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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### ACCOUNTABILITY: THE MARKER OF WISDOM, EXCELLENCE AND SUCCESS.

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#### Abstract

It is argued that accountability stems from within, that personal accountability is lacking in business these days, that accountability is central to Islam, that it is a mark of wisdom and a virtue, that it is the sole means of doing jobs thoroughly, that it leads to excellence, and that its absence has been responsible for the evils the world is brimming with in numerous arenas. The discussion demonstrates that individuals should have strong personal accountability that leads to their making right choices, being liable for their actions, and evading being concerned with outward appearances. It has been shown that accountability is the marker of wisdom, excellence, and success not only in this world but also in the hereafter.

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Today's world teems with serious problems brought about by people who are reckless, rash, and irresponsible. People of this sort never think of the consequences of their choices that they make impulsively. To take an example, a foolish ruler, surrounded by foolish retainers, may determine to launch a war against another country to achieve his own wicked ends. Such a stupid ruler is driven only by his own interests that are worthless in comparison with the numbers of innocent people who will get killed, who will be disabled, who will be motherless and fatherless, who will be widowed, etc. These classes of people die in today's jungle-like world on a daily basis. They are sent to death before the eyes of billions of world peoples who have been unbelievably good at being apathetic, unsympathetic, and unassertive. The question that poses itself is: What wrong have those killed, disabled, and widowed done to be dealt with this way? Aren't those people's lives worthwhile? Aren't others responsible for the victims' being mistreated this way? Whose responsibility is it that they have been killed, that they have been disabled, and that they have become parentless? Had the foolish ruler responsible for launching the war been accountable, nothing of the aforementioned atrocities would have been perpetrated? Another example indicative of the lack of both responsibility and accountability is the great disparity existing nowadays between the outcomes of classical education and the market demands. Whereas employers keep demanding employees equipped with a variety of skills, the market overflows with graduates that have nothing of the skills necessary for life, such as the critical thinking skills, the problem-solving skills, and the communicative skills. Other skills are taking the initiative, working with others as a team, achieving success, and contributing to developing the workplace in particular and the whole country in general. Some scholars rightly refer to the preceding skills as "survival skills," which does make sense because these skills facilitate surviving in this ever-changing world marked by globalization and deadly competition. How will graduates without skills fit into this world? Who is to blame for the failure of these graduates to get careers that help them with living decently? I think that the answer is obvious. Nobody can be excluded. Teachers are to blame. Administrators are to blame. School

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principals and university presidents are to blame. Parents are to blame. Ministers and officials are to blame. Were those people accountable, the outcome would be certainly different. This accountability that makes the outcome different has emerged, Emma Grant and Tessa MacArthur claim, “as a core element of the governance agenda in the late 1990s due to a growing concern with its absence in many new democracies, as well as some older ones”(2). “Governance” itself refers to “sustaining co-ordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors with different purposes and objectives such as political actors and institutions, corporate interests, civil society, and transnational governments” (Pierre, 2000, 3-4). Elaborating on Pierre’s argument, Eberlein and Kerwer (2004) argue that “governance” involves “a large number of decision-making arenas... differentiated along both functional and territorial lines, and ... interlinked in a non-hierarchical way”(128). These decision-making arenas which are non-hierarchically interlinked are all worthless if “governance” is devoid of accountability.

