Developing Spiritual Intelligence: Some New Evidence

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Abstract: *Developing spiritual intelligence for Muslims is easy, because spiritual intelligence is linked to reflecting on relevant Islamic knowledge. At the beginning of the semester, 103 students at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) were assessed on their level of spiritual intelligence using the instrument devised by King (2008). As a part of their coursework, they had to listen to one Islamic talk a week on the Internet and keep a weekly diary of their reflections. They were free to choose the topic that interested them. Their task was to listen to the talk and write a weekly diary of their reflections. At the end of the semester, students' level of spiritual intelligence was measured a second time. There was a significant improvement in the students' level of spiritual intelligence, thus confirming the data presented in Fontaine and Ahmad (2013). Author has focused on identifying processes to develop spiritual intelligence and some empirical evidence has already been presented elsewhere (Fontaine, 2011, Fontaine & Ahmad, 2013, Fontaine, Ahmad & Oziev, 2017). This result suggests that developing spiritual intelligence can become a systematic and predictable process. Since then, this author has modified his framework and put more emphasis on Tafsir of the Qur'an as being the key success factor. The implications for leaders wishing to develop an organizational culture based on Islamic principles are discussed.*

Key Words: Spiritual intelligence, Internet, Islamic perspective, business processes.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper was initially presented at an international conference in 2014. The author has since then updated it after receiving feedback from participants and colleagues. In 2012 and 2013, the author interviewed senior managers in Malaysian commercial organizations about their perception of Islamic management. They saw a practical need for Islamic management in their organizations as they associated Islamic management with better work ethics among their employees. At the same time, they did not believe that their employees were "ready" for Islamic management. These interviews suggest that if scholars of Islamic management are going to gain credibility in the corporate world, they have to demonstrate that principles of Islamic management can be incorporated into the existing business processes of commercial organizations. This paper is such an effort. Since 2010, the author has used the Internet to develop the level of spiritual intelligence of more than 3,000 participants. Some of

the qualitative and quantitative data has been presented elsewhere (as will be explained shortly). However, this paper focuses on collecting additional data to confirm the possibility that developing spiritual intelligence can become a systematic process.

2. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to present quantitative findings that demonstrate that developing spiritual intelligence can be done systematically, quickly and cheaply.

3. SPIRITUALITY AND SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE

There is a vast literature on spirituality and spiritual intelligence. Pargament and Mahoney (2009) define spirituality as "the search for the Sacred". They see it as a process that includes a process of discovery, a process of conservation and a process of transformation. These three stages are briefly described as:

- Discovery: There are numerous reasons why people discover spirituality. Social context plays a critical role (Kirkpatrick, 2005).
- Conservation: Having discovered a spiritual connection, people often have to work hard to "hold on" to it. This is especially true when people experience difficult times (Balk, 1983).
- Transformation: Over the course of their lives, people often experience a series of events that make them question their beliefs. This often pushes people to re-evaluate their spiritual beliefs and to make fundamental changes to the way they experience their spirituality (Paloutzian, 2005).

Over the course of a lifetime, a person can go through several cycles of discovery / conservation / transformation.

Pargament and Mahoney's (2009) approach contrasts to Gardner (1983) who proposed a theory of multiple intelligences that was originally based on seven types of intelligences. In 1993, he added an eighth and, in 1998 he added a ninth (Mayer & Cobb, 2000). The ninth intelligence - which Gadner called "existential intelligence" - helps people to develop a theory of their existence and gives meaning to their life and actions. This new construct was later called spiritual intelligence (Mayer, 2000). Emmon (1999) in particular caused a stir when he claimed that spirituality is a central feature of new theories of motivation. This led to commentaries (Vaughan, 2002). The debate is on-going. Nonetheless, there are psychometric instruments that allow researchers to measure spiritual intelligence (King, 2008).

In this study, spirituality is about searching for meaning in one's life. Spiritual intelligence is about harnessing spiritual resources to solve problems.

