A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP ON KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR WITHIN TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: This paper aims to explore the ability of telecommunication industry in Malaysia engaged in managing those unexpected events by studying the leadership ability based on spiritual leadership to optimize the potentials of their human resources' knowledge and experiences as part and parcel of competitive advantage in meeting the challenges brought by the competition within the industry.

Methodology: The present study is exploring the outcome of such areas through a combination of both qualitative and quantitative perspective methods, to provide with empirical evidence for the research problem, and also to help answer questions that cannot be answered by qualitative or quantitative approaches alone. The Exploratory Sequential Design as in model development has been selected for this study for no specificity of guiding framework to begin with as it integrates diverse areas within spiritual leadership and knowledge sharing behavior with integration to islamic leadership model, that require to begin with qualitative exploration.

Main Findings: The present paper is based on the mixed method findings of such leadership style in creating the values within the workplace that able to ignite the inner-sense among the employees to feel the conscience and compassion to share knowledge beyond conventional motivational factors as in rewards, power, and relationships, aligned to the Islamic leadership model perspective.

Implications/Applications: The present study will definitely help in analyzing the influence of spiritual leadership on the knowledge sharing behaviuor within the telecommunication industry of a nation. This study will also contribute to the agenda of KSB within telecommunication industry in Malaysia, by including the exploration on SL as the construct for the leadership style, so that individual employees would be motivated to share knowledge by positioning it within the context of Islamic leadership model.

Keywords: Spiritual leadership (SL), Workplace Spirituality (WS), Social Exchange Theory (SET), Islamic Leadership, knowledge sharing behavior (KSB)

INTRODUCTION

Malaysian industries acknowledged the importance of knowledge sharing as evidenced within the public sectors (Tangaraja et al., 2015) multinational firms (Chen et al., 2009; Jain et al., 2015) manufacturing (Fathi et al., 2011) banking (Tan et al., 2010) and of course the educations industry (Cheng et al., 2009; Sohail and Daud, 2009). However, Human Resources practitioners and organizations still could not fully understand how and what makes individuals share their knowledge (Blankenship and Ruona, 2009; Castorena et al., 2014; Dim and Ezeabasili, 2015; Wang and Lu, 2016).

The urgency of knowledge as part of competitive advantage did not excluding Malaysian telecommunication industry from finding ways to retain its strength by taking advantage over knowledge economy (Riaz, 1997; Chin et al., 2006). The telecommunication players seriously putting their efforts to ensure themselves to become more competitive by turning knowledge into the key for sustainability were seen in their efforts to implement knowledge management (Chin et al., 2009). On the other hand, the employees needed to see the motivations to share their knowledge (Minu, 2003). Adding to the complexity, to encourage such behavior, a combinative leadership style that could engender trust is needed (Duru and Chibo, 2014; Purnama, 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2015; Ghazali et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Nazal, 2017; Tanoos, 2017; Chowdhury et al., 2018; Taqi et al., 2018) but yet very limited exploration made on such matter within Malaysian context, particularly within the telecommunication industry.

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Thus, the study is to contribute to the agenda of KSB within telecommunication industry in Malaysia, by including the exploration on SL as the construct for the leadership style, so that individual employees were motivated to share knowledge by positioning it within the context of Islamic leadership model. The next section is to elaborate the overview of knowledge sharing behavior especially from the telecommunication industry where the issue of knowledge management implementation rarely explored from the perspective of social factors such as leadership and organizational values (Chin et al., 2007; Nze et al., 2016; Kimengsi and Gwan, 2017; CHE and Sundjo, 2018; Cheng et al., 2018). Following this section is discussions on the methodology chosen for this study and finally the discussion on the research findings and suggestions for future research avenues.

LITERAUTRE REVIEW

Knowledge Sharing in Malaysian Telecommunication Industry

Malaysian telecommunication industry is an interesting area to focus on in this research because the productivity performance of the industry is highly related to the improvement in the efficiency components, in which the offerings or output is significantly contributed by the capability to exploit the advancement of technology. Given the high technological advancement within the industry, the labor forces should be well-equipped with knowledge in optimizing the technology available to give operators a competitive advantage in the long term (Ketler and Willems, 2001; Mohamad, 2004). This makes the telecommunication industry as the best focus to prove the importance of knowledge sharing so that the knowledge to exploit the technology can be optimized for a stronger competitive advantage within such a challenging environment.

