and complete the way of those who preceded me of my colleagues and also maintain a level parallels the advanced college's at least regional university. We look forward to global. Thank Allah we prove that, our universality now got three accreditations. Accreditation on the master's AMBA and the accreditations on AACSB and accreditation on EPAS. AACSB is an international accreditation, just King Fahd for Petroleum and Minerals and King Abdul Aziz University got this accreditation from Saudi universities”

Nob also stresses the importance of change and development in the organization and she provided Prophet Mohammed as an example of person who made change in our live, she said:

I believe that if I am in this position, I have to make a difference, make a change and when I am not there they still remember me for the things. I think also this also why we still want to emulate Prophet. He is no longer around but we still remember him”

Development of the individuals: As a leader, one of your key responsibilities is to develop staff. Career development and encourage growth of employees by coaching and by helping employees achieve their personal goals at university and beyond. Northouse (2013) points out that leaders have many demands: they inspire, mediate, help, motivate and direct change. The majority of Muslim women leaders from both counties (Malaysia and Saudi) acknowledge that women leaders should create a healthy positive environment and motivate by guidance, not by issuing commands to bring innovation in their work. In addition, inspiring others is the mark of effective women as leaders to put their effort in work.

The Malaysian women leaders' capacity to support and develop staff was one of the important characteristic of Muslim women leadership informing the theoretical framework of the current study. Identifying individual differences among people and providing assistance for each one, according to her capabilities were seen as an effective leadership practice of the women leaders. Sit is Malaysian woman described the role of leader in developing other by describing her boss style, she said:

“When I work with boss, he was a good leader, he was very hard working person, he empower me, he always supports, he seem very strict but sometime he did some jocks and he has that kind of the quality of a leader, support and then he guide at the same time”

San from Saudi has an ambition and goal:

“I have ambition to raise and develop the level of the staff and students skills, helping them according to their capabilities. For example, in the Islamic Studies Department, the most important point that I face is achieving moderation thinking. The achievement of moderation thinking is important issue to ensure developing community. as well as women leaders should have initiative for innovation, motivate others by guidance and inspire the ability to self-control”

Likewise, Waf agrees with her colleague San, she said:

“Women leaders have to know the quality of the individuals who are dealing with, on the one hand. And how you encourage, empower and motivate them to work altogether as a single entity because when there is a difference among the workers, this certainly effects on performance, on the other hand”

Leadership styles: Leadership style is the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans and motivating people (Ojokuku *et al.*, 2012). Two sub-themes emerged from participants when they described their style.

Flexible and adaptive: Flexible and adaptive leadership includes changing behavior inappropriate ways as the situation changes (Yukl and Mahsud, 2010). Situational leadership recognizes that the effective leader must be flexible and can adjust the styles of his followers and situations change over time in work environment (Mwai, 2011). Eight of the participants viewed flexibility as essential to the leadership style of Muslim women leaders. Leaders should have the flexibility on dealing with different people, staff, students and situation and adaptation in different situations. Sit Malaysian leader described her leadership style as “flexible.” Her description was based on multiple years of experience:

“For me this position is very challenges, my principle is: for whatever task been assigned to me always try my best, I will do my best. This my principle. I think I am flexible because I am collaborator person, I am practicing work and also

Daw Saudi leader also describes her approach in dealing with other as a balanced approach which combines the intensity and soft and she believes that leader style depends on the situation. She said:

“My style between the soft and the firm depends on the situation that we are exposed. Some situations we must be rigorous to adjust things and some situations require patience and careful consideration. The studies in the differences characteristic between women’s world and a man’s world. Women’s world depends on the circles of relationships, women keen to not losing any relationship and benefit from all the opportunities available to them. So woman has the kind of flexibility and patience”

Participative: The study showed that the participative leadership style responds to the various needs and challenges in contemporary education. The participants recognized the value of collaboration in today’s academic environment. Participative leadership was studied by a group of psychologists led by (Lewin *et al.*, 1939). Two of the participants applied participative or collaborative leadership style which stresses a leader’s willingness to work with subordinates or colleagues (Rubin and Futrell, 2009). Sit viewed her leadership style as “participatory” as she believes that:

“leader should go to the ground not just on the office, you have to participant, you have to involve, you join and you have to collaborate, that mean in the team, you not just thinking about yourself”

Abe from Saudi held the same view as Sit and considered her leadership style to be participative. As a participative leader, she described:

“Leader requires to be effective more than to be the sitting on the chair, it must participate in activities when someone ask you participate, don’t refuse. Also leader should go outside the office in order to be close to the people, to know their problems, listen to them, dialogue with them nor sits in the office only to end the papers... leaders must be found something to offer to the community who surrounding and at the same time gain the experiences and develop them self”

Traits and ethical: In today’s turbulent world, values and ethics are presented at a number of levels for leaders who devote their energy and time to leading the process of value creation (Freeman and Stewart, 2006). Muslim women in both countries (Malaysia and Saudi Arabia) have the same perception that is Muslim women leaders

cannot perform their leadership roles well if they do not have a set of morality and traits by which they gain the trust and love of others. The most common attributes and ethics cited from Muslim women to be effective leaders in the university were openness, respect, compassionate, understanding people, punctuality, sincere, honest with Allah and self, wisdom, commitment, patience, quiet, piety, control and fear from Allah. Nob Malaysian woman leader labels qualities of Muslim women leaders:

“I think one aspect is the need for being compassionate. I think compassionate in this context does not mean that you treat-you know-your values, but compassionate here means you try to understand whoever is working with you”

Waf from Saudi also provides some qualities that should Muslim woman leader be possessed:

“My good leadership example is Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). I always said for my students, if we have the morel of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), everything will be good. Most lessons that He taught us deal with Shura, sincere and more commitment. Openness, patience, good dealing with those whether he loves them or not, friend and enemy. Actually, He had a perfect ways to lead others”

As well as, Abe adds some other traits must be enjoyed by Muslim woman leader:

“Woman leader should have wisdom and quiet in her behaviours, because honestly a post needs afford and needs to be a basically quiet, do not be nervous, because the reactions sometimes may surprise you a unexpectedly. Besides, for any leader, piety of Allah is very important”

CONCLUSION

The general aims of this study were to identify various practices exercised by Muslim women academic leaders in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Aims that are more specific included identifying leadership competencies, styles and behaviors that may be more important for Muslim women leaders in higher education.

The practices are not very different from practices identified for women in two countries, even for other women leaders in other situations. The research findings identified the importance of those practices such as communicating effectively, developing and maintaining relationships, building up teamwork, problem solving, decision making, having career experiences, perfect women leader styles and possession of traits and ethics.

The only major difference is the context and society's perception of women's leadership. The women leaders appeared to have a solid understanding for themselves related to their values and practices.

To sum up, women leaders in higher education need a combination of these leadership practices and competencies in order to address the challenges faced in the sector. Hence, providing women leaders with the right tools, skills and self-confidence and efficacy enhances their ability to be effective leaders. Another important aspect, in order to foster environment diversity and to create change with long lasting effects, it is crucial to create personal and workplace awareness on gender role to increase opportunity of Muslim women to assume senior position of leadership. The findings of this study help in leaving footprints for other women in different sectors seeking leadership to follow, guide and inspire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations can be drawn from the findings of Muslim women leadership in academia: The leadership practices voiced by Muslim women leaders in higher education offered important contributions about their live experiences and professional lives. The leadership practices articulated by these women leaders and conclusions from the findings could assist in helping current or aspiring women leaders in understanding the complexities and demands of today's women leaders.

Comparisons between the stories and experiences of such women leaders in various fields or comparisons between both genders' views can identify and resolve the different perspectives that men and women hold about one another as leaders. These comparisons provide insights more progressive that offer further opportunities and equalities for Muslim women to access and have better professional success as leaders.

Future studies could go beyond the self-descriptions of the women leaders to include observations of the Muslim women leaders by their employees or other stakeholders in formal and informal settings.

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