There is a significant difference between the Western and the Islamic understanding of spirituality. The Western experience of spirituality is that of a personal quest for a meaning in life. It is often one's person's personal introspection and soul searching. Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian author of spiritual novels, has sold 150 million books. In Coelho's books, the dominant theme is the individual in search of the sacred within himself or herself. This personal experience can be within a faith or outside of faith.The Islamic experience of spirituality is that one can only become more spiritual by acquiring more Islamic knowledge. This new knowledge leads to develop one's connection with God within the boundaries of the Islamic faith. However, Islam places emphasis on collective acts of worship and collective learning. In many ways, developing greater spirituality is a collective experience, rather than a personal experience.

At the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Osman-Gani and Sarif (2011) edited a book with eight papers that discuss spirituality, its impact at the workplace and an Islamic perspective on spirituality. One paper proposes an instrument to measure *taqwa* (Kamil, Sulaiman, Osman-Ghani& Ahmad, 2011). Another paper proposes a framework for understanding workplace spirituality, HRD and organizational performance (Osman-Gani, Hashim & Wan Nazir, 2011). Anwar (2016) used a questionnaire developed by King (2008) to measure the spiritual intelligence of Muslim bank employees in Malaysia. He found that when Muslim employees had a higher level of spiritual intelligence, they showed more signs of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). This effort to develop the Islamic perspective to spirituality in management is on-going. The general observation is that Muslim scholars need to start presenting quantitative data to prove their case.

Generally, Pargament and Mahoney's (2009) process of discovery / conservation / transformation is quite accepted in the literature. Gardner's theory of spiritual intelligence adds more insights (i.e. some people maybe pre-disposed to be more spiritual). Luthans (2011) showed the link between spirituality and psychological capital. Psychological capital is a construct which is based on hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy. In the workplace, one can assume a positive relationship between spirituality and psychological capital. Psychological capital is positively correlated with work performance.

However, the question remains. How can a corporate leader facilitate the process of discovery, conservation and transformation among his or her employees?

4. THE HAPPY IN ISLAM PROJECT

Within this general interest in spirituality at work, my interest has been on utilizing the Internet as the platform to help students discover, conserve and transform their spirituality. Since 2010, I have been systematically developing spiritual intelligence among my undergraduate and postgraduate students. In self-reporting surveys, 75% of students report becoming more spiritual. Some details of this project have been reported elsewhere (Fontaine, 2011, Fontaine 2013, Fontaine & Ahmad 2013, Fontaine, Ahmad, & Oziev, 2017). A brief history follows.

In 2008, the author was teaching in a private university in Malaysia. One student - Aiman (not his real name) - had severe academic problems and Istarted counseling him. He was honest enough to report severe relationship problems with his parents and his girlfriend. His mood varied from extreme anger to severe depression. After a year of counseling, the traditional approach to counseling was not working. Having run out of ideas, the author asked him to watch Islamic videos on the Internet. This triggered a series of conversations about his purpose of existence, his perception of God and his relationship with Him. Prior to these conversations, his prayers were very irregular. He then decided to start praying five times a day. His anger and depression gradually disappeared. His academic performance and his relationship with his parents improved dramatically. In short, this student had to solve his spiritual issues before he could unlock his potential.

Muslims sometimes get criticized by non-Muslims because we want to implement Islamic principles in our lives. The unstated assumption is that Western principles are 'universal' and Islamic principles are 'parochial'. Aiman's experience showed that, at least for Muslims, Western principles don't always work but Islamic principles do.

In 2010, the author joined IIUM. Having witnessed how Aiman had changed after watching Islamic videos, the author wondered whether the same thing would happen to his students. As every student in IIUM is Muslim and the vision of the university is to integrate Islamic knowledge with secular knowledge, it is decided to give this Islamic videos assignment to my students in September 2010. Students were asked to watch one good quality[1] Islamic videos every week and write down their thoughts and feelings about the video. For the first half of the semester, they were free to watch whatever video they wish. For the second half of the semester, they were asked to focus on explanations of the Qur'an.

[1]Students are free to choose the videos they watch but the author monitors the content to avoid extremist speakers.

The response from the first batch was very enthusiastic. Many students reported that the assignment helped them deal with the stress of university life. During the semester, some students would come to me and explain which video they were watching that week and why they liked it so much. After such a positive response, author continued giving the assignment. Out of curiosity, author asked a research assistant to survey how many students still listened to Islamic talks one month after the assignment was over. 50% reported listening to Islamic talks at least once a month and 25% reported wanting to listen to Islamic talks but not having access to the right equipment (i.e. headphones to listen to the talks in the computer lab). 25% reported that they did not listen to talks once the assignment was over.

