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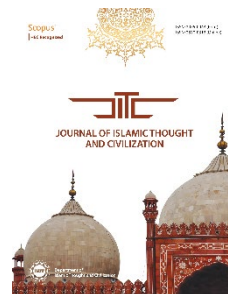
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***Rahmah* among Muslim Leaders: The Case of Waqf Institutions**

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Abstract

This study aims to expand the existing research on empathic leadership and its impact on management effectiveness within Waqf institutions in Malaysia. This aim was achieved by including the concept of *Rahmah* in the analysis. Empathetic leadership exemplifies the manner in which the behaviours and emotional states of followers are impacted by the leaders' comprehension and provision of support. Data analysis was conducted via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Well-structured interviews were used to collect the opinions of the individuals entrusted with managing Waqf properties. Given the uneven distribution of Waqf employees across Malaysia, the study population was stratified into clusters based on the states. This practice ensured the suitability and sufficiency of the sample size obtained from each cluster, specifically referring to the states. The results indicated that Islamic leaders in Waqf organizations exhibit a notable degree of empathy, as seen by the mean score of 5.23 and standard deviation of 1.09, in the management of their personnel. Based on the findings, this study posits that the concept of *Rahmah* may have broader applicability outside the third government sector (TSO), encompassing many organizational practices. It also argues that the presence of a strong leader is crucial for the development of any organization and is not limited to TSOs, such as Waqf institutions.

Keywords: empathy, empathetic, followers, leaders, organisations, *Rahmah*, Waqf

Introduction

Leader plays an important role in all organizational settings. Besides leading and encouraging people, a leader also plays the key role of envisioning the way towards achieving the set objectives. To become an effective leader, one must have good leadership traits and style that can influence followers and affect their work performance.¹ Good management and leadership procedures must reflect the culture in which they are rooted. Islam places a strong emphasis on leadership. Today,

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¹Hira Khan, Maryam Rehmat, Tahira Hassan Butt, Saira Farooqi, and Javaria Asim. "Impact of Transformational Leadership on Work Performance, Burnout and Social Loafing: A Mediation Model," *Future Business Journal* 6, no. 1 (2020): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-020-00043-8>.

however, people rely more on the western leadership style, whereby Muslim societies seem to overlook the Islamic leadership paradigm established by the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) and the four significant leaders known as the *khalifa ar-Rashidun* who led the Muslim ummah for 50 years.²

Muslim scholars have constructed a list of Islamic leadership ideas. Some of them believe that the elements of patience and leniency exemplified by the Prophet (*SAW*) should be emulated by all leaders.³ Basically, all aspects of Islamic leadership must be established based on the teachings of Al-Qur'ān, such as understanding people and becoming a role model. The nature of *Rahmah* is one of the elements in Islamic leadership that remains critical to ensure the well-being of the society. It is defined as a tender sensation in the heart, a sign of full memory, and an instinct to always be merciful to others and to abstain from crime, as well as to be the source of all goodness, virtue, and security for all human beings.⁴ Willingness to care, paying attention, helping and tolerating each other, and taking care of welfare are among the important characteristics towards creating a harmonious society and family.⁵ Indirectly, *Rahmah* is an attribute that is highly promoted in Islam. In fact, the term *Rahmah* appears more than 300 times in the Qur'ān.

Rahmah is universal and encompasses all aspects.⁶ Muslim scholars believe that the love brought by Islam is something that must be enjoyed by every living being. This was revealed by the Prophet himself in a hadith narrated by Salman: "Indeed, I was sent as a blessing for all the worlds." The Prophet interpreted the concept of *Rahmah* through his daily communication with those around him, demonstrating kindness to other people, such as children, the elderly, and even the enemy.⁷ This attitude of doing good to others is generally acknowledged as an important characteristic of a leader. *Rahmah* occurs when the leader is able to show his love and consideration.⁸

²Ahmad Rafiki, "Islamic Leadership: Comparisons and Qualities," in *Digital Leadership: A New Leadership Style for the 21st Century*, ed. Mario Franco (London: Intech Open, 2020), 129-144,

<https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.90151>. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1039/C7RA00172J> <https://www.intechopen.com/books/advanced-biometric-technologies/liveness-detection-in-biometrics> <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.colsurfa.2011.12.014>.