It was discovered that when it comes to such industry within Malaysia context, factors such as leadership style, and organizational climate were among the obstacles discouraging KSB (Chin et al., 2006; Chin et al., 2007; Chin et al., 2009) overlooking on how the KSB could have been better if the social factors such as leadership and organizational culture are explored (Choy and Suk, 2005; Chin et al., 2006; Chin et al., 2007; Chin et al., 2009). Hence, the study is purposely conducted to explore elements of leadership style based on SL to see how leaders of the industry able to manipulate their leadership style upon engendering trust as needed for such event to happen.

Leadership and Workplace Experience in Malaysia

The challenges posit by the dynamic evolution of human capital undeniably challenging the style of leadership too (Wahid and Mustamil, 2017). Malaysian leaders were challenged to prepare the organizations for even more challenging economic environment (Yeoh, 1998). Most of the studies pertaining leadership were conducted by evaluating leadership from an external perspective, focusing mostly on leadership preferences, leadership behavior, leader–member exchange approach to leadership and power–influence approach to leadership (Ansari et al., 2004).

On that note, businesses in Malaysia being challenged to manage multi-racial employees within the multi-religious background, a more demanding task for the leaders. It is inevitable for the organizations not to involve a more democratic leadership style (Rani et al., 2008) or combination of all approaches as the demand for more employee engagement is very crucial for business success (Kaliannan and Adjovu, 2015). Malaysian leadership style could be between transformational, transactional, paternal, participative or even Laissez-faire Leadership approach, a combinative leadership style that able to address the emergence of emotional labor (Ansari et al., 2004).

As leadership styles have their own ways to influence KSB (Tamunosiki-Amadi, 2013; Al-Husseini and Elbeltagi, 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015) a spiritual leaders also has its own way to create a workplace that encourage employees to contribute and bring differences (Boorom, 2009; Fry and Cohen, 2009; Fry et al., 2010; Fry et al., 2011; Sweeney and Fry, 2012; Jeon et al., 2013; Pawar, 2014; Whitaker and Westerman, 2014; Kaya, 2015). The emergence of spirituality within corporate affairs started to attract the attentions, with number of studies supporting its contributions on the core organizational values (Fairholm, 1996; Ferguson and Milliman, 2008). For the interest of the study, the researcher adopts to the definition of SL that taps into the needs of both leaders and followers for spiritual survival so that they become more organizationally committed and productive through the desire to make more contributions and differences necessary to invoke organization members to experience spiritual well-being (Fry, 2003).

Knowledge Sharing Behavior and Motivations to Share Knowledge

Studies talked about formulation of motivational packages to encourage KSB (Bock et al., 2005; Wickramasinghe and Widyaratne, 2012; Šajeva, 2014) while at the same time literatures mentioned about how rewards nowadays becoming redundant to KSB (Bock and Kim, 2001) leading to the need to explore potential ways to ignite deeper level of intrinsic motivations as mechanism to excite employees to share knowledge (Chalofsky and Krishna, 2009; Dewar and Cook, 2014).