5. THE QUALITATIVE DATA

In 2011, a qualitative study of the reactions to the internet assignment was presented to Muslim psychologists (see Table 1). Table 1 suggests that, like Aiman, if IIUM students fix their relationship with God first, it often gives them more focus and more peace of mind to do better in their academic studies. Thus, there is a link between the spiritual and daily performance. These findings are consistent with the evidence reported in the literature.

Table 1: Some Qualitative Data

Coding	Are you happier after completing the assignment? They wrote.....
o35	Yes. I read the meaning of the Qur'an in Malay but it is only after listening to the *tafsir* that I started to feel that Allah is speaking to humans through the Qur'an
o39	Yes. There are certain things that I always wondered before and now, I feel satisfied as if one of the puzzles is placed at its right place and where it is supposed to be
o40	Yes. I feel so much happier. (I was) a young man who is still searching for his true inner color.
o41	Yes. I feel much more content than before. The talks gave me insights into things which I had overlooked and it cleared some of the doubts about Islam
o46	No difference (but) it is no doubt that the gaining of greater knowledge has made it easier for me to be a better Muslim. The only difficulty lies in the first step, which is the independent search for knowledge by myself
m64	Yes. I was never really happy with myself before this assignment because of my lack of being a good Muslim. I am not that much happier but I am more aware.
m66	Yes. I (now) realize that lots of things that I used to do were meaningless, such as reciting Qur'an without understanding the meaning of the verses
m67	Yes. I am able to better control my desires
m81	Yes. I have found answers too many questions that I had. I tend to be less involved in entertainment. I really hope that this little change will be continued

m133	I now recognize the barriers that I face
m142	Yes. I feel happier. There is a lot of new things I've learnt after doing this assignment. I like the most about *tafsir* of the *surah*. I never knew the meaning before and it is quite new knowledge for me
m164	No change except that I feel more guilty and I am more afraid of death

Source: Fontaine (2011)

After several semesters of collecting qualitative data, most students reported similar comments. These talks allowed students to explore topics that were relevant to them and helped them reflect on their purpose in life. Three general themes were knowing more about the meaning of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, knowing more about Allah's names and attributes and knowing more about Allah's Qadar. From these general observations, figure 1 was derived.
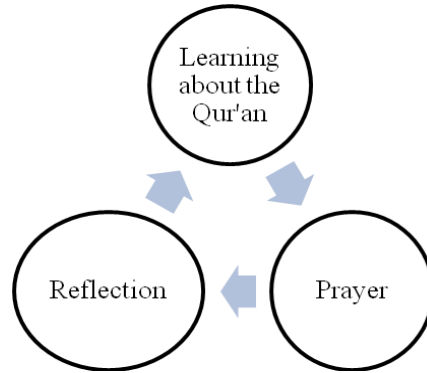
Figure 1: Conceptualizing the Happiness in Islam project
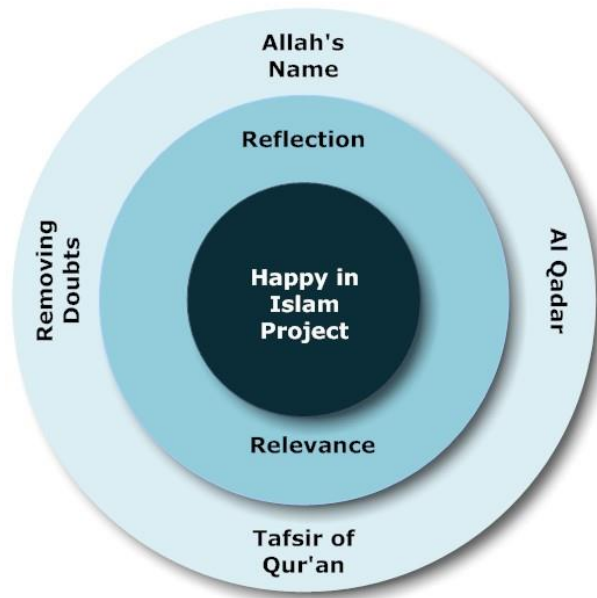
Source: Dr. Fontaine

Although Figure 1 is useful, it does not adequately reflect the process of becoming more spiritual. Figure 2 is more representative of the process of discovery / conservation / transformation.

