

Full Length Research Paper

## Team management: The Islamic paradigm

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The success of any organization greatly depends on the collective performance of teams working under that umbrella. Therefore to measure/monitor the effectiveness of a team is of vital importance for both practitioners and researchers. Many researchers have presented their models explaining how to respond to this concern. This study critically analyzes the existing methods of assessing effectiveness of teams and found two main deficiencies in the current models (lack of accountability and satisfaction). The current study provides 'team management and the Islamic paradigm' (TMIP) instrument to measure the effectiveness of team performance, thus filling the gap in contemporary approaches. Although TMIP instrument is based on the Islamic perspective, it provides a unique blend of Islamic and existing ways of measuring the effectiveness of team management. TMIP instrument analyzes team effectiveness from three dimensions including values, environment and rewards and accountability. This is a seminar work from an Islamic perspective; however, future research opportunities, given at the end of this paper, can open new horizons of research for Islamic scholars.

**Key words:** Islamic paradigm, team effectiveness, satisfaction, environment.

### INTRODUCTION

A team refers to a specific kind of group whose members are collectively accountable for achieving common objectives and exhibiting cooperative attitudes (Kanaga et al., 2002). It is a group of individuals with a common purpose, focused and united to achieve specific tasks or set of objectives (Neill, 2005). As such, teams are important determinants of corporate success (Barrick et al., 2007). Team success does not start with results, but instead starts with building of an effective team that can deliver on its promise. Most of the problems teams encounter are predictable and preventable (Kanaga et al., 2002). Better team performance comes about when people are stimulated to do their job better, for example, they look after their customers in a better way and solve problems better at work with their colleagues. This is a discretionary behavior, in the sense that employees give and can take away cooperation and effort to 'go the extra mile' once they have met the minimum standards of performance (Purcell et al., 2003).

This behavior depends on the environment in which teams inculcate proficiency among team members, who

who show their commitment, resolve and unwavering determination for the success of the team. The Islamic paradigm of the team focuses on these key elements along with a unique concept of enhanced rewards and just accountability.

### EXISTING PATTERN OF TEAM MANAGEMENT

Although team management has evolved over the decades, this aspect of HRM has not come of age yet. Setting clear direction, building organizational support, empowering team members, identifying key relationships and monitoring external factors (Kanaga et al., 2002) can enable teams to accomplish their tasks. Organizational culture and environment has been studied extensively to explore new dimensions for effective team management. Culture is a contextual and qualitative field of observation (Houldsworth, 2008), while environment is a set of measurable properties in the working surrounding, perceived directly or indirectly by the people who live and work in that environment and who assume that it influence their motivation and behavior (Litwin et al., 1968). It is usually seen to be different from culture and more quantitative and measurable (Denison, 1996). Environment has a meaningful impact on team performance,

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and it can influence motivation to such an extent that discretionary effort would be leveraged, or would not under a negative environment (Litwin et al., 1968). Several dimensions of the environment have been identified to assess the effectiveness of a team including flexibility, responsibility and commitment (Davidson et al., 2005), but factors such as accountability, proficiency and satisfaction are out of focus, thereby missing vital links to enhance productivity of the team.

### **Islamic paradigm of team management**

Diversity in the understanding and application of the Islamic teachings for socio-scientific order increases exponentially across space and time. The universal truth of divine knowledge and its crystallization in real world-systems has left an abiding legacy for all generations to reveal fresh and new answers and directions to the problems of human life (Choudhury, 2004). The chief reason for adopting a religious perspective for team management in this article is that all religions are supposed to preach good and beneficial things (Abbasi et al., 2010). Islamic paradigm of team management is based on trust, responsibility, proficiency, discipline, commitment, cooperation, flexibility and justice (Alhabshi et al., 1994).

Islamic paradigm of team management introduces the concept of expended reward (al - Qur'ān 6:160) and strict accountability (al - Qur'ān 99:7-8). It is a set of beliefs and morals, a social doctrine, and a call to righteousness among all members of the team (Asad, 2007). Everywhere in the Islamic world, Muslims have witnessed a return to Islamic traditions, that is, to the fundamentals of their faith as an alternative to materialism (The Economist, 1994). Islam, unlike many other religions, governs every aspect of life (public and private, political and economic), and as such, is relevant to business activities (Tayeb, 1997).