### **Accountability:-**

Accountability itself has been defined in various ways. Mulgan (2000), for instance, deems accountability to be a “complex and chameleon-like term.” Schedler (1999), likewise, notes that accountability “represents an underexplored concept whose meaning is evasive [sic], whose boundaries are fuzzy, and whose internal structure is confusing”(13). He adds that accountability is broad and includes three dimensions: “enforcement, monitoring and justification”(1999a, p. 14). At the same time, he maintains that “unless there is some punishment for demonstrated abuses of authority, there is no rule of law and no accountability”(1999a, p. 17). Like Schedler and Mulgan, Bovens (2010) defines accountability as “one of the core attributes of good governance” and regards being accountable as a positive quality in organizations and officials”(p. 946). Bovens adds that accountability is used primarily as a normative concept, as a set of standards for the evaluation of the behavior of public sector”(p. 946). Bovens (2005) goes on to say that accountability is a “relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pose judgment, and the actor may face consequences”(p. 6). Like Bovens, Grant and Keohane (2004) object to limiting accountability to that of “democratic control” and mention other forms of accountability (administrative, fiscal, legal, etc.). Following Schedler, Mulgan, Grant and Keohane, and Bovens’ steps, Linda Galindo (2010) maintains that the absence of accountability is a major problem in business these days. Behn (2001), similarly, argues that “[i]t’s great to be an accountability holder. It’s not so much fun to be an accountability holdee”(p. 2). Some analysts, likewise, incorporate accountability into “the very definition of political democracy”(Schmitter & Karl, 1991). As for Schmitter and Karl’s (1991) definition of political democracy, it is “a regime or system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm...”. Like Schmitter, Jane S. Schacter (2006) argues that accountability is “used as a way to talk about cleaning up bad legislative behavior, from campaign finance and lobbying abuses to criminal acts of corruption”(p. 641). Jane adds: “Accountability is central to democratic theory as conventionally understood because it stands in for the consent of the governed. As such, it is a cousin to the terms *responsiveness* and *representativeness*, though not strictly synonymous with them”(p. 642). Like Jane, Jeremy Waldron (2014) argues that there are two conceptions of accountability which is used in “two ways in political theory.” The first conception is “forensic accountability” that denotes the responsibility of a person to have his actions judged by a court according to established norms (p. 1). The second conception is “agent-accountability” which denotes the duty of “the agent to his principal” that may demand “an account of the work that the agent has been doing in the principal’s name or the principal’s behalf,” which enables the principal to “sanction or replace the agent or terminate the agency relationship”(p. 2). The difference between the two conceptions is that the first conception doesn’t involve accountability to anyone, but the second one does. In both cases, a given person has to answer for his/her actions, Waldron adds, in a setting not necessarily of his/her own choosing (p. 3). Waldron goes on to say that the insistence on holding “political officials accountable” is part of “the liberalism of fear” (p. 5).

These definitions clearly show that scholars differ over the definition of accountability, and that accountability is a complex, evasive, and elusive term. Despite these qualities, accountability is something positive not only in organizations and governments, but also individuals. The reason for this contention is that individuals who hold themselves to be accountable do their utmost to abide by their obligations because they are overseen by an agency or someone to whom they have to explain their reasons for not doing a certain job well, and accordingly, violating an obligation. It is taken for granted that individuals’ violating their obligations is something intolerable and deserving of blame. Such unaccountable individuals exemplify insufficient accountability and furnish a good reason for reforming the society.

### **Absence of accountability:-**

Many societies today are ravaged by officials that don't hold themselves to be accountable. Before elections, these officials keep giving fair promises that they'll combat poverty, unemployment, corruption, injustices, and economic problems. When they have been elected, they start acting as they like simply because they know well that masses are not in a position to hold them to account. Lacking the inner feeling of accountability, they forget about poverty and employment, disregard vulnerable groups, keep the poor disempowered, concentrate solely on their own interests, and approach the rich and the powerful. Being unprincipled and unaccountable, these officials disregard not only their own responsibilities, but also the needs of the marginalized, the sick, the starving, the jobless, and the retarded. This behavior dissatisfies the poor that start complaining of the irresponsiveness and of the unaccountability of the state institutions run by untrustworthy officials that badly lack social accountability. Commenting on the dissatisfaction of the poor, Narayan et al (2000) claim that poor people report that state institutions are often "neither responsive nor accountable to [them]" and "not accountable to anyone or accountable only to the rich and powerful" (p.172). These institutions, being irresponsive and unaccountable, fail to offer the services citizens wait patiently for because they are run by officials who, being corrupt, look just for their personal interests. Supporting this claim, Malena and Forster (2004) maintain that in many developing countries the government "fails to deliver key essential services to its citizens due to problems such as: misallocation of resources, leakages, corruption, weak incentives or a lack of articulated demand" (p.5). Hamstrung by corrupt officials who arrange for being in power and free from sanctions, such corrupt governments cannot do anything against corruption because corrupt officials either directly or indirectly thwart the efforts exerted to, Prado, 2014 and Power, 2011 claim, "detect and investigate corrupt activities." These corrupt officials also do people and the whole country harm by capturing the state resources, which impacts economic growth and development.