³Khaliq Ahmad, and O.K. Ogunsola. "An Empirical Assessment of Islamic Leadership Principles," *International Journal of Commerce and Management* 21, no. 3 (2011): 291-318. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10569211111165325>.

⁴Siti Nurjanah, Talhah Ajamain, and Jimain Safar, "Children's Education According to Abdullah Nasih Ulwan," essay, in *Prosperous Family Model* (Johor Bahru, Johor: Yayasan Pembangunan Keluarga Darul Ta'zim, 2019), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341252351_Pendidikan_Anak-Anak_Meneverat_Abdullah_Nasih_Ulwan.

⁵Hayatullah Hayatullah, "Conception of Society and Its Characteristics from an Islamic Perspective," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 6, no. 1 (2014): 12-25. <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.06.2014.002>.

⁶Ahmad Sanusi Azmi, and Mohd Yusof Ismail, "The Concept of Rahmatan Lil Alamin in Hadith: An Exploration of Meaning and Application in Malaysia," *Journal of Hadith Studies* 3, (November), (2018): 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.33102/johs.v3i2.40>

⁷Taufiq Yap Yun Hin, "Islam is a Blessing for the Whole World," *MyMetro*, October 11, 2018, sec. Addin.

⁸Hailan Salamun and Asyraf Ab Rahman, "Leadership Values and Understandings from an Islamic Perspective," In *Leadership in a Changing World* (Intech Open, 2022).

An important trait of *Rahmah* is empathy, in addition to respect, kindness, and tolerance.⁹ Empathy can be defined as the cognitive response that arises as a result of one's ability to understand others.¹⁰ It also increases self-awareness, while experiencing and interacting with emotions. Empathy is a critical leadership concept as contended by many leadership theories.¹¹ To become an effective leader, it is an emotional intelligence feature that one must possess.¹² Empathy is required by transformational leaders in order to demonstrate to their followers that they care about their needs and success.¹³ When a follower requires explicit support from the leader, the latter would supply it through communication in the form of encouragement, moral support, and so on, demonstrating how empathy is shown through leader communication.¹⁴ Nevertheless, leaders frequently display hesitance to openly express sensitivity and emotions, mostly driven by concerns that such behaviour may be perceived as a sign of incompetence or vulnerability. This was supported by a survey conducted by Businessolver's on their 6th Annual State of Workplace Empathy study. The results of the survey showed that over 68% of chief executive officers (CEOs) voiced concerns regarding the potential loss of respect if they were to demonstrate empathy in the workplace.¹⁵ Furthermore, employees in a high power distance country, such as in Malaysia, are known to maintain social distance and are willing to demonstrate deference, loyalty, and trust towards their leaders. This phenomenon may have been influenced by the colonial era and the lingering impact of the Malay feudal system.¹⁶ In instances where leaders fail to demonstrate empathy, there is an adverse consequence in the form of a toxic work environment, wherein employees experience a lack of support and appreciation. Consequently, this situation engenders a high rate of employee turnover, diminished morale, and subpar performance.

Islam places significant emphasis on the notion that its practices embody mercy, peace, and blessings. It imparts teachings on cultivating a compassionate disposition, fostering empathy, and embracing forgiveness. Empathy is commonly perceived to be intricately linked to the concept of *Rahmah* and is considered synonymous with love, which is regarded as a precious and benevolent blessing bestowed by Allah.

⁹Siti Mursyidah Mohd Zin, and Nur Amira Mohd Zahri, "Thematic Analysis of the Kalimah Al-Rahmah in the Al-Quran," in *Proceeding of the International Conference on Contemporary Issues In al-Qur'an And Hadith* (Bangi, Selangor: Institut Latihan Islam Malaysia (ILIM), 2018).

¹⁰Afiah Mukhtar, Nurjaya Asmawiyah, and Muhammad Ilyas Thamrin Tahir. "Effects of Leader Empathy during the Covid-19 Pandemic," In *International Conference on Social, Economics, Business, and Education (ICSEBE 2021)*. January 24, 2022. Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.220107.004>.

¹¹William Gentry, Todd Weber, and Gelnaz Sadri. "Empathy in the Workplace: A Tool for Effective Leadership," In *Annual Conference of the Society of Industrial Organizational Psychology*, New York, NY, April. 2007. <https://cclinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/empathyintheworkplace.pdf>.

¹²Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence Why it can Matter More Than IQ*. (USA: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1996).