Muslim scholars identified several work related characteristics which fulfill requirements of modern management practices and provided a dual benefit for them. Firstly, these characteristics, having their roots in al - Qur'ān and Sunnah, help eliminate ethical dilemma, which mainly occur due to the weakness of the individual's character, through inculcating standard values and ethics while hiring/acquiring professionals for specific objectives in the team. Secondly, these characteristics provide suitable environment for better individual and team performance. These traits maintain flexible, but responsible attitude to achieve set objectives. The traits, identified by Ali (2001) as an essential part of Muslim employees, are: hard work, self-reliance, loyalty, dedication and creativity, while Latifi (1997) found that the work related characteristics available in Muslim workforce are: equality, responsibility, cooperation, kindness and consultation.

The concept of Islamic paradigm of team management has its origin in al - Qur'ān and the sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), who

preached that hard work causes sins to be absolved and that 'no one eats better than that which he eats out of his work'. Islam speaks about honesty, flexibility, justice, responsibility, equitability and fair system of rewards. Islam encourages acquiring skills and technology for excellence and continuous improvement in performance standards of the team (Darwish, 2000). Management policies are often adopted and implemented with some reference from the national context within which the organizations operate. Religions in many countries, with either secular or religious constitutions, have a certain degree of influence on the cultural characteristics of their people and their institutions. In countries with predominantly Muslim majority, this influence is far more extensive and inclusive (Tayeb, 1997).

Although we are living in the age of secularism, epistemology of Islam demands that Muslims return to the basic construct of Islamic teachings (Choudhury, 1994). Everywhere in the Islamic world, from West Africa to Middle East, and Central Asia to Far East, Muslims have started to return to Islamic traditions, that is, to the fundamentals of their faith, in the wake of social and cultural failure of Western societies in spite of meticulous scientific and technological advancements.

Apparently, there is subtle difference in the terms used within contemporary management onomatology and Islamic management terminologies. In essence, there is significant distinction between the two: Islamic being essential and intrinsic in nature, while contemporary being optional and extrinsic. This is because the nucleus of all contemporary management approaches / practices is invariably profitable, while the fundamental makeup of the human society, where all human-beings are equal and are supposed to help and complement each other for collective prosperity, is ignored.

### **Purpose of this study**

The purpose of this study is to extricate components of team management from the Islamic perspective, thus establishing the Islamic paradigm of team management for the benefit of Muslim professionals, business organizations and researchers, and for a better understanding of the human resource and business methodologies in countries where Muslims are a majority. The second important objective of this paper is to explain how the Islamic paradigm of team management coordinates with the existing approaches of team management and how it differs. Tools chosen for this comparison are Islamic Work Ethics (IWE), developed by Ali (1988), and organizational climate survey (OCSII) emerging out of the work of Litwin and Stringer (1968).

### **Islamic work ethics (IWE)**

The concept of Islamic work ethics has its origin in al - Qur'ān, the sayings of and the practices of Prophet

Muhammad (PBUH). Al - Qur'an speaks about honesty and justice in trade. In Islamic work ethics, there is no room for laziness and waste of time, either by remaining idle or engaging oneself in an unproductive activity. The Islam work ethics view dedication to work as a virtue. Sufficient effort should go into one's work, which is seen as obligatory for a capable individual. The Islamic work ethics emphasizes cooperation in work, and consultation is encouraged to overcome obstacles and avoid mistakes (Darwish, 2000). Hard work is seen as a virtue, and those who work hard are more likely to get ahead in life. Conversely, not working hard is seen to cause failure in life (Ali, 2001). The value of work in the Islamic work ethics is derived from both the accompanying intention and the results of the work, if all necessary requirements are fulfilled.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE SURVEY (OCSII)**

Emerging out of the work of Litwin and Stringer (1968), the organizational climate survey (OCSII) was widely used to measure the climate as a predictor of team performance. OCSII assesses six dimensions of the climate for team effectiveness: flexibility, responsibility, standards, rewards, clarity and team commitment. Based on gaps in the climate for team effectiveness, improvement programs are specified to improve individual and team effectiveness, and enhance climate and ultimately team/ organizational performance (Davidson et al., 2005).