Figure 2: Learning, Praying and Reflecting

Source: Dr. Fontaine

As Figure 2 shows, there is a relationship between learning about the Qur'an, prayer and self-reflection. The key is to understand that learning about Islam is not enough. Most Muslims know a lot about Islam but they have almost no understanding of what they recite in prayer. Specifically, Muslims need to understand the Qur'an so that their prayers become meaningful. That is the essence of the Happy in Islam project.

6. THE QUANTITATIVE DATA

In 2012, a PhD student argued that spiritual intelligence would probably better describe the Happy with Islam project. We decided to collect data on the spiritual intelligence of my students at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester (i.e. after they have finished listening to Islam talks). The instrument used was King (2008). The results are shown in Table2.

Table2: First survey (96 respondents)

No	Question	1st round	2nd round	Sign.
Q1	I have often questioned or pondered the nature of reality.	3.48	3.71	0.089
Q2	I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence.	3.9	3.95	n.s.
Q3	I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death.	3.7	3.84	n.s.
Q4	I recognize aspects of myself that are deeper than my physical body.	3.8	3.83	n.s.
Q5	I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.69	3.69	n.s.
Q6	It is difficult for me to sense anything other than the physical and material.	2.45	2.54	n.s.

Q7	My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations.	3.77	4.13	0.025
Q8	I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness	3.59	3.72	n.s.
Q9	I accept the theories about such things as life, death, reality, and existence.	4.47	4.5	n.s.
Q10	I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people.	4.11	4.11	n.s.
Q11	I am able to define a purpose or reason for my life.	4.21	4.2	n.s.
Q12	I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness.	3.61	3.67	n.s.
Q13	I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life.	3.81	3.85	n.s.
Q14	I define myself by my deeper, non-physical self.	3.54	3.79	0.04
Q15	When I experience a failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.	4.29	4.28	n.s.
Q16	I often see issues and choices more clearly while in higher states of consciousness/awareness.	4.06	3.84	0.06
Q17	I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe.	3.79	3.84	n.s.
Q18	I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life.	3.75	4.04	0.022
Q19	I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life.	4.06	4.15	n.s.
Q20	I recognize qualities in people which are more meaningful than their body, personality, or emotions	4.04	4.1	n.s.
Q21	I have deeply contemplated whether or not there is some greater power.	3.75	3.91	n.s.
Q22	Recognizing the nonmaterial aspects of life helps me feel centered.	3.58	3.86	0.032.
Q23	I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.	4.18	4.19	n.s.
Q24	I have developed my own techniques for entering higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.8	3.81	n.s.

The Cronbach Alpha was 0.801. Out of the 24 questions, there were significant differences in 5 of the questions (Q7, Q14, Q16, Q18, and Q22). In particular, listening to Islamic talks seemed to have the most impact on question no 7 ("*my ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations*"), which is a good description of resilience.

In 2013, I decided to repeat the exercise of collecting data using the same instrument. This time, 103 undergraduate students took part. Again, the students were surveyed at the beginning of the semester, they were told to listen to one Islamic talk on the Internet every week and they were surveyed a second time at the end of the semester. The data is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Second survey (103 respondents)