¹³Bernard, M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership* (New York: Taylor & Francis Inc., 2006).

¹⁴Jacqueline Mayfield, Milton Mayfield, and Jerry Kopf, "Motivating Language: Exploring Theory with Scale Development," *Journal of Business Communication* 32, no. 4 (1995): 329–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002194369503200402>.

¹⁵Businessolvers, "State of Workplace Empathy," (2023) <https://www.businessolver.com/workplace-empathy/>.

¹⁶"High Power Distance Index Kills Entrepreneurship," The Malaysian Reserve, accessed October 25, 2023, <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2017/04/03/high-power-distance-index-kills-entrepreneurship/>.

Thus, this study aims to overview how empathy among leaders can affect employees' effective job performance. It was conducted on employees in the Islamic based third government sector (TSO), specifically Waqf institutions, in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Malaysia is well-known for its etiquette and courtesy. The country has a multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic population which is classified into three major races namely Malays, Chinese, and Indians¹⁷, with Malays being the most populous ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia.¹⁸ The Malay community dominates most sectors including government organisations, followed by the Chinese, Indians, and other communities. Due to this diversity, a nation with integrity, efficient governance, and trust, as well as a knowing community that is moral and courteous is required to achieve long-term and sustainable development.¹⁹ Indeed, harmony and unity must always be maintained and upheld as they are fundamental in the concept of *Rahmah*.²⁰

The culture of Malays is heavily influenced by Islamic philosophy and practices.²¹ Islam teaches humility, particularly in the way one talks, which serves as a measure and determinant of the beauty of the Malay culture.²² This is an indication that Malays, in general, speak humbly and politely²³ and hold a high regard for ethics and empathy while communicating, as demonstrated by their courteousness.²⁴

¹⁷Department of Information Malaysia, "Information Malaysia- Population Demography," *Mygov - The Government of Malaysia's Official Portal*, accessed November 23, 2022, <https://www.malaysia.gov.my/portal/content/30114?language=my>.

¹⁸Marshelayanti Mohamad Razali, and Wan Asna Wan Mohd Nor, "Society And Politics in Malaysia: A Brief Review," Essay, in *Dynamisme Masyarakat Malaysia* [Dynamism of Malaysian Society]. (Tanjung Malim, Perak: Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2020), 163-74.

¹⁹Siti Sara Ibrahim, Dalila Daud, Khusnul Hidayah, Amir Shaharuddin, and Al-Amirul Mukmin Al-Amin, "Waqf Integrated Income Generating Model (WIIGM) for Enhancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) in Malaysia: An Evaluation of Behavioural Intention," *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*, August. 2022 <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoes-02-2022-0030>.

²⁰Mohd Nordin Ibrahim, *The Concept of Rahmah in Governance* (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2019)

²¹Nafisah Abdul Hamid, *Language Politeness - The Use of Greetings and Euphemisms in Communication* (Singapore: Singapore Malay Language Center, Singapore Ministry of Education, 2015), <https://pdfslide.net/download/link/penggunaan-sistem-sapaan-daneuphemisme-dalam-komunikasi>

²²Abdul Hamid Mar Iman, and Mohammad Tahir Sabit Haji Mohammad, "Waqf as a Framework for Entrepreneurship," *Humanomics* 33, no. 4 (2017): 419–40. <https://doi.org/10.1108/h-01-2017-0015>.

²³Suryani Awang, Mariyna Maros, and Noraini Ibrahim, "Malay Values in Intercultural Communication," *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 2, no. 3, (2013): 201–5. <https://doi.org/10.7763/ijssh.2012.v2.96>.

²⁴Kuang Ching Hei, Wong Ngan Ling, and Maya Khemlani David, "The Perceived Value of Silence and Spoken Words in Malaysian Interactions," *SEARCH: The Journal of the South East Asia Research Centre for Communication and Humanities* 7 no. 1, (2015): <https://doi.org/10.7603/s40931-015-0003-1>.

Rahmah entails three main stages of philological analysis, namely information, socialization, and transformation.²⁵ In the information phase, the normative definition of *Rahmah* is a universal affection addressed to the entire universe. In the socialization phase, the normative definition of *Rahmah* is socialization via teaching with the prime example of the Prophet, who declared *Rahmah* as the identity of Muslims regardless of whether they constitute the minority or majority group. With *Rahmah*, affection dominates over hatred. Lastly, in the transformation phase, *Rahmah* appears as a classic and contemporary 'sufistic' lifestyle that actively spreads affection to all creatures, with no insight of girded exoteric status.

