The Process of Becoming a Leader: An Islamic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in Islam is a trust. Often, it takes the form of an explicit contract or pledge between a leader and his followers that he will try his best to guide them, to protect them and to treat them fairly and with justice. Hence, the focus of leadership in Islam is on integrity and justice. God Almighty Allah and his last prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) have made assuming responsibilities and positions of leadership incumbent upon Muslims. The Quran declared that the whole of humanity was created to the station of Khalifatullah. The prophet (PBUH) prescribes Amirship even in any situation where there are two or more Muslims in company, in a gathering or embarked on a specific activity. The collapse of the Khalifate robbed Muslims of a central institution and a symbol of power. It eroded the cohesive nature of the Muslim community and left them without effective leadership. The so-called Muslim State became but a carbon copy of the Westphalian nation-state, and its political leadership became more and more detached from the ideological and practical framework of the Quran and The Sunnah. Hence, why Islam provides guidance and process to choose and become a good leader.

Theories of Leadership:

The concept of leadership has been discussed and debated for a long time. For example, a review in the Google search engine generated more than 400 million results on the topic of leadership and out of these more than 24 million are on the definitions of leadership. Though elaborately discussed, the topic has not increased our understanding of the leadership phenomenon (Aminuddin Mohd Yusof, 1994; Ali, 2005). This supports the view of Kanungo and Mendonica (1996) that:

"Literally thousands of articles, papers and books on the topic have examined and probed the leadership phenomenon from every possible angle. Yet our understanding remains incomplete in spite of decades of research."

There are various leadership theories and concepts which might confuse researchers if they do not clearly examine and understand the conceptual framework used. Most early conceptual frameworks of leadership were categorized generally into the traits, behavioral and contingency approaches. The traits approach to leadership studies assumes that leaders should possess leadership traits, for example physical appearance, intelligence and personality characteristics (Bass, 1990; Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991).

On the other hand, the behavioral approach tries to explain leadership phenomenon based on behavioral patterns, actions or leadership styles (Yukl, Gordon and Taber, 2002). Lastly, the contingency approach views that leadership depends on the situation. Thus, leadership is not about having the best style but rather knowing which style is the most effective in a particular situation (Fiedler, 1972).

Wren (1994: 387) notes that there have been “thousands of studies, with a disparity of approaches, a proliferation of confusing terms, a high percentage of irrelevant or trivial studies and the absence of an integrating conceptual framework.” Due to space limitation, much of the background literature on leadership will be ignored, including the problem of defining leadership. Generally though, there is an agreement that:

a) Leaders have certain values that set them apart from others.
b) Leaders have an accurate and realistic perception of the present.
c) Leaders have an inspiring, optimistic vision of the future.
d) Leaders communicate that vision to others.
e) Leaders inspire others to change.

The fact that leaders are individuals who inspire others to change is something that is well understood (Kotter, 1998). Recently, other conceptual frameworks have emerged and they focus on aspects of charisma, transformation, transaction, spirituality, ethics, voluntary services and values. These new emerging conceptual...
frameworks do not necessarily contradict the earlier approaches, but rather attempt to fill in the gap with a more integrative perspective in explaining the leadership phenomenon.

Leadership is a complex phenomenon that could not be fully explained using only a certain conceptual framework or leadership model. Being complex, the concept and theory, or support of empirical research that proposed to explain leadership phenomenon are built upon many different premises. In turn, these perspectives are value-laden and based on various assumptions. Hence, the leadership concept is shaped according to societal values, culture, and ethics. In this regard, Shaharir Mohamad Zain (2008) noted that grasping the concept of leadership as of any other fields, is not value-free as argued by many scholars, including Al-Attas (1995), Kuhn (1970) and Nasr (1992). The idea that knowledge is ‘neutral’ or value-free is certainly rejected.

Value-Based Leadership:

The concept of leadership is value-laden. Many theories and leadership concepts highlighted in the literature reflect Western understanding and views, which are mainly influenced by their culture, belief system and way of life. Thus, the explanation of leadership may not necessarily be appropriate when used in understanding communities with different cultures. These differences in view create different societal expectations and motivations. (Mohd Ezani, Nordin, Nur Atiqah and Khairul Akmaliah, 2011: 171). A number of common descriptions of leadership in Western literature include: a) the process of leading, b) entities involved, as well as activities and behaviors in leading, and c) power and influence in leading.