	Questions	**1st round**	**2nd round**	**Sign.**
Q1	I have often questioned or pondered the nature of reality.	3.51	3.81	0.001
Q2	I recognize aspects of myself that are deeper than my physical body.	3.63	4.00	0.001
Q3	I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence.	3.51	3.80	0.001
Q4	I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.50	3.74	0.001
Q5	I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death.	3.30	3.59	0.001
Q6	It is difficult for me to sense anything other than the physical and material.	2.70	2.78	0.001
Q7	My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations.	3.83	4.00	0.001
Q8	I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.46	3.66	0.001
Q9	I accept the theories about such things as life, death, reality, and existence.	4.29	4.54	0.001
Q10	I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people.	3.79	4.00	0.001
Q11	I am able to define a purpose or reason for my life.	3.79	4.13	0.001
Q12	I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness.	3.22	4.02	0.001
Q13	I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life.	3.55	3.85	0.001
Q14	I define myself by my deeper, non-physical self.	3.40	3.76	0.001
Q15	When I experience a failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.	3.89	4.10	0.001
Q16	I often see issues and choices more clearly while in higher states of consciousness/awareness.	3.70	3.95	0.001
Q17	I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe.	3.45	3.78	0.001
Q18	I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life.	3.67	3.89	0.001
Q19	I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life.	3.61	3.97	0.001
Q20	I recognize qualities in people which are more meaningful than their body, personality, or emotions	3.85	4.19	0.001
Q21	I have deeply contemplated whether or not there is some greater power.	3.59	3.67	0.001

Q22	Recognizing the nonmaterial aspects of life helps me feel centered.	3.59	3.87	0.001
Q23	I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.	3.58	3.98	0.001
Q24	I have developed my own techniques for entering higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.23	3.58	0.001

The Cronbach Alpha was 0.846. Surprisingly, the group as a whole reported a significant difference in every question asked. This requires some explanation. There are two facts which are at play:

1. I showed the data collected to a statistician at UniverstiKebangsaan Malaysia(UKM). We discussed the validity of the instrument, the data collection procedure and the kind of statistical tests used. He confirmed that there is nothing wrong with my methodology. Due to the mathematical formula used to calculate the T-test, this test is very sensitive when there is large sample and when the standard deviation is very low. This is a partial explanation.

2. The other factor to bear in mind is that these students were doing this internet assignment for the second time. They first did the assignment in their first year introduction class to management. For this batch, I had only collected qualitative data. The same group took the course on organizational behavior in which this data was collected.

One student, for example, wrote in his report, "*This is the second time that I am doing this assignment. I was afraid that it would be boring but I enjoyed it more the second time*." In other words, the students were already very familiar with the process of listening to Islamic talks and they probably were less apprehensive of the overall purpose of the assignment. As a consequence, they probably benefited more from the process that students doing it for the first time.

7. THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

It is obvious that universities play a critical role in educating the next generation of Muslim leaders. Based on experience, the author would recommend that universities in the Muslim world consider the following ideas:

a) In the first year, introduce at least one compulsory Islamic personality assignment for every student. The content is freely available on YouTube so there is no significant cost involved. This will expose the students to on-line learning. It will help develop the spirituality of students. This will correspond to the discovery stage.

b) In the second year or third year, students should do a second Islamic personality assignment. The aim is no longer to develop their spirituality but to equip the students with a skill that they can use throughout their life. This corresponds to the conservation / transformation stage.

Clearly, most universities in the Muslim world teach Islamic subjects. But these subjects tend to be driven by a syllabus. The purpose is for students to pass a subject, not necessarily connect with God. If there are 10,000 students taking a subject, 10,000 people are expected to learn exactly the same thing. With on-line learning, every student can personalize their learning. If there are 10,000 people taking the same course, each student has the opportunity to solve their most pressing spiritual questions. It is a completely different experience of learning about Islam.

This simple and cost-effective approach will help Muslim students understand their religion in a more meaningful manner.

8. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the author's argument are as follows.

Islamic management requires Muslims to have a certain level of spiritual intelligence. Although Western scholars have differences of opinion about what that implies, Muslim scholars agree that Islamic spiritual intelligence is when one gets closer to Allah by reflecting on Islamic knowledge. Developing greater spiritual intelligence without improving one's knowledge of Islam is probably something quite rare.

The Happy in Islam project (i.e. the qualitative and quantitative data reported) shows that the spirituality of Muslims students can be develop systematically, easily and at no cost. Muslim organizations can adapt the process to suit the training and development needs of Muslim employees their organizations.

A key aspect of this research is that developing insights into the Qur'an is critical. The struggle in the Islamic Banking and Finance industry has been to develop the *shariah* framework necessary for the industry to grow. The struggle in Islamic management is completely different. It is about changing the mindset of business leaders and ordinary employees by exposing them to high-quality Islamic content. With this content, their understanding of Islam will evolve and this will change the corporate culture in their respective organizations.

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