### **ANALYZING OCSII**

There are two major deficiencies in OCSII: lack of accountability and partial approach to satisfaction. In organizational climate survey, some important dimensions such as minimizing bureaucracy, autonomy, clarity and financial rewards have been addressed effectively, but even after all these measures, team members have not been held accountable for their failures. Rewards and accountability should go hand-in-hand with better outcome. Even then, if teams fail to achieve their objective, the most important element for every team member is the testimony of their intentions. Secondly, deficiency is the focus on material rewards, ignoring other important aspects which can contribute to the satisfaction of individuals working as a team. These aspects may include environmental and spiritual wellbeing of those who are part of the team. Islamic paradigm of team management takes a holistic approach to satisfaction and provides work settings where every team member feels comfort in terms of financial, environmental and spiritual satisfaction.

### **Team Management as the Islamic Paradigm (TMIP) instrument**

In the light of the literature review, the researcher developed the instruments as shown in Table 1 to measure effectiveness and performance of the team under Islamic paradigm.

### **COMPONENTS OF ISLAMIC PARADIGM OF TEAM MANAGEMENT**

There are usually five types of teams that exist in organizations: functional operating teams, cross-

functional teams, self-managed teams, self-defining teams and executive teams. Effectiveness and productivity of teams depend on the environment in which they operate. The concept of environment provides a way to describe the impact of organization and organizational life on the motivation and behavior of team members. It is defined as the individuals' perception of aspects of their working surrounding that directly affects performance (Davidson et al., 2005). Components of team management, subsequently delineated, describe the environment which the Islamic paradigm of team management establishes across all types of teams for their effectiveness and success.

### **Flexibility**

Islam calls on Muslims to be effective and productive members of teams. It embodies a flexibility that allows Muslims to do so without any internal or external conflict. Flexibility is an integral part of the Islamic way of life including social, cultural and legal aspects. In fact, one can say it is one of the defining characteristics of Islamic law (Figure 1). Islamic law is both a methodology and the collection of positions adopted by Muslim jurists over the last 1400 years. Those centuries were witnessed by, nothing less than, 90 schools of legal thoughts, but the 21<sup>st</sup> century puts humans in the providential position to look back on this tradition, in order to find that which will benefit humans today (Gomaa, 2010). Flexibility is a critical ingredient for the overall workplace effectiveness. In an organizational environment, flexibility can improve employee engagement and job satisfaction and reduce stress (Friedman, 2010). Flexibility leads to minimized bureaucracy in the organization and encourages innovation (Houldsworth et al., 2006).

### **Responsibility**

Responsibility is the force that binds to the courses of action demanded by the team objectives. Team members should know their responsibilities, their targets, what they need to do to get which rewards, and what the consequences would be if they make mistakes (DeKrey et al., 2007). Responsibility leads to sufficient autonomy and it encourages taking reasonable risk to achieve objectives (Houldsworth et al., 2006).

Islam inculcates responsibility in every member of the society. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Whenever God makes a man responsible for other people, whether in greater or lesser numbers, he will be questioned as to whether he ruled his charges in accordance with God's decrees or not; and that will not be all. God will question him even about his family members" (Ibn Hanbal, on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar).