### **Defining corruption:-**

As regards development, it is stifled by corruption that has been defined in numerous ways. The United Nations Global Program against Corruption (2012) defines corruption as "abuse of power for private gain." The Transparency International, similarly, defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain." At the launch of the Transparency International Corruption Index 2004, the Chairman, Peter Eigen, maintains that "corruption in large-scale public projects is a daunting obstacle to sustainable development, and results in a major loss of public funds needed for education, healthcare and poverty alleviation, both in developed and developing countries" (p.2). Eigen (2004) adds, "As the Corruption Perceptions Index 2004 shows, oil-rich Angola, Azerbaijan, Chad, Ecuador, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Libya, Nigeria, Russia, Sudan, Venezuela, and Yemen all have extremely low scores. In these countries, public contracting in the oil sector is plagued by revenues vanishing into the pockets of western oil executives, middlemen, and local officials" (p.2). Repeating Eigen's words and emphasizing the loss of public funds, Farida Waziri (2010) defines corruption as a change from the general accepted rules or laws for selfish gain. However, The World Bank defines corruption as: "The abuse of office for private gains. Public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts, solicits, or extorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public offices and processes for competitive advantages or profit. Stressing the various forms of corruption, Andrig and Fjelstad (2001) hold corruption to be a "complex multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes and effects, as it takes on various forms and contexts" (p.4). To take an example, Southern Italy, in western Europe, is the home of "amoral familism- including the propensity to offer and accept bribes- and Spain is home to amiguismo, the use of contacts and intermediaries in dealing with the bureaucracy, and influence trafficking in political life" (Banfield, 1958, Heidenheimer, 1994, and Heywood, 1996). Similar to Italy and Spain is Nigeria where there is a "consensus among well-meaning individuals and foreign nations that corruption has inevitably become a major clog in the quest for sustainable growth and development" (Ogbeidi, 2012). Ogbeidi adds that corruption is like a "deadly virus" that "attacks the vital structures and systems that engender progressive functioning of the society" (p.18). Like Nigeria, Kosovo is also equally plagued by corruption. Commenting on this problem, Brett Romero (2015) contends that corruption is a "significant issue in Kosovo." Romero adds that people of Kosovo appear to be "aware of the issues of corruption in their country, and more importantly, they are willing to take an active role to fight it." Despite these cruelties, these officials flee punishment because they know well that state institutions are too weak to interrogate them and send them to jail. Making use of their own riches and acquaintances that are equally corrupt, they divert citizens' attention and arrange for embroiling others by tempting and giving them an amount of money in return for spending some time in prison on their behalf. Arguing in support of this contention Emma Grant and Tessa MacArthur argue that "[a]nti-

corruption commissions and other specialized agencies are often hamstrung by the power of officials whose serial abuses should make them the agencies' prime targets, but who mostly escape charges" (Briefing Note, p.2). This quotation justifies the contention that it is common to see courts in poor countries failing to enforce laws against public officials found to have abused power. To take an example, India is a country that has been crippled by corruption which has been aggravating poverty, increasing inflation, and causing instability and inequality. The judicial system in this country is under-developed, and, thus, doesn't "pronounce any conviction in most corruption charges" (p.1). According to an article published in *Harvard International Review*, the Indian government, Vittal (2001) claims, is updating its anti-corruption laws by "eliminating loopholes and [introducing] an amnesty period of three months during which those who have black money can claim it legally after paying an income tax of 21%" (p.1) with the purpose of fighting corruption to urge investors to come to India. Like India, Eleven Latin American heads of state have been, since 1990, "impeached or forced to resign before the end of their terms. In each case, corruption was a factor. Although these oustings were often justified, in a number of cases corruption was just an excuse to get rid of a weakened president; the country's lack of progress was widely interpreted as simply another manifestation of corruption" (Moises Naim, 2005). Naim adds that "Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Russia's Vladimir Putin all came to power in part because of public disgust with corruption that preceded them. Yet all three countries remain corrupt and are still waiting for their promised progress" (p.1). These three countries and the like are denied progress because money goes to the pockets of corrupt officials that misuse it together with their public for their private gain. Commenting on corrupt governments, Susan Rose-Ackerman (2004) claims that in these governments the "individual projects are excessively expensive and unproductive, but the overall size of the government is relatively small" (p.7).