Hence, by integrating all previous literatures, the study is believed to be able to expand and provide empirical evidences on the contribution of SL on KSB by manipulating the ability of SL to challenge MTS from intrinsic perspective through leadership supports, organizational culture and trust (Chin et al., 2006; Chin et al., 2007; Chin et al., 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2015; Jain et al., 2015). The study is to contribute to the theory of Social Exchange (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976) on how spirituality explains wisdom and psychology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Generally, researches on leadership, workplace experiences and KSB being explored either from qualitative or quantitative perspective (Podsakoff and Dalton, 1987; Conger, 1998; Wang and Noe, 2010). The current study is exploring the outcome of such areas through a combination of both methods, to provide with empirical evidence for the research problem, and to help answer questions that cannot be answered by qualitative or quantitative approaches alone from the perspective of pragmatism (Creswell and Plano, 2007). The Exploratory Sequential Design as in model development was chosen due to the reason of potential of unexplored constructs that could have a significant influence on knowledge sharing behavior, to assimilate the interest of the topic (Myers and Oetzel, 2003). The Exploratory Sequential Design as in model development has been selected for this study on the ground of no empirical framework to begin with as the study exploration leadership style that lead to SL which later integrated into diverse areas upon deducing the qualitative findings on KSB that lead to establishment of new framework (figure 1) that explain the influence of SL on KSB at the top performing organization within the industry.

Table 1: Scope of Interview Questions for Qualitative Study

Intention/Section	Question	Descriptions
To explore the understanding, practices and motivations on knowledge sharing behavior	1.	Concepts of knowledge sharing
	2..	Mechanisms of knowledge sharing
	3.	Motivations to share knowledge
To explore the influence of spiritual leadership dimensions on knowledge sharing	4.	Concepts leadership
To explore the dimensions of workplace spirituality on knowledge sharing	5.	Concepts of working values, organizational values, organizational culture
To explore the strength between spiritual leadership and workplace spirituality on knowledge sharing	6.	Contributions effects between spiritual leadership and workplace spirituality on knowledge sharing agenda (motivations and behavior)

The personal responses from the participants were gathered together with observational notes, and focus group transcripts and documentary materials as well as the researcher's own records of ongoing analytical ideas, research questions and the field diary to add richness to the information gathered (Pope et al., 2007) to facilitate the instrument model development and then further validated by the respondents (Patton, 1990) The qualitative data was analyzed according to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis and Boyatzis, 2008).

The second phase that followed the first phase of the qualitative approach was the quantitative approach, to cross validate the research model developed together with the emerging variables on deeper level of intrinsic motivations to share knowledge, to make inferences across telecommunication industry in Malaysia and to generalize the results to different groups (Morse, 1991). Survey research was used to provide a quantitative description of opinions, trends or behavior of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2013).

The selection of the participants was made by the HRD from the products and services development teams because these groups of employees are considered as the knowledge pool for the organizations' competitive advantage (knowledge-based resources for production of products and services), based on the criteria that they able to impart their knowledge and experiences for the purpose of the research (Bernard, 2011). On that basis, the unit analysis for the research is individual employee of the industry. The samples were given sets of questionnaires consisting of sets of scales to measure workplace spirituality, spiritual leadership, knowledge sharing and two emerging variables, namely compassion and meaningful work, adopted and adapted (based on the situational and environmental factors) from the previous literature to measure the spirituality dimensions of workplace (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Milliman et al., 2003; Petchsawang and Duchon, 2009) and leadership (Fry, 2003; Fry and Matherly, 2006; Fry et al., 2010) and knowledge sharing behavior (Yi, 2009) together with the measures for compassion and meaningfulness as emerging variables resulted from the contributions between all constructs, as well as motivations to share knowledge (Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Wasko and Faraj, 2005).