Leadership can also be described as a social contract between the leader and his followers, where the leader’s functions are to lead, preserve and serve his followers fairly (Khalil Ahmad, 2007). In addition, leadership, as asserted by Siddiq (2006) is one of trust and responsibility (tuklif), instead of being related to greatness and arrogance (tashrif).

In simple terms, values-based leadership is leading by staying true to one’s values. It means to lead others by remaining consistent with the leader’s beliefs and never swaying from one’s fundamental values. You may be wondering, does this mean a values-based leader never changes his or her principles? The answer is no. The leader may change his or her strategy, tactics, or approach given the situation, but the leader never changes his or her underlying values, beliefs, or principles. (Saylor.org)

If a person is striving to be a leader, the person must apply certain qualities for values-based leadership. Adopted from Harry Jensen Krame Jr.’s book, From Values to Action: The Four Principles of Values-Based Leadership, there are four essential qualities of a values-based leader. A description of each quality is provided below:

1) Self-reflection is a trait required for a person to identify and evaluate his or her fundamental values. A person must be aware of how his or her experiences, education, priorities, beliefs, and values affect how he or she makes decisions, leads others, and handles conflict. Self-reflection improves a person’s understanding of himself or herself.

2) Balance refers to a person’s ability to view a situation from different perspectives. A person should remain open minded and consider all opinions before making decisions or evaluating a situation. This trait also means to achieve a healthy work/life balance example for others to follow.

3) Self-confidence is essential for leaders to truly believe in themselves. Leaders should be able to identify areas of strength and weakness while continuing to improve their abilities. Leaders with self-confidence are able to ask for help when needed and use their strengths to help others.

4) Humility is a trait that keeps a person grounded and keeps life in perspective. Humility supports a person’s ability to respect others and value others’ opinions. A person should never assume that he or she knows more or knows what is best; rather, a person should remain humble in his or her assessment of the situation.

Regardless of position, level, gender, age, or ethnicity, a person can apply each of these qualities. A leader does not have to wait until he or she reaches a high-ranking position before becoming a values-based leader. He or she just needs to know what kind of leader that he or she wants to be and begin.

Defining Leadership in Islam:

To begin with, Muslims base their behavior as leader and/or as follower upon the Word of God as revealed in their holy book, the Qur’an. They believe that the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him), has modeled the way for Muslim leaders and followers for all times. This belief is supported when God says the following about Muhammad (PBUH):

And you stand an exalted standard of character...

(Holy Quran, Al-Qalam: 4)

Muhammad’s (PBUH) example, then, is what both Muslim leaders and followers seek to emulate.

As Islam is a comprehensive system of life, its roots of leadership generally exist in the primary and secondary resources of the Shari‘ah in addition to the early practices of the early Muslims. With this concept, a leader in Islam is said to be not free to act as he chooses, nor must he submit to the desires of others - he must
act in accordance to Allah’s laws like how Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) exemplified his kind of leadership. Allah said in the Qur’an:

“And We made them leaders guiding men by Our Command and We sent inspiration to do good deeds, to establish prayers and to practice charity; and they constantly served Us only”

(Holy Qur’an, Al-Anbiya’: 73)

According to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), leadership in Islam is not reserved for a small elite. Rather, depending upon the situation, every person is the ‘shepherd’ of a flock, and occupies a position of leadership. (Sahih Bukhari, no. 3,733) Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said:

“Each of you is a guardian, and each of you will be asked about his subjects.”

(Sahih Bukhari)

In most circumstances in life, Muslims are urged to appoint a leader and follow him. According to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Muslims must appoint a leader during a trip, select a leader to lead the prayer, and choose a leader for other group activities. Leadership, then, can be depicted as a process by which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of followers in an effort to reach certain objectives. (Beekun and Badawi, 1999: 2) This definition suggests that leadership is essentially a process whereby the leader guides willing followers. At all times, a leader must remember that he cannot compel others to do things against their will.

“Let there be no compulsion in religion…”

(Holy Qur’an, Al-Baqarah: 256)

An anecdote from the Seerah (history) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) indicates his ability to envision what his companions could not. During one of the darkest times faced by Muslims, the prelude to the Battle of the Trench, he was blessed by God with a vision of the Ummah’s future (Lings, 1983: 218):

“After many vain attempts to split or dislodge a rock he struck, ‘Umar went to the Prophet (saw) who took the pickaxe from him, and gave the rock a blow at which a flare of lightning flashed back over the city and towards the south. He gave it another blow and again there was a flash but in the direction of Uhud and beyond it towards the north. A third blow split the rock into fragments, and this time the light flashed eastwards. Salman saw the three flashes and knew they must have some significance, so he asked for an interpretation from the Prophet (saw) who said: “Did you see them, Salman? By the light of the first, I saw the castles of Yemen; by the light of the second, I saw the castles of Syria; by the light of the third, I saw the white palace of Kisra at Mada’in. Through the first has God opened up to me the Yemen; through the second has He opened up to me Syria and the West, and through the third, the East.”