Just as corruption has crippled India, Italy, Venezuela, Russia, and a number of countries in Latin America, so has it also crippled Uganda and Ukraine where most cases collapse on account of lacking the sufficient evidence. In an article published in *The Observer*, Derrick Kivonga (2015) quotes Justice Lawrence Gidudu's, the Head of the Anti-corruption Court in Uganda, claiming that it is "no longer wise to steal alone. The chain is too long from the people who actually steal to even people who work in court; so, you find that the case collapses because people want to cover up for one another." Giving examples of cases that have collapsed, Kivonga adds that, in May 2015, "a case involving five government officials accused of stealing Shs 63bn in pension funds collapsed after the state failed to produce a single witness in two years." Elaborating on the reasons for the collapse of this case, he claims that "[previously], people involved in the [corruption] transactions were few but now they are many. We normally see a chain of beneficiaries when those cases come here." He goes on to say that "many corrupt people are taking advantage of the court system, leading to some cases' collapse." Like Uganda, Ukraine is a country that is equally replete with corrupt individuals. In an article titled "Sensational Cases against Corrupt Officials will Fall Apart in Courts," Yaroslav Yurchyshyn (2016), member of the Board of Transparency International Ukraine, declares that "corruption cases connected with high officials [require] long-term investigations." According to him, if there is "insufficient evidential base, we cannot expect a conviction." Reiterating the difficulty of convicting the corrupt officials, Nazar Kholodnytskyi (2016), Head of the Special Prosecutor's Office, holds that he is investigating about "20 cases related to corruption in Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, but so far 'accusations have failed to indict to anyone.'" Nazar adds, "it is unlikely that these cases will ever result in a formal trial, much less a conviction", "[c]onsidering the power of those currently under investigation and the high levels of corruption in the Ukraine justice system." Supporting Nazar's argument, Neil Mitchell (2012) maintains, in *Democracy's Blameless Leaders*, that corrupt political leaders try evading "accountability for abuse and atrocity" by "using a range of well-known techniques including denial, delay, diversion, and delegation to pass blame... to the lowest plausible level." Mitchell goes on to say that only "a rare and courageous leader ... acts differently, exposing the limits of accountability in democratic societies." Such corrupt leaders sacrifice accountability that is a central marker of democracy for their personal interests. In this way, they violate human rights and put an end to peace and progress, which gives the chance for crime, poverty, and violence to prevail. Remarking about political accountability, Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General (2011), holds that political accountability is central "to meeting the generational challenges of today's world poverty, crime and violence." She adds, "political accountability and democratic governance are inseparable, and both are essential to peace, development and human rights." When the parliament practices accountability by holding transparent elections and maintaining the freedom of speech, it promotes democratic governance. The parliament also practices accountability when it keeps an eye on the government and confronts corruption as well as crime. This confrontation is central for maintaining not only political accountability but also democratic governance.

This argument about democratic governance and accountability and the intimate relationship between them reminds us of the problems humans in many countries are wrestling with due to the lack of self-accountability resulting from selfishness, greed, envy, jealousy, hatred and wickedness. Such evils are destructive because they bring about blindness. In other words, these evils blind the selfish, the greedy, the envious, the jealous, the hateful, and the wicked to the needs of others that should be met. Being blind, these individuals cannot make any right choice.