The text of the Qur'ān on which the philological analysis focuses entails verses that contain the term 'mercy'. This is explicitly stated in al-Anbiya' 21:107 which represents the vision and grand narrative of Islam namely "*lial-Rahmah'ālamīn*", spreading affection worldwide. The term 'mercy' always appears at the beginning of each *surah* – other than al-Taubah – particularly *al-Rahmān* (the Merciful) and *al-Rahīm* (the Most Merciful) in the phrase *Bismillah*. According to Fadl (2001), the Qur'ān constantly highlights values such as justice, honesty, compassion, goodness, and truth as natural and innate human characteristics.

The actions or the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) have been the guiding source for Muslims all over the world.²⁶ It is clearly stated in the Qur'ān in Al-Anbiya verse 107 which translates as, "And We have not sent you oh Muhammad except as a *Rahmah* or mercy to the world."²⁷ In fact, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) brought an abundance of *Rahmah* and mercifulness to the whole world and to all mankind. *Rahmah* also implicates being loving and caring. Love and care are essential to the wellbeing, happiness, and survival of human beings. Without these attributes, there would be no life, respect, or collaboration among them.

Malaysia practices a high-power distance culture, that is, "*the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a society expect and accept that power is allocated unequally*". Whereby, the employees view organisational hierarchy as a form of inequity between those in higher and lower positions.²⁸ Resultantly, these employees are more likely to just follow orders and avoid being perceived as insubordinate.²⁹ A high-power distance culture is characterised by paternalism, whereby the leader takes on the role of a parent who is responsible for providing support and protection to those under his care.³⁰ Little do such leaders know that

²⁵Rosidin and Handoko Ja'far, "Philological Analysis on Normative Historical Practical Term *Rahmah* in Qur'ān," *Abjadia: International Journal of Education* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.18860/abj.v3i1.5915>.

²⁶Khairul Azhar Idris, "Promoting *Rahmah* as a System of Life," *Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia* (IKIM), accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.ikim.gov.my/new-wp/index.php/2019/12/09/promoting-rahmah-as-a-system-of-life/>.

²⁷Al-Anbiya 21:107.

²⁸Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival* (New York; London: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

²⁹Raquel Durán-brizuola, Grettel Brenes-leiva, Martin Solis, and Federico Torres-Carballo, "Effects of Power Distance Diversity within Workgroups on Work Role Performance and Organizational Citizenship Behavior," *Tecnología En Marcha* 29 no. 2, (2016): 63–76; Albert Puni, and Alex Anlesinya, "Whistleblowing Propensity in Power Distance Societies," *Journal of Global Responsibility* 8, no. 2, (2017): 212–24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jgr-02-2017-0005>

³⁰William Gentry, Todd Weber, and Golnaz Sadri. "Empathy in the Workplace: A Tool for Effective Leadership," In *Annual Conference of the Society of Industrial Organizational Psychology* (New York, 2007). <https://cclinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/empathyintheworkplace.pdf>.

empathy can bind human values. The matter of empathy in the Malaysian context has attracted the interest of multiple parties including Datuk Hussamuddin Yaacob, who holds the positions of the Head of Kumpulan Karangkrif and is also its founder and Managing Director. He emphasises the importance of leaders displaying empathy and integrity when addressing issues, especially in times of crisis. This indirectly indicates the importance of empathetic leaders in making employees feel safe and valued and, therefore, fostering their sense of trust and belonging.

Leaders with high awareness and attention to detail, an understanding of emotional aspects, and a willingness to care are needed if workers are to be successful.³¹ Empathetic leadership entails the highest attention and emotional regard towards the workers. Attention and awareness is a mindful leadership style³², one that focuses on understanding other people's emotional situations and the willingness to care and take relevant actions which is termed as empathetic leadership.³³ In the home-front environment, an individual can rely on family and friends for support; at work, they can turn to their co-workers and colleagues. However, leaders can show empathy as well. By doing so, leaders create a powerful bond that encourages and sustains followers in their efforts to improve their workplace performance.³⁴