**Table 1.** Dimensions and elements of TMIP instrument.

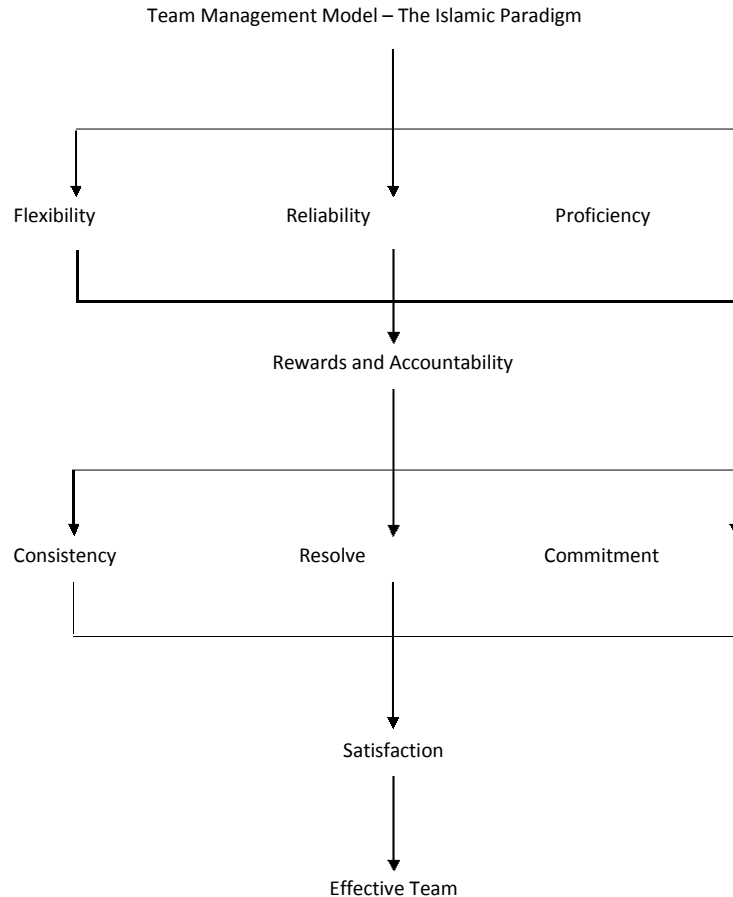
Value	Environment	Rewards and accountability
Justice and truthfulness at the workplace are necessary conditions for the success of the team.	Bureaucracy should be minimized and innovation should be encouraged	Continuous self evaluation helps the person to improve his performance.
Help and support among team members improves effectiveness of the team.	Success of the team leads to both material and spiritual satisfaction.	Good performance should be recognized and rewarded
Internalization of values and ethics is essential for better performance of the team.	One should be granted sufficient autonomy to take responsibility in his work.	People value practices more than words.
Respect of every one's integrity is the source of togetherness.	Making an effort to improve skills is essential for success of the team.	If one can not keep to time, one ought not to teach others to do so.
Dedication to work is virtue.	A person feels valued being part of this team and enjoys his work.	Every member of the team should have the right to ask questions.
Laziness is a vice.	Creative work is a source of satisfaction and accomplishment.	No one is above the law.
Good work benefits both oneself and others.	Team should have clarity and pride in its mission.	One is answerable to Allah (SWT) and his fellow humans to discharge duties assigned to him
Producing more than enough to meet one's personal needs contributes to the prosperity of the society as a whole.	Any man who works is more likely to get ahead in life.	One performs one's responsibilities for both personal and collective gains.
One should carry out the work to the best of one's ability.	A satisfied man is the one who meets deadlines at work.	Team leader treats members fairly and listens to their ideas and concerns.
Human relations among team members should be emphasized and encouraged.	Fulfilling job responsibilities lead to satisfaction.	Rewards and incentives positively influence one's performance
The value of work is derived from both accompanying intention and results, not just results or intentions.	One should constantly work hard to meet responsibilities.	Team leader serves as positive role model
Interpersonal communication and relationships contribute to team performance	My team has sufficient tools and technologies to perform the task	This organization has a fair system of awarding rewards and appreciation.
Employees have good balance between work and personal life	Team members consult each other and share their knowledge, experience and information.	Being accountable among team members is the culture in this team.

## Proficiency

Proficiency is commonly understood as doing marginally, more than the minimal requirement (Abbasi et al., 2009). Also, it means efficiency. This particular meaning obviously enhances productivity (Alhabshi et al., 1994). There may be two types of people, one who perform their duties scrupulously, but do not demonstrate any additional

commitment, and others who push themselves beyond the call of the duty (Beekun and Badawi, 1999) with a lot of energy and willingness to make sacrifices in the performance of their task. They are those who have proficiency (*ihsan*) and work tirelessly to carry out their duties over and above the call of duty.

Proficiency is the quality which ensures that organizational members exhibit little more than their prescribed



**Figure 1.** Islamic paradigm of team management.

and it is not possible to cover all the aspects; but in all, its manifestations of proficiency means excellence in team performance and effectiveness. Proficiency encourages continuous improvement and it means doing a good job or doing some job in a proficient manner. If every member of the team exhibits proficiency (*ihsan*), it will increase their effectiveness. Al - Qur’ān says:

“But do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee (al - Qur’ān 28:77)”.