#### **Accountability in Islam:-**

In stark contrast with these democracies hamstrung by corruption and teeming with individuals lacking self-accountability is the Islamic state in which individuals are obligated to hold themselves to be accountable because this is their only way of evading punishment on the Day of Judgment. This accountability, an inner feeling, derives, Maszlee and Musa(2015) maintain, “from the concept of *amana* (often translated as “trust”). As a political concept, it suggests that God has given the trust to human beings to deliver and promote His guidance through justice and fairness in their lives”(p.1). Maszlee and Musa go on to say that “[e]veryone becomes a recipient of such a trust and consequently has to stand in reverence before his people for whose sake he will be called upon to exercise his duty.” This concept is cherished as being sacred in the Holy Qur’an: “Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity”(Qur’an,3:104). Accountability is emphasized both in the Qur’an and the Prophet’s (Allah May Bless Him) sayings and actions. Allah says: “O you who believe! Fear Allah and keep your duty to Him. And let every person look at what he has sent forth for tomorrow, and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Well-Acquainted with what you do.”(Al-Qur’an,59:18). Allah also 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!” (Al-Qur’an,99,7-8). Allah also says: “O you who believe! Make not (a decision) before Allah and His Messenger (PBUH) and fear Allah. Verily! Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing”(Al-Qur’an,49,1). Allah also argues: “And fear Allah in Whom you believe”(Al-Qur’an,60,11). Stressing the same idea, Allah claims, “So keep your duty to Allah and fear Him as much as you can”(Al-Qur’an,64,16). In addition to the Qur’an, Mohammad, the Prophet (PBUH) emphasizes this idea when He says: “The wise person is one who holds himself to be accountable and works for what comes after death, and the weak impotent person is one whose self follows its vain desires and he simply puts his hope in Allah”(Hadith in Saheeh Al-Bukhari).

#### **Mohammad (PBUH) also says:-**

“Verily, Allah loves those who want to do a job to do it thoroughly”. In a third Hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) claims: “Beware that everyone of you is a shepherd and everyone of you is a shepherd and everyone is answerable with regard to his folk. The caliph is a shepherd over the people and shall be questioned about them. A woman is a guardian over the household of her husband and his children and has to be questioned about them. A slave is a shepherd over the property of his master and shall be questioned about it”(Saheeh Al-Bukhari). The preceding verses from the Holy Qur’an and the Messenger’s Hadiths provide examples of self-accountability to Allah Who will question everyone about his actions on the Day of Judgment. If these actions have been done well, this person will be rewarded, and vice versa. This self-accountability also involves accountability to other people in the community. Muslims are advised to do others justice. The teacher, for instance, should do learners justice when he addresses, teaches, and evaluates them. It is also his duty to instruct them on how to be good, to do good, to be productive, and to be dutiful son and daughters. Moreover, he should warn them against sinning which displeases Allah (SWT). This teacher is also accountable to Allah on the Day of Judgment, and his deeds will be judged by Him.

These teacher’s deeds should not do people harm and go against, Tekke(2015) maintains, “the limits set by Allah” (p.133). Thus, the teacher’s accountability can be broken up into his accountability to Allah (SWT) and his accountability to society. This idea is underlined in the Holy Qur’an:

“Allah takes careful account of everything”(An-Nisa’:86). “Ignominy has been pitched on them, wherever they are, they shall get no security save a rope from Allah and a rope from men, (they may get protection)”(Al-Imran, Verse No.112). Like the teacher, the surgeon is also equally accountable, which means that he should treat patients well, and give them a piece of advice about the best medicine to be taken. He should be kind, do whatever he can to alleviate their pains and help them feel relieved. This surgeon behaves this way to please Allah (Subhanahu Wataala), not for the sake of money. These two examples reveal the responsibility and the accountability of the

teacher and the surgeon. They also reveal that the teacher and the surgeon regard themselves to be accountable are wise people who are certain of being questioned about their jobs on the Day of Judgment. They do their jobs well in fulfillment of the Prophet's (PBUH) saying that "The wise person is one who holds himself to be accountable and works for what comes after death" and that "...Allah loves those who want to do a job to do it thoroughly." Other individuals in the community should be as accountable as the teacher and the surgeon are. When other individuals shoulder their responsibilities and hold themselves to be accountable to Allah(SW) and to the society, accountability becomes a marker of both wisdom and excellence.