This vision of the Prophet (PBUH) has motivated Muslims for more than a millenium. At one point, the Muslim Ummah had to wait 700 years for Constantinople to be liberated. The vision still energizes Muslims.

Conceptual Framework of Islamic Leadership:

In Islam, leadership is illustrated by the Qur’anic verse:

“Behold, thy Lord said to the angels, ‘I’ll create a vicegerent on earth.’ They said: ‘Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? - whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?’ He said, ‘I know what ye know not.’”

(Holy Qur’an, Al-Baqarah: 30)

In this story, Allah had chosen Prophet Adam as the vicegerent. However, Iblis (Satan) protested the decision. Iblis argued that he is of a more dignified origin, which is fire, compared to Prophet Adam, who was created from clay.

“(Iblis) said: ‘I am better than he: Thou createdst me from fire, and him Thou createdst from clay.’”

(Holy Qur’an, Sad: 76)

However, Allah, who is all-knowing, had chosen Adam with his human characteristics and potentials. Humans have the potential to become more noble creatures than angels, but can also become lower than animals if the noble ‘human’ values are neglected (Gulen, 2004). Human perfection, in all aspects of life, was exemplified in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and this was emphasized in the Qur’an:

“Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah.”

(Holy Qur’an, Al-Ahzab: 21)

The above verse considers Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the exemplar in all aspects of life, including his leadership. In understanding Prophet Muhammad’s type of leadership, the leader’s personality and realization of values are the thrusts in the formation of societal and organizational culture. In fact, the Qur’an teaches that the exemplification of a leader should be emulated by the followers. (Mohd Ezani, Nordin, Nur Atiqah and Khairul Akmaliah, 2011: 171).

In other words, it becomes the axis of reference, which is in tandem with Islamic values and faith. Leaders that conjure up such situations as “follow what leaders say, not what leaders do” is frowned upon, as mentioned in the Qur’an:
“Do ye enjoin right conduct on the people, and forget (to practise it) yourselves, and yet ye study the Scripture? Will ye not understand?”
(Holy Qur’an, Al-Baqarah: 44)

“O ye who believe! Why say ye that which ye do not?”
(Holy Qur’an, As-Saff: 2)

Majali (1990) defines leadership as the ability to show the way, to guide or conduct, to direct and govern, and to influence the actions or opinions of others. Leadership is both an art and a science which requires integrative capabilities, aptitudes and together with values makes up the personality and capability of a leader. Murad (1996), on the other hand, defines leadership as the ability to see beyond assumed boundaries and to come up with solutions or paths that only few can visualize.

This definition refers to the follower’s expectation that a leader should be creative in solving problems. Leadership requires leaders to have a vision that goes beyond the expectations of the followers. On the other hand, Beekun and Badawi (1999) rely on two primary leadership definitions: first, it refers to a process by which the leader seeks voluntary involvement of followers in an effort to reach organizational objectives, and second, it distinguishes leadership from the more routine processes associated with management. (Mohd Ezani, Nordin, Nur Atiqah and Khairul Akmaliah, 2011: 174).

These writers differentiate between a manager and a leader - the manager administers, whereas the leader innovates; the manager maintains, whereas the leader develops; the manager relies on systems, whereas the leader relies on people; the manager counts on control, whereas the leader counts on trust; and the manager does things right, while the leader does the right things. The definition of Beekun dan Badawi (1999) also refers to the leader’s expected task in achieving more effectively the objectives of the organizations.

In Islamic teachings, a person must behave within the realm of Shari'ah, that is, he must conduct himself in a manner as prescribed in the Qur’an and the Sunnah (sayings and conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). For a Muslim, Islam encompasses everything in one’s life. Islam is a religion that does not separate actions that are good for one’s life in this world and those that are good in the hereafter, as all actions of a person are considered religious duties, as stated in the Qur’an:

“Say: ‘Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds.’”
(Holy Qur’an, Al-An’am: 162)

Therefore, leadership from an Islamic perspective is tied to the entire requirements for performing religious duties. In fact, all matters and responsibilities related to leadership, including responsibilities of subordinates to be loyal to the leader, is valued and thus rewarded, as stated in the Qur’an:

“O ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination.”
(Holy Qur’an, An-Nisa’: 59)

Therefore, leadership based on Islamic teachings is tied to this particular conduct. All behavior and leadership values should be based on Islamic teachings in their entirety so that all conducts fit religious duties.