In the same way, an empathetic leader can increase employee performance, job satisfaction, and workplace innovation due to the emotional relationship with his followers, specifically with regards to how much the former understands the latter's work situation, invests in emotional understanding, and provides emotional security for them.³⁵ Human beings use empathy to survive because anyone who shows empathy can be trusted and be invited to work with others.³⁶ Thus, empathy helps develop good relationships between people. The need for such a model has increased significantly as workplace performance increasingly relies on employees' cognitive and emotional labor. The model's results show that empathetic leadership has a significant and direct relationship with job satisfaction. A mindful leadership is significantly related to empathetic leadership, turnover intention, and self-regulation.³⁷ The more mindful the leader is the more empathy he has, which leads to lower turnover intention and higher self-regulation among the

³¹Amin Wibowo, and Widya Paramita, "Resilience and Turnover Intention: The Role of Mindful Leadership, Empathetic Leadership, and Self-Regulation," *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 29, no. 3 (2021): e154805182110687. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518211068735>.

³²Jochen Reb, Jayanth Narayanan, and Sankalp Chaturvedi, "Leading Mindfully: Two Studies on the Influence of Supervisor Trait Mindfulness on Employee Well-Being and Performance," *Mindfulness* 5, no. 1 (2012): 36–45. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-012-0144-z>.

³³Ned Kock, Milton Mayfield, Jacqueline Mayfield, Shaun Sexton, and Lina M. De La Garza, "Empathetic Leadership: How Leader Emotional Support and Understanding Influences Follower Performance," *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 26 no. 2 (2018): 217–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051818806290>.

³⁴Graham B. Bell, and Harry E. Hall Jr. "The Relationship between Leadership and Empathy," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 49, no. 1, (1954): 156–57. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0053927>.

³⁵Kock Mayfield, Mayfield, Sexton, and Garza. "Empathetic Leadership: How Leader Emotional Support and Understanding Influences Follower Performance," *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 26 (2): 217–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051818806290>.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Amin Wibowo and Widya Paramita, "Resilience and Turnover Intention: The Role of Mindful Leadership, Empathetic Leadership, and Self-Regulation," *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 29, no. 3 (2021): e154805182110687. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518211068735>.

followers. Based on the above discussion, the current study attempts to explore the element of *Rahmah* in empathetic leadership among Muslim leaders.

Basically, empathy is a component of emotional intelligence³⁸ and it can be expressed either verbally or non-verbally. It is effective when it communicates with people by sharing the encouragement and support. Expressing empathy through verbal communication also promotes the practise of careful listening and allows for space of various viewpoints as well as the expression of varying emotions in other people.³⁹ This theory believes that a leader should be able to communicate with their workforce in a way that shows compassion and respect for workers. At the same time, leaders who are adept at using this style of language frequently help their teams develop strong interpersonal bonds. By utilising this language, the leader can acknowledge the employee's success and validate unfavourable employee sentiment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study is explanatory in nature. Data was collected from each employee of Waqf institutions throughout Malaysia individually in their natural environment. Beyond administering the questionnaire to the employees, the researcher did not interfere with the normal activities in the institutions. The unit of analysis was the individual employee at the Waqf institutions responsible for handling and managing Waqf matters.

3.2 Population

Some information of the employees was taken from the institutions' databases or websites, whilst other was obtained directly from the employees via phone and email. Hence, the probability sampling technique was regarded as the most suitable for this study because the available data was defined for constructing the sampling frame.⁴⁰ Table 1 shows that a total of 216 employees are involved in managing and handling Waqf issues in Waqf institutions throughout Malaysia. Cluster sampling was applied to sort the units in the study population into groups⁴¹ known as clusters.⁴² Due to the uneven distribution of Waqf employees throughout Malaysia, the study population was clustered into groups by states. This ensured the appropriateness and adequacy of the number of samples taken from each cluster (state).

Table 1. Samples Distributed by State (Cluster)

No	State (Cluster)	Number of Staff (Population)	%	Sample Size
1	Perlis	5	0.02	3
2	Kedah	19	0.09	15

³⁸Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.

³⁹Jacqueline Rowley Mayfield, Milton Ray Mayfield, and Jerry Kopf. "The Effects of Leader Motivating Language on Subordinate Performance and Satisfaction," *Human Resource Management* 37, no. 3-4 (1998): 235-48. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(sici\)1099-050x\(199823/24\)37:3/4%3C235::aid-hrm6%3E3.0.co;2-x](https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1099-050x(199823/24)37:3/4%3C235::aid-hrm6%3E3.0.co;2-x).