### Rewards and accountability

There are several methods of rewards and accountability in contemporary management models, but all these procedures are based on manmade regulations which historically fail to provide a perfect mechanism (Abbasi et al., 2010). Islamic paradigm of team management introduces a unique concept of rewards and accountability based on Divine teachings. Al - Qur’ān says:

“He that doeth good shall have ten times as much to his

credit, but he that doeth evil shall only be recompensed according to his evil: no wrong shall be done unto (any of) them (al - Qur’ān 6: 160)”.

Islamic paradigm multiplies rewards of good performance and recognizes the contribution of every team member. Thus, it provides highly energized performing environment to the team. On the other hand, there is equally a strong mechanism of accountability, which is the Islamic paradigm of team management. Al - Qur’ān says:

“Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it also (al - Qur’ān 99:7-8)”.

Accountability is both an instrument and a goal. What started as an instrument to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency has gradually become a goal in itself. Accountability has become an icon for good performance both in the public and private sectors (Bovens, 2005), nor can a bearer of burdens bear another's burden. If one heavily laden should call another to (bear) his load, not

the least portion of it can be carried (by the other), even though they are virtually related (al - Qur'ān 35:18).

Accountability in this very broad sense is basically used to positively influence a state of affairs or the performance of a team. It comes close to 'responsiveness' and 'a sense of responsibility', that is, a willingness to act in a righteous and trustworthy manner (Bovens, 2005).

### **Consistency**

The tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has taught Muslims to be consistent in their work. Allah (SWT) loves one who is diligent and consistent in his work. A good team member is one who is dedicated and consistent in his work (Alhabshi et al., 1994), that is, consistent in delivering performance, maintaining standards and pursuing sustained improvement. Consistency demonstrates leadership confidence and control. It means that one should stay firm on track during rough times and maintain a solid vision ahead (White, 2008).

"Peace unto those who persevered in patience! Now how excellent is the final Home!" (al - Qur'ān 13: 24).

To meet standards, goal-oriented individuals work consistently and effectively as a team. They share a common purpose and persevere with patience to perform consistently at higher levels. Islamic paradigm of team management promotes consistent excellence in meeting performance standards both in personal and collective efforts and encourages continual improvement in all related fields: those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure! (al - Qur'ān 39:10)

### **Resolve**

Resolute persons continue to pursue their objectives efficiently (Safi, 1995). Resolve strengthens one's own inner belief and provides laser-like focus combined with unwavering determination to achieve collective objectives (Flynt, 2008). Resolve demands clarity of team's mission to enable every member of the team play their roles in achieving the team's objectives. Islamic teachings motivate individuals to patiently persevere. Therefore, patiently persevere, as did (all) Messengers of inflexible purpose; and be in no haste about the (Unbelievers) (al - Qur'ān 46: 35).

### **Commitment**

Islamic paradigm of team management places considerable emphasis on commitment and dedication to work. Intrinsic ethical values relate more closely to team commitment than extrinsic measures (Darwish, 2001).

Islamic paradigm of team management focuses on

strengthening intrinsic ethical values, for example, honesty, righteousness, truth, justice, etc., among team members. This strength of inner character in the team members guides them to strong commitment towards their objectives. The term most closely related to ethics in al-Qur'ān is *Khuluq*. The al-Qur'ān also uses a whole array of terms to describe the concept: *Khayr* (goodness), *birr* (righteousness), *adl* (justice), *haqq* (truth and right), *taqwā* (piety), etc. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "You are not better than people with red or black skins, unless you excel them in piety". In Islamic business ethics, no businessman is allowed to be dishonest. Give just measures and cause no loss (to others by fraud), but weigh with scales truthfully and uprightly and do not withhold things justly due to men (26: 181-183).