The importance of values in the Islamic leadership framework has been thoroughly discussed by Toor (2007). In fact, he considers values as fundamental in leadership framework and the formation of leader characteristics that are required by Islam as indicated in Figure 1. In this framework, the Islamic values like those proposed by Toor (2007) are formed integratively through: (a) understanding the Qur’an, the Sunnah, Ijma’ and Ijtihad; (b) upholding the five pillars of Islam, namely attesting to Islamic faith, performing the five daily prayers, giving alms, fasting during the month of Ramadan and performing pilgrimage to Mecca; (c) believing in the Six Pillars of Islamic Faith (Allah, the Angels, the Revealed Scriptures, the Messengers, the Hereafter, and the Divine Decrees).

Leadership Roles from an Islamic Perspective:

According to Islam, the two primary roles of a leader are those of servant-leader and guardian-leader. First, the leader is the servant of his followers (sayyid al qawn khadimuhum). (Omar, 1998: 3) He is to seek their welfare and guide them towards good. The idea of a leader as a servant has been part of Islam since its beginning, and has only recently been developed by Robert Greenleaf (1970: 7):

“The servant-leader is servant first...It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. [...] The best test, and the most difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons?”

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has emphasized a second major role of the Muslim leader: to protect his community against tyranny and oppression, to encourage God-consciousness and taqwa, and to promote justice.

“A commander (of the Muslims) is a shield for them. [...]”
(Sahih Muslim, no. 4542)

Beekun and Badawi (1999) propose the model of the five-pointed star. In the middle lies Iman, Islam, taqwa and ihsan while each point of the star contains the branch of amanah (trust), adl (justice), birr
(goodness), ahd (keeping promises) and mujahadah (striving to continuously develop oneself). Beekun and Badawi (1999) also stress that Muslim leaders have two key roles: to be a guardian-leader and to be a servant-leader. Beekun and Badawi argue that Muslim leaders have to understand their own behavior, the behavior of their followers and the situation in order to come up with appropriate solutions. To do this, leaders must reach out to everybody, welcome sinners and try to improve them and use outsights (Beekun, 2008).

The understanding that leaders see things differently is echoed by other Muslim scholars in other Islamic disciplines. Al-Qardhawi (1991, 1996), for example, argues that Muslims cannot be successful until they “understand the reality of the Ummah.” This is not surprising as Muslim legal jurists define fiqh (the application of the Qur‘ān and Sunnah to a specific situation) as the outcome of human understanding (jahmi), perception (tasawwur) and cognition (idrak) (Auda, 2010: 193).

Moral Bases of Islamic Leadership:

Leadership in Islam is rooted in belief and willing submission to the Creator, God. It centers on serving Him.

And We made them leaders guiding (men) by Our Command and We sent them inspiration to do good deeds, to establish regular prayers and to practice regular charity; and they constantly served Us (and Us only).

(Holy Qur‘an, Al-Anbiya’: 73)

To serve God, a Muslim leader is to act in accordance with the injunctions of God and His Prophet (PBUH), and must develop a strong Islamic moral character. This moral character will be reflected by his increasingly strong belief in God as he progresses through 4 stages of spiritual development: iman, islam, taqwa and ihsan. Each stage is now discussed in terms of how it affects a Muslim leader’s behavior (Beekun and Badawi, 1999: 5-8).

Iman:

At the core of Islamic moral character is iman or faith in God. Iman implies belief in the Oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH). A leader with a strong iman will consider himself and all his possessions as belonging to God. He will bow his ego, his ideas, his passions and his thinking to God. Iman also implies belief in the life hereafter and in one’s ultimate accountability for one’s deeds. A leader with a firm iman will not dodge responsibility for his actions, and will continuously emphasize good deeds. To reinforce this idea, the Qur’an links iman with good deeds no less than 60 times.

Although Muslims consider it desirable to appoint a leader with iman, it may not always be possible to find such a person. An organization may have to choose between a strong Muslim with weak leadership skills or a strong leader with moderate/weak Islamic understanding. The example of Amr Ibn Al-‘Aas is to be remembered here. He had been a Muslim for only four months when he was appointed by the Prophet (PBUH) to a key leadership position. This issue was explained by Ibn Taymiah in his book Assiyasah Ash-Shar‘iyya (Jabnoun, 1994). A leader with weak or inadequate expertise can bring disaster to an organization whereas a skilled leader may advance and help the same organization. Even if the skilled leader were not a strong Muslim, his shortcomings can be made up through shura or the consultative process of decision making.