Table 2: Questionnaires based on Measurement Scale from Literatures

Construct	Items	Items Wording	Ref.
Knowledge Sharing Behavior Scale			
Knowledge Sharing Mechanisms	Written Contribution (KSW)	Submit documents and reports Shares documentation from personal files related to current work Contribute ideas and thoughts to company online database Keep others updated with important organizational information through online discussion boards	(Yi, 2009)
	Organizational communications (KSC)	Express ideas and thoughts in organizational meetings Participate fully in brainstorming sessions Propose problem-solving suggestions in team meetings Answer questions of others in team meetings Ask good questions that can elicit others' thinking and discussion in team meetings Share success stories that may benefit the company in organizational meetings Reveal past personal work-related failures or mistakes in department meetings to help others avoid repeating these mistakes Make presentations in department meetings	
	Personal Interactions (KSP)	Support less experienced colleagues with time from personal schedule Engage in long term, coaching relationships with junior employees Spend time in personal conversation (i.e. discussion in hallway, over lunch, through telephone) with others to help them with their work related problems Keep others updated with important organizational information through personal conversation Share passion and excitement on some specific subjects with others through personal conversation Share experience that may help others avoid risks and trouble through personal conversations Spend time in email communication with others to help them with work-related problems	
Motivations to share knowledge	External factors (Relationship and Rewards) (MTS)	It is important for me to feel sense of belonging It is important for me to establish a friendly relationship with others I expect to receive an honor in return to my knowledge sharing I always provide constructive ideas to help colleagues upgrade service quality	(Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Wasko & Faraj, 2005)
	Internal factors (Power and Reciprocity) (MTS)	If I answer questions posted by others, my competitive advantage will be threatened because my knowledge is share with others If I answered to questions posted by others, the person who acquires my knowledge will become my competitor I feel that by sharing my knowledge improves my social status Sharing knowledge is kind of self-assurance to me I would share my knowledge with others if they would do so	
Table 2: Continue			
Emerging Variables	Meaningful work (MW)	I really like helping others I feel so good to help others to solve their problems I enjoy helping others I would share my knowledge if it is beneficial to the organization I would share my knowledge is they need it	(Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Milliman et al., 2003; Petchsaw
	Compassion (COMP)	I can easily put myself in other's people shoes I am aware of and sympathize with others	

		I sympathize with my co-workers suffering	ang &
		I try to help my co-workers to relieve their suffering	Duchon,
		I am aware of my co-workers needs	2009
		I feel obligated to help others out of my own conscience and compassion	
Spiritual Leadership	Altruistic love/ Vision/ Hope/faith/ Inner life /Spiritual wellbeing (SL)	The leaders in my organization "walk the talk"	(Fry, 2003; Fry & Matherly, 2006; Fry et al., 2010)
		The leaders in my organization are honest and without false pride	
		My organization is trustworthy and loyal to its employees	
		The leaders in my organization have the courage to stand up for their people	
		My organization is kind and considerate towards its workers and when they are suffering, wants to do something about it	
		I feel my organization demonstrate respect for me and my work	
		I feel my organization appreciates me and my work	
		I feel I value as a person in my job	
		I feel highly regarded by my leaders	
Workplace Spirituality	Sense of community/ Meaningful work/ Alignment of values/ Organizational Values (WS)	My ideal workplace would foster a strong sense of community	(Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004; Milliman et al., 2003; Petchsaw ang & Duchon, 2009)
		I would like to work I a place where I can connect with others	
		My ideal workplace overcomes people's differed to create unity	
		I want to be an integral part of a work community	
		It is important for me to work in an environment where people are mutually respected	
		I expect my work to be significant to me	
		My work would be related to what I value in life	
		I want my work to mean more to me than just paycheck	
		I experience joy in my work	
		My spirit is energized by my work	
		I am passionate about my work	
		I look forward to coming to work most days	
		I feel positive about the values of my organization	
		My organization cares about its employees	
		I feel connected with the organizational goals	
		My organization concerns about the health of its employees	
		I feel connected with the organizational missions	
		My organization cares about whether or not my spirit is energized	
		I feel that I am not forced to compromise my basic values at work (conscience)	

RESULTS

From the thematic analysis done on the qualitative data collection, it was discovered that all subjects interviewed acknowledged that KSB as a set of individual behavior which involves sharing of one's work-related knowledge and expertise with others across the organization to create effectiveness towards achieving performance (Yi, 2009) but the influence of leadership styles of their superior to a great extent contribute to their MTS. The leadership style of their superior able to awaken the Subjects' inner sense, resulting to the awakening of compassion and meaningful work. The emergence of compassion and meaningful work stretched the level of MTS to go beyond rewards, power, reciprocity, and relationships. Employees started to find their works to become more meaningful when the sense of compassion driven their initiatives to make contributions and differences to others, that able to encourage KSB.