These two values can be safely attached to accountability in Islam. The first person whose name occurs to one's mind is the 2<sup>nd</sup> caliph in Islam, Omar Bin Al-Khattab whose fear of Allah The Al-Mighty stops him from sleeping deeply. Asked about ruling the Ummah and his obligations, he answered that if an animal tripped in Iraq Allah(SW) would question him about it. He seems to be saying that being a caliph is not a picnic. It's both responsibility and accountability. Underlining accountability, he advises Muslims to judge themselves before they are judged, to evaluate themselves before they are evaluated, and to be ready for the greatest investigation. Being accountable, he keeps touring the country to learn about citizens and their needs. In one of these night tours in Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah, he hears a voice coming out of a house. Upon listening, he hears a woman who sells yoghurt asking her daughter to mix milk with water. The girl refuses to do as she has been told, and tells her mother that Ameer Al-Mumineen (The Ruler of Believers) has issued a decree forbidding believers to mix milk with water. The mother answers that Ameer Al-Mumineen won't see them. Responding to her mother, the girl says that if Ameer Al-Mumineen does not see them, Allah does. When Omar, Ameer Al-Mumineen, hears of that, he admires this good girl with firm faith and marries her to one of his sons. She gives birth to a daughter whom Abed-al-Azeez Bin Marwan marries and begets a son called Omar Bin Abed-al-Azeez that grows to be a ruler renowned for his justice. This ruler is often referred to as the 5<sup>th</sup> caliph in Islam. Having found him crying, his wife inquires of him about his reasons for doing so. Responding, he claims that, in his capacity of being the ruler, he'll be questioned about the poor, the hungry, the sick, and the oppressed. He adds that he'll be also questioned about strangers and the elderly. The three examples that I have given provide the indication that accountability is central in Islam, and that it leads to success both in real life and in the hereafter. It is worth mentioning that Omar Bin Al-Khattab and Omar Bin Abed-al-Azeez epitomize success. Being accountable, they have both done their jobs well, and, thus, they have set good examples for the generations to come.

### **Conclusion:-**

It has been demonstrated that accountability is both an inner feeling and a value that has been lacking in many businesses and democracies. It is the absence of this value that has been solely responsible for the collapse of businesses as well as the evils dominant in so many countries all over the world. These evils have become traits of numerous democracies in which government officials prioritize their own interests and keep exploiting the resources in a way that stifles development and, consequently, turns progress into a dream that citizens in these countries go on with doing their utmost to fulfill it. Hamstrung by corruption, democracies plagued by corrupt officials who don't regard themselves to be accountable become a fertile land for crime, violence, and poverty that represents tremendous challenges for governments and institutions that are often irresponsive and unaccountable to the poor, the jobless, the marginalized, etc. Being irresponsive and unaccountable, institutions in these countries fail to deliver key services to citizens and to fight corruption because they are run by corrupt officials who sacrifice accountability, which is an important value, for their private gain. Such corrupt officials are fools for they sacrifice something of great value for something trivial. These officials are lacking wisdom because they defame themselves and sell their reputation at a cheap price. When they are discovered, which is a certainty, they will be ridiculed by their compatriots. By subordinating accountability to their private gains they make a foolish choice leading to both failure and shame. This wrong choice also leads to their being blameworthy, disrespected, and fallen.

In stark contrast with these countries where individuals don't deem themselves to be accountable is the Islamic society in which individuals willingly hold themselves to be accountable to citizens and to God, which makes them keen on doing their jobs thoroughly. This choice reflects an inner desire to please Allah, which does them good not only in this life but also in the hereafter. In this way, these individuals demonstrate wisdom because wise believers are the ones who hold this transitory life to be a passage leading to the afterlife which represents a residence. These believers that make a right choice of this sort achieve success and distinguish themselves from others into whose pockets money goes. Thus, they excel others who

don't fear God the same way they do, and who are not as accountable as they are. In a sense, believers' choosing to be accountable becomes a marker of not only success but also wisdom and excellence. This argument is also true of other countries be they Islamic or not. In my own judgment, wherever individuals choose to be accountable, they can easily achieve success and excel their peers. Such a right choice that gives birth to success and excellence is certainly indicative of wisdom.

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