Islam does not tolerate interference in the market system by hoarding or other forms of manipulations. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: "He who hoards is a sinner." In Islamic business ethics, deceiving a buyer is a sin. Businessmen are not allowed to increase the sales through false oaths. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "The swearing (by the seller) may persuade the buyer to purchase the goods, but that will be deprived of Allah's blessing" (Beekun, 1997). A number of previous studies showed a relationship between ethical values and commitment. Team members who show strong affinity towards ethical values exhibit relatively high commitment (Oliver, 1990). Strong support to ethical values directly relate to higher team commitment (Saks et al., 1996). Other scholars have also found a positive relationship between ethical values and team commitment (Cote et al., 1991; Chusmir et al., 1988; Brief et al., 1980).

### **Satisfaction**

Satisfaction means how contented and happy team members are within their teams. Satisfaction and motivation are linked with each other. The more the satisfaction, the more motivated the team members will be.

There are three dimensions of satisfaction: material, environmental and spiritual. Material satisfaction means performance, based on financial rewards for the team. The Islamic paradigm of team management considers financial rewards as an important driver for motivation. Environmental satisfaction includes the working atmosphere where people interact with each other while carrying out their task. Islamic paradigm of team management promotes respect, help, support and unity among team members for collective achievements. To build an effective team and ensure a good working relationship, it is important to maintain respect for all team members. Respect of others while working together is the spirit of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "All Muslims are sacred to Muslims: they are brothers and helpers to one another". al - Qur'ān says:

"O ye who believe! Let not some men among you laugh

at others, it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former); nor let some women laugh at others, it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former). Neither defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames" (al - Qur'ān 49: 11).

Help and support is essential for team's success (Sneider, 2000). Islamic value system is full with teachings and motivations for helping and supporting others. al - Qur'ān says:

"Whoever recommends and helps a good cause becomes a partner therein, and whoever recommends and helps an evil cause, shares in its burden: and Allah hath power over all things" (al - Qur'ān 4:85).

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said; "Help each other in good and virtuous deeds, but do not help in sinful deeds and committing excesses on others". Islamic paradigm of team management emphasizes unity of the team as it is clearly directed in the following verse of al - Qur'ān:

Hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves (al - Qur'ān 3: 103). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "The hand of Allah (SWT) is with the group". It means if the team members are united and pursue their goals with unity, The Creator will help and support them to achieve their objectives. Where people respect, help and support each other, or remain united while working, such an environment will obviously lead to greater functional and spiritual satisfaction of team members. Spirituality is a prominent concept which is discussed in various professional fields. Spiritual satisfaction also involves psychological satisfaction, which is necessary for better performance of the individual. There is increasing interest in the spiritual assessment of people, because the worldly and countable side of the bored men has seized to become the life quality measurement. For most Muslims, a quality of life or level of satisfaction is not through measuring tangible and countable worldly goods and services, but for them, the quality of life indicator is one's spiritual and religious well-being, which nurtures one's feeling of gratification. There can be a debate on the possibility to measure the reliability of spiritual satisfaction. Although it is difficult for the profession which deals with human minds, however, it is useful to assess/measure spiritual satisfaction to understand individuals' metaphysical status to facilitate them for better performance as a team (Isgandarova, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

Effectiveness of the teams determines the destiny of the organization. The Islamic paradigm of team management is based on values emanating from the teaching of al - Qur'ān and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad

(PBUH). Islam is a complete code and provides guidance for every aspect of life. Team management is of significant importance in Islam. No wonder, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "The hand of Allah (SWT) is with the group". Therefore, we find adequate teachings to establish effective and satisfied teams, while incorporating Islamic values in team management paradigm as explained in this article.

Modern approaches to team management have evolved and developed many frameworks to measure their effectiveness. This paper critically analyzes contemporary approaches to foster effectiveness in the teams. Although these measures cover both social and psychological dimensions, they tend to be lost in material counting, ignoring the ethical and spiritual aspect of human makeup which is probably a stronger force to motivate the person to do his best for the success of the team.

Islamic paradigm of team management, delineated in this paper, attempts to fill this gap by incorporating values and accountability in measuring team effectiveness. The instrument developed and presented in this paper provides opportunity to future researchers to explore the effectiveness of teams under Islamic paradigm by examining the performance of business or social organizations in terms of their profitability/achievements before and after adopting the TMIP instrument. Researchers can also examine the impact of the TMIP instrument by observing a change in the team's environment from demotivating to energizing, and from energizing to high-performing environment.

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