The occurrence of KSB evidenced to take place at various levels within organizations such as at the individual, team, or departmental level, or at the organization level (Erhardt, 2003) were driven by the individual employees' own inclinations (Kim, 1998; Antonacopoulou, 2006) contributed by the emergence of compassion and meaningful work. Compassion and meaningful of work helped the employees to orchestra their KSB, by respecting the value of relationships more. Compassion guides them to see that their knowledge could be helpful in easing others' problems while meaningful work brought the satisfaction to them when they able to contribute to performance as well as brought differences to others' people's life.

Compassion and meaningful work emerged as two positive outcomes of effective leadership style supporting the contributions of SL on workplace values by awakening the intrinsic motivation to go beyond material affairs, that further enrich the previous study (Fry, 2003). The workplace values based on WS becoming the catalyst intrinsic motivation to share knowledge causing typical motivations to become insignificant due to strong sense of connectedness led by sense of community. A new path model was constructed to facilitate the next phase of hypotheses and questionnaires development of quantitative data collection and analysis, as per figure 1 below:
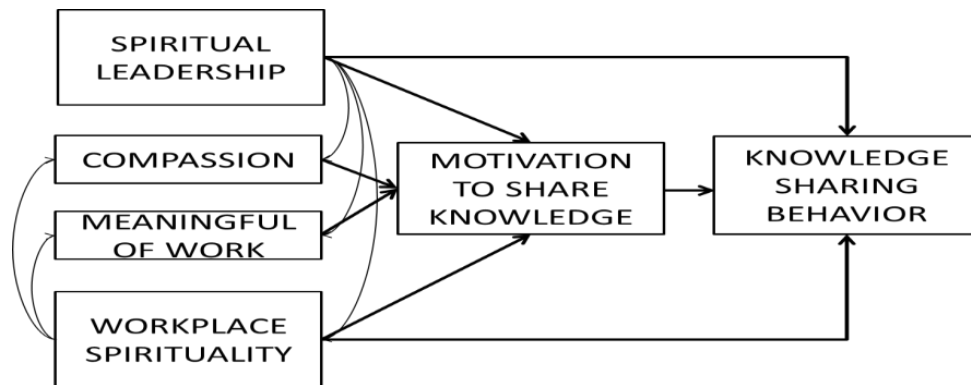

Figure 1: Causal Model Diagram – The Influence of Spiritual Leadership and Workplace Spirituality on Knowledge Sharing Behavior.

The qualitative finding then inform the next data gathering on the platform of quantitative method, by replicating the causal model into a model of inter-relationship between SL and KSB via the influence of MTS to facilitate the second phase of quantitative data collection based on the hypotheses below:

H1:   Spiritual leadership positively influences knowledge sharing behavior.

H2:   Workplace spirituality positively influences knowledge sharing behavior.

H3:   Spiritual leadership positively influences motivations to share knowledge.

H4   Workplace spirituality positively influences motivations to share knowledge.

H5:   Compassion positively influences motivations to share knowledge.

H6:   Meaningful of work positively influences motivations to share knowledge.

H7:   Motivations to share knowledge positively influences knowledge sharing behavior.

H8:   Spiritual leadership positively contributes to workplace spirituality.

H9:   Spiritual leadership positively contributes to compassion.

H10:   Spiritual leadership positively contributes to meaningful of work.

H11:   Workplace spirituality positively influences compassion.

H12:   Workplace spirituality positively influences meaningfulness.

Table 3: Status Spiritual Leadership and Knowledge Sharing Behaviour of on the Basis of Evaluation of Hypotheses