⁴⁰Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill, *Research Methods for Business Students* (New York: Financial Times Prentice Hall, 2009).

⁴¹Bruce Frey, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation* (Los Angeles: SAGE reference, 2018).

⁴²Corbetta Piergiorgio, *Social Research: Theory, Methods and Techniques* (USA: Sage Publications, 2003) <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209922>.

No	State (Cluster)	Number of Staff (Population)	%	Sample Size
3	Pulau Pinang	8	0.04	7
4	Perak	23	0.11	19
5	Wilayah Persekutuan	10	0.05	8
6	Selangor	50	0.23	39
7	Negeri Sembilan	9	0.04	7
8	Malacca	9	0.04	7
9	Johor	20	0.09	15
10	Pahang	27	0.13	22
11	Terengganu	18	0.08	13
12	Kelantan	6	0.03	5
13	Sabah	5	0.02	3
14	Sarawak	7	0.03	5
TOTAL		216	1	68

Source: Limited Information from SIRCS

3.3 Measurement Scales

Empathetic leadership was examined via the empathetic segment of the Motivating Language scale.⁴³ This scale focuses on the way leaders express their emotional support and understanding to their followers. Simultaneously, the Management Effectiveness scale was also adapted from a previous study.⁴⁴ The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for analysing frequency, mean, and standard deviation. A 5-level mean score scale was used for this purpose.⁴⁵ Table 2 presents the interpretations.

Table 2. 5-Level Mean Score Scale

Mean	Level
1.00-2.19	Very Low
2.20-3.39	Low
3.40-4.59	Moderate
4.60-5.79	High
5.80-7.00	Very High

This study also employed the qualitative method for enquiry using different Islamic councils to observe the patterns of attributes. The fundamental goal of using qualitative research is to conduct the in-depth analysis of an issue within its context with the aim to understand the issue

⁴³Jacqueline Mayfield, Milton Mayfield, and Christopher P. Neck. "Speaking to the Self: How Motivating Language Links with Self-Leadership," *International Journal of Business Communication* 58, no. 1, (2017): e232948841773186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488417731861>.

⁴⁴Siti Alawiah Siraj, "An Empirical Investigation into the Accounting, Accountability and Effectiveness of Waqf Management in the State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRCS) in Malaysia," (PhD Dissertation, Cardiff University, 2012).

⁴⁵Ungku Norulkamar Ungku Ahmad, "Technostress and Organisational Commitment among Librarians in the Malaysian Public Higher Learning Institutions" (2011), <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Technostress-and-organisational-commitment-among-in-Ahmad-Norulkamar/59ff6d3827190d0a83dab4496ddb854d825ecb15>

from the perspective of the participants.⁴⁶ Due to the limited number of studies on leaders in relation to the *Rahmah* concept, this study would contribute significantly in studying this phenomenon.⁴⁷

The next stage involved conducting semi-structured interviews with several experts in Islamic religious councils. This was done to achieve a better understanding of the utilisation of *Rahmah* in their leadership style. These practitioners and leaders consisted of senior managers at the Islamic councils. The objective of the interviews and focus group discussions was to identify how *Rahmah* is applied within the organisation. Finally, the obtained data was transcribed and coded and was analysed.⁴⁸

4. Results and Discussion

The Islamic viewpoint on leadership is critical to understand excellent management in all sectors, notably for an organisation's performance, the workforce's benefit, and the hereafter. In fact, Islamic leadership must be established in accordance with Al-Qur'an with the aim to understand people and to serve as a role model. Therefore, the concept of *Rahmah* is one of the most significant aspects of Islamic leadership needed to ensure the society's well-being.

The current findings showed that on average, Islamic leaders in Waqf institutions have a high empathy level, as illustrated by the mean value of 5.23 and standard deviation of 1.09 (Table 3). Hence, it can be concluded that the leaders portray *Rahmah* in managing their employees. This also shows that the leaders are respectful, kind, and tolerant towards their subordinates. This is in accordance with the findings of a previous study which stated that empathy is a vital leadership concept.⁴⁹ Many leadership theories also claim that the ability to feel and display empathy is a crucial component of leadership.