Islam:

Building upon iman, Islam is the second layer of the moral personality of an Islamic leader and followers. Islam means the achievement of peace with God, within oneself and with the creation of God, through willing submission to Him. As Maudoodi (1991) points out so well, “Iman is the seed and Islam is the fruition.” (Al-Maudoodi, 1991: 115) Because of his or her iman, a leader who practices Islam will never see himself as supreme. Ali Ibn Abu Talib’s (r.a) letter to Malik al-Ashtar an-Nukai, the new Governor of Egypt, stresses this point in the following manner (Behzadnia and Denny, 1981: 8).

“Malik, you must never forget that if you are a ruler over them, then the Caliph is a ruler over you, and God is the supreme Lord over the Caliph.”

Taqwa:

As an individual submits to God through Islam, he develops an awe of God. This all-encompassing, inner consciousness of his duty towards Him and this awareness of his accountability towards Him is taqwa (Behzadnia and Denny, 1981: 116). As pointed out by Maudoodi, “the essence of taqwa lies in an attitude of heart and mind rather than in an outward form” (Behzadnia and Denny, 1981: 118). When imbued with taqwa, a person’s frame of mind-his thoughts, emotions and inclinations-will reflect Islam. Taqwa will restrain a Muslim leader or follower from behaving unjustly-whether to community members, to customers, to suppliers or to anybody else.

“God commands justice the doing of good and liberality to kith and kin and He forbids all shameful deeds and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you that you may receive
admonition."
(Holy Qur’an, An-Nahl: 90)

Ihsan:

Whereas taqwa is the fear of God and the feeling of God’s Presence, ihsan is the love of God. This love of God motivates the individual Muslim to work towards attaining God’s Pleasure. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) describes ihsan as follows: “To worship God as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you” (Sahih Bukhari, no. 1: 47). The constant feeling that God is watching is likely to prompt any leader or follower with Ihsan to behave at his best. The difference between the Muslims with taqwa and Muslims with Ihsan is concisely explained by Maudoodi with the following example (Sahih Bukhari, no. 1: 119).

Among government employees, there may be some who perform their duties scrupulously, but who do not demonstrate any additional commitment. Other employees, however, push themselves beyond the call of duty; they are energized, and willing to make sacrifices in the performance of their tasks. Within the context of Islam, the first group of employees are like believers who do what is sufficient and necessary; they are those that have taqwa. By contrast, the second group of employees have ihsan. These are the Muslim leaders and followers who will tirelessly carry the banner of Islam under the most difficult circumstances (Beekun and Badawi, 1999: 8).

Based on the above discussion of the four layers of Islamic moral character, leaders and followers may be classified depending on what stage they are at: Iman, Islam, Taqwa and Ihsan. The Islamic moral character requires that leaders emphasize the following five key parameters of Islamic behavior: justice, trust, righteousness, the struggle towards self-improvement, and promisekeeping.

i. Justice:

Justice is a dynamic characteristic (Umar-ud-din, 1991: 241) which each Muslim must strive to develop whether he is a leader or a follower.

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. [...]

(Holy Qur’an, Al-Maidah: 8)

The need to achieve a balance and to take a middle road is quite important in a leader, and is stressed repeatedly by God in the Qur’an. He describes those “who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven” as:

“Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those two extremes; [...]”

(Holy Qur’an, Al-Furqan: 67-68)

Application of justice to leadership:

The principle of justice must be observed by all Muslims-leaders and followers alike (Beekun and Badawi, 1999: 9). For example, God admonishes Muslims thus:

“God does command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due; and when you judge between man and man that you judge with justice [...]

(Holy Qur’an, An-Nisa’: 58)

This is why the Prophet (PBUH) emphasized that justice must never be compromised by personal affiliations or other considerations.

ii. Trust:

This concept of trust stresses the idea of responsibility towards organizational stakeholders, and holds true whether those entrusting something to Muslims are themselves non-Muslims.

“O you that believe! betray not the trust of God and the apostle nor misappropriate knowingly things entrusted to you.”

(Holy Qur’an, Al-Anfal: 27)

As a core value, trust fits within the overall Islamic etiquette governing social relationships.