| Hypo.	Path	Original Sample (β)	T Statistics (> 1.96)	P Values (< 0.05)	Results
H1	SL → KSB	0.803	6.087	0.000	Supported
H2	WS → KSB	-0.026	0.159	0.874	Not Supported
H3	SL → MTS	0.545	3.044	0.002	Supported
H4	WS → MTS	-0.617	2.136	0.033	Supported
H5	COMP → MTS	0.264	2.331	0.020	Supported
H6	MW → MTS	0.327	1.434	0.152	Not Supported
H7	MTS → KSB	0.014	0.159	0.874	Not Supported
H8	SL → WS	0.876	42.712	0.000	Supported
H9	SL → COMP	0.382	2.678	0.008	Supported
H10	SL → MW	-0.130	1.061	0.289	Not Supported
H11	WS → COMP	0.227	1.584	0.114	Not Supported
H12	WS → MW	0.908	10.413	0.000	Supported
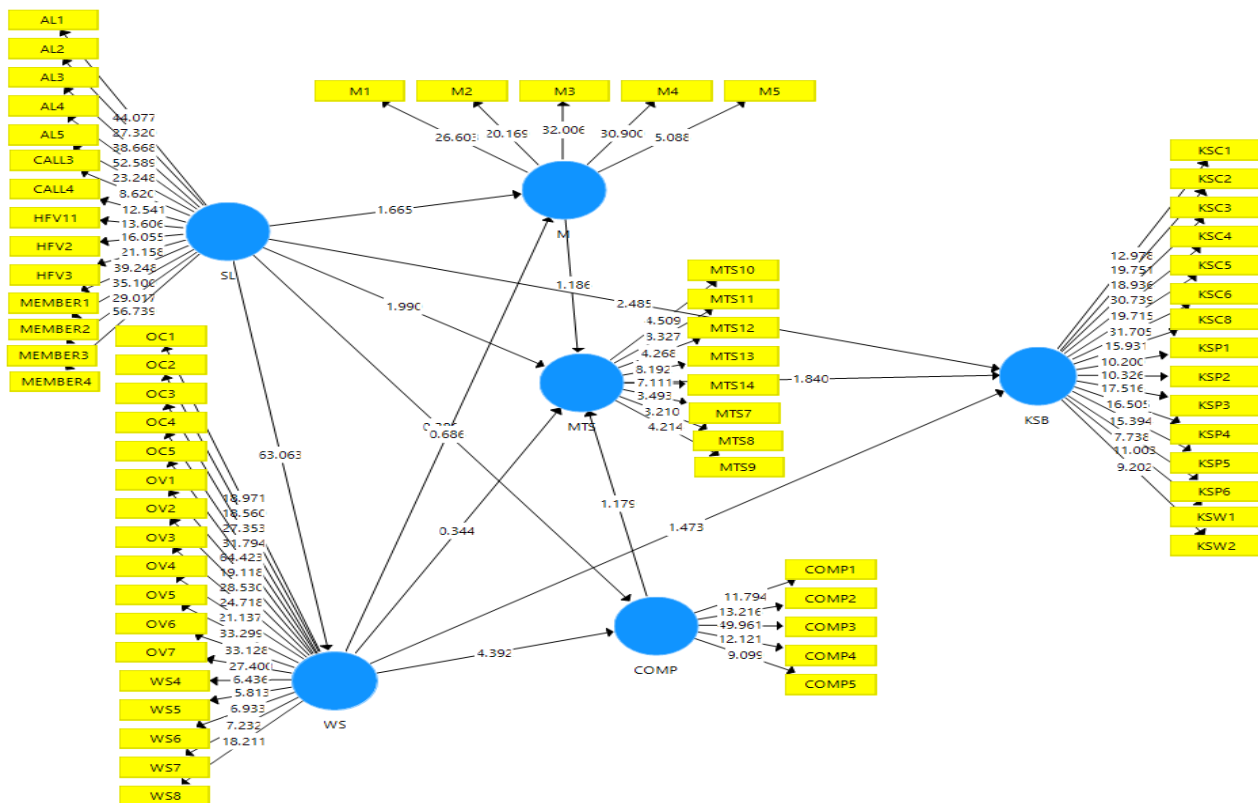
Figure 2: Path Model Coefficient of relationship between SL to KSB

From the table and figure above, the relationships between SL to KSB proves that SL has a positive influence when interacting directly with KSB, and MTS. Thus, the findings explained that SL able to influence KSB at all levels inclusive of individual, group and organizational level because of its ability to awaken trust (Bradshaw et al., 2015). SL effectively combined hope and faith together in orchestrating effective efforts toward the vision, guided by the altruistic love that able to unite the employees under the enclosure of WS. The current research provides explanation on how leaders are to balance between transactional and transformational behaviors for effective knowledge management through trust that rides on the elements of intrinsic motivations (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Ghazali et al., 2015).