Table 3. Mean level

Mean	Standard Deviation	Findings
5.23	1.09	High Empathy Level

Based on the aforementioned findings which indicate the high level of empathy demonstrated by Islamic leaders in Waqf institutions in Malaysia, it can be said that the concept of *Rahmah* is currently applied in their management. Furthermore, non-Islamic sectors may also benefit from embedding the concept of *Rahmah* in their organisational management for creating a better work environment. Thus, indirectly affecting the performance of their employees.

⁴⁶Victor C X Wang, *Scholarly Publishing and Research Methods across Disciplines* (Hershey, USA: IGI Global, Information Science Reference, 2019); Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (London: Sage Publication, 2014).

⁴⁷Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003).

⁴⁸Robert K. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (New York: Guilford Press, 2016); Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2019); Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (London: Sage, 1994).

⁴⁹William Gentry, Todd Weber, and Golnaz Sadri. "Empathy in the Workplace: A Tool for Effective Leadership," In *Annual Conference of the Society of Industrial Organizational Psychology* (New York, 2007), <https://cclinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/empathyintheworkplace.pdf>.

Empathy is important because harmony and unity must always be maintained and upheld as the basis of *Rahmah*.⁵⁰ It also increases self-awareness when dealing with emotions. As such, leaders should always try their best to understand their subordinates and be tolerant towards them. An effective leader must have empathy as part of their emotional intelligence.⁵¹ Empathy is inherently linked to the concept of *Rahmah*, which is particularly synonymous as a love attribute bestowed by Allah.

Finally, based on the findings, the concept of leadership should be approached from several perspectives including administrative, military, community, spiritual, and business perspectives. This is because empathic leaders could be more successful at motivating and leading their employees, as well as assisting them in alleviating workplace stress that would ultimately result in their improved performance. All this shows the significance of empathic leadership in creating a leader with better emotional intelligence.

Qualitative method was also used to gather more reliable responses from officers and leaders in Islamic religious councils in Malaysia. Structured interviews were used to interview the individuals entrusted with managing the Waqf properties. As claimed by one of the managers in Waqf development, “Even though we do not call our strategies *Rahmah*, empathy is one of the tools that is very important especially as we want to have a better relationship with the staff. I feel obligated [to know] the conditions of the staff and their families. Their current situation does affect their work performance. I always ask them how they are doing especially when it comes to their families. [This makes them feel] appreciated and important [in the eyes of] their superior and the organisation. Now we feel like we are one family. They do not feel any burden even though sometimes they have to work on weekends.” This is in accordance with a verse from Surah At-Taghabun, which translates as “He is the One who created you, then some of you are disbelievers, and some of you are believers. And Allah is Watchful of what you do.”⁵² (Surah). This verse depicts that Allah SWT decrees for superiors and their staff to work together as a family, as we are all from the same source. Despite differences in the levels of authority in an organisation, the journey leads to the same organisational mission and vision.

Another officer from the Islamic council stated, “It is important to have the element of empathy; the staff feel that their existence is important and thus create values to the organisation.” A verse from Surah Al-Imran states which translates as “The ones who spend (for Allah’s sake) in prosperity and adversity, and those who control anger and forgive people. And Allah loves those who are good in their deeds”⁵³ This shows that empathy entails spending out of what Allah SWT has blessed one with and leaders have the authority to do so in abundance. Such action would purify and bring more blessings for the staff and the organisation as a whole.

Another representative from the Islamic council said that it is better for leaders to understand and solve problems rather than create anger among the staff, as the former path leads to salvation. This is in accordance with verse 133 from Al-Imran, which translates as “Race with one another towards Forgiveness from your Lord and towards a paradise the width of which spans the heavens and the earth. It has been prepared for the God-fearing.”⁵⁴

An officer stated that she takes about half an hour before going home to mingle with all her staff in order to keep track of their well-being and to build a better relationship with them. She

⁵⁰Mohd Nordin Ibrahim, *The Concept of Rahmah in Governance* (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2019).

⁵¹Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.

⁵²At-Taghabun, 64:2.

⁵³Al-i-Imran 03:134.

⁵⁴Al-i-Imran 03:133.

found this strategy as very effective in gaining their trust and affection. She said that being a leader does not merely entail assigning tasks and making decisions. It also entails gaining the employees' trust, so that they would do their assigned jobs with greater attention and responsibility.

She also said that it is always better to say thanks and express gratitude, so that the staff members feel more appreciated. She added that leaders should identify staff members with unique specialities and make use of these specialities towards ensuring productivity.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the results, it can be concluded that *Rahmah* is evident among the leaders in the State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRCs). This is because the Malay culture is heavily influenced by Islamic philosophy and practices. Islam is a monotheistic religion which professes only one divine being as the Creator of the universe. Muslims believe that Islam is the true religion of God revealed to the humanity. It is a universal religion that can be practiced by anyone at any time in any place. Islam is a complete, holistic way of living that covers every aspect of life, leaving no stone unturned as it teaches mankind how to behave individually, socially, materially, morally, ethically, legally, culturally, politically, economically, and globally.

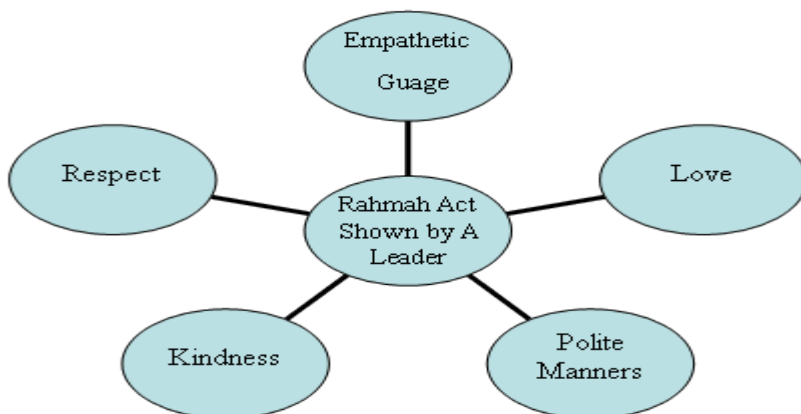


Figure 1. *Rahmah* shown by the leader

The high level of empathy amongst the SIRC leaders is also due to the Malay culture that puts a high regard on respecting one's employer. Islam is a religion of peace and love, hence it teaches people to respect others of different races and beliefs. Islam teaches us to respect human dignity regardless of faith, race, ethnicity, gender, and social status. As everyone is created by the Almighty Allah, the Maker of all, we must all treat one another with full honour, respect, love, and kindness. Additionally, Muslims speak in a polite manner to others. For example, Abu Hurayrah narrated Allah's Messenger as saying, "Whoever believes in God and the Last Day should speak a good word or remain silent. And whoever believes in God and the Last Day should show hospitality to his neighbour. And whoever believes in God and the Last Day should show hospitality to his guest."⁵⁵

⁵⁵Muhammad b Ismail al-Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book of Good Manners and Form (Al-Adab), Chapter "To honor guest and to serve him," Hadīth no 6136.

This study hence supports the notion of *Rahmah* as being the key element in Islamic leadership towards ensuring the well-being of the society. The leaders of organisations should lead and motivate their staff and workers with empathy. The leader must have a high sense of self-awareness when communicating with others. This is in line with the suggestion that empathy is a critical leadership concept.⁵⁶ This study hence suggests the application of the concept of *Rahmah* in all organisational practices and not only in the third government sector (TSO), such as Waqf institutions. This is because every organisation or group needs a good leader in order to achieve the desired success. Empathetic language, for example, allows leaders to understand their subordinates via the emphasis on emotional support, specifically the selection of words, which presumably has an effect on management effectiveness.⁵⁷ It also serves as a medium of good interpersonal relationship skills among leaders, which has been proven to improve both employee and organisational performance. Today, the concept of leadership has become highly significant in financial, political, and social arenas. From smaller institutions such as the family unit to bigger ones such as business organisations, good leaders are needed to maintain and advance the post-modern civilisation.

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Conflict of Interest

Author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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⁵⁶William Gentry, Todd Weber, and Golnaz Sadri, "Empathy in the Workplace: A Tool for Effective Leadership," In *Annual Conference of the Society of Industrial Organizational Psychology* (New York, 2007), <https://cclinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/empathyintheworkplace.pdf>.

⁵⁷Khusnul Hidayah, Dalila Daud, Nurazilah Zainal, and Siti Sara Ibrahim, "Effectiveness of Musharakah Financing in Empowering Small Micro Enterprises," *Studies of Applied Economics* 39, no. 10 (2021):. <https://doi.org/10.25115/eea.v39i10.5847>.

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