On the other hand, quantitative findings discovered that WS is an outcome from the existence of SL within the organizations, proven that importance of SL to produce such environment as the catalyst to KSB, supporting the qualitative field findings in the first phase, making motivation as not seen from material rewards, instead from the desire for spiritual wellbeing (Fry, 2003).

DISCUSSION

The findings support the research on leadership within the Malaysia's context as through combinative approach that the country's telecommunication industry's readiness for knowledge management implementation need to have the right

supports from the right leadership behavior and organizational climate (Ansari et al., 2004; Chin et al., 2006; Chin et al., 2007; Chin et al., 2009) through SL.

Further to that, a comprehensive research model deduced managed to provide an empirical evidence to explain from the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, that such industry able to exploit its knowledge-based competitive advantage by acknowledging the contribution of SL as the best adaptive leadership style in encouraging and motivating employees to share their knowledge for the sake of competitive advantage by not solely relying to monetary rewards, supporting rewards as myth to knowledge sharing (Bock and Kim, 2001; Bock et al., 2005). The theory which previously explained based on reciprocity of actions (Blau, 1964) now further enriched by the influence of spiritual values that engendered trusts as a solution toward KSB (Kim and Ko, 2014; Hashim and Tan, 2015; Jain et al., 2015). The theory gives an explanatory power to SL on the element of psychological and wisdom (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). Malaysian's organizations now started to acknowledge the importance of holistic leadership style on such behavior (Yusof et al., 2012). Within Malaysian multi-ethnicity context, SL was found to have contributed to the common understanding of unity (Fry, 2003; Chen and Li, 2013) through compassion and meaningful work, central to Islamic tenets based on Quran and Sunnah(Beekun, 2012).

SL acts as a causal leadership theory for organizational transformation, facilitates in creating intrinsically motivated employees (Fry et al., 2005) aligned with Islamic leadership as a process of inspiring and coaching voluntary followers in an effort to achieve a clear and defined shared vision (Aabed, 2006). Hence, the current study supports the literature on the transposition of the spiritual leadership component into a model for Islamic Leadership (Egel and Fry, 2016) as per figure 2 below.

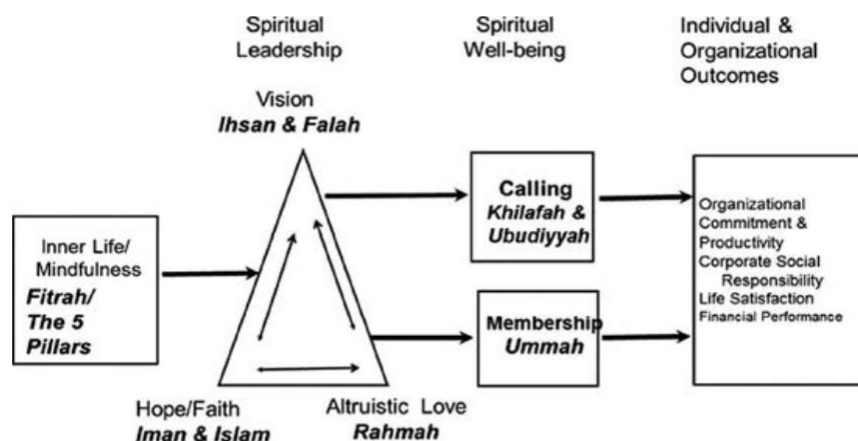Figure 3: Transposition of Spiritual Leadership components into Islamic Leadership

(Source: Egel and Fry (2016))

CONCLUSION

Leadership is not simply about power and authority but also about emotional connections, authenticity, and spiritual values (Krishnakumar et al., 2015).The acceptance of SL potential in engendering trust toward encouraging KSB required extensive discovery by incorporating the element of religiosity, culture, ethnicity as well as other demographic profile could help to strengthen the influence of SL on KSB.

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