Application of trust to leadership:

Trust is explicitly linked to leadership in the Qur’an. We refer to the story of Prophet Joseph (a.s). After the king had indicated that he placed great trust in him, Prophet Joseph (a.s) deliberately asked to be put in charge of the granaries and storehouses, and the demanding task of establishing them and guarding them. As one translator of the Qur’an, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, points out, Prophet Joseph (as) understood the need to build reserves better than any one else, and was prepared to take on this task himself rather than throw on to another the burden of restricting supplies in times of plenty (Ali, 1989).
Once an individual has accepted to be the leader of a group or organization, he has become their trustee. In a for-profit, Muslim organization, the management of the organization is entrusted with the shareholders’ investment. In a nonprofit organization, the management of the organization is charged with watching over the properties in the trust. Consequently, any managerial decision must be balanced with respect to this trust. The concept of trust can be extended to other dimensions of one’s work as a leader or a follower. Should one be wasting time or organizational resources in performing one’s task, one is violating his/her employer’s trust (Beekun and Badawi, 1999: 10).

iii. Righteousness:
Righteous behavior is described as follows:

“It [...] is righteousness to believe in God and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for Him for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask [...] to be steadfast in prayer and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which you have made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity [...]”

(Holy Qur’an, Al-Baqarah: 177)
These general attributes will now be linked to the attributes that Islamic leaders and followers should embrace.

Application of righteousness to leadership:
Based on the above verses, several moral attributes of righteous leaders become salient (Beekun and Badawi, 1999: 11):

- They act justly and do not allow their personal feelings to hinder justice.
- They have iman,
- They take care of those in need, and do so for the love of God,
- They are steadfast in prayer and practice charity,
- They observe all contracts, and
- They are patient no matter what type of adversity they may be experiencing.

In general, then, organization participants of all faiths are entitled to be treated with basic human decency and dignity and with the maximum of fair play and justice. In an Islamic organization, a leader is expected to be sensitive to their needs (Beekun and Badawi, 1999: 11).

Struggle within oneself towards self-improvement.
This concept is portrayed very accurately by the Qur’an (Al-Hajj: 77-78). The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stressed the importance of this inner striving to improve oneself:

God’s Messenger (PBUH) said, “The believers in the world are in three classes: those who believe in God and His Messenger and do not doubt, but strive with their property and their persons in God’s cause; the man whom people trust with their property and their persons; and the man who, when he is about to display greed, abandons it for the sake of God, Who is Great and Glorious.”

(Mishkat al-Masabih, 1996: 3854)
The dimension of inner struggle permeates the very progression from iman to ihsan, and continues thereafter.

Application of the concept of self-struggle to leadership:
This principle encapsulates the process of inner struggle towards self-betterment. Leaders and followers practicing this principle are continuously monitoring and evaluating their intentions and actions, and acting to improve themselves accordingly. They work hard at practicing what they say, and encourage others in this struggle for self-improvement (Beekun and Badawi, 1999: 12).

v. Promise-keeping:
All Muslims—whether leaders or followers—are urged to keep their promises. They also cannot make promises that are unislamic in nature.

“O you who believe! fulfil (all) obligations...”
(Holy Qur’an, Al-Maidah: 1)
Keeping one’s word characterizes a Muslim. Breaking one’s word is tantamount to hypocrisy.

Application of promise-keeping to leadership:
Based upon the above discussion, keeping promises is very important for all, and a leader is not exempted from this important principle (Beekun and Badawi, 1999: 13).

“I bought something from the Prophet (peace be upon him) before he received his Prophetic commission, and as there was something still due to him I promised him that I would bring it to him at his place, but I forgot.
When I remembered three days later, I went to that place and found him there. He said: [...] I have been here for three days waiting for you.”

(Sunan Abu Dawud, Winalim, 1996)

Leader’s characteristics:

The biggest concern Muslim scholars have towards western-based theories of leadership is that they reflect secular values and are incompatible with the Islamic values found in the Qur’an and Sunnah (Ahmad, 2006; Ahmad and Fontaine, 2011). Hence, the critical argument in favor of the Islamization of knowledge of ‘secular’ disciplines like management. For example, Ahmad (2006: 175-79) writes:

“The Islamic concept of leadership is derived from the doctrine of Tawheed...The following elements are included in Islamic leadership: knowledge and hikmah, taqwa, ‘adl (justice) and rahmah (compassion), courage and bravery, shura (mutual consultation), decisiveness, eloquence, a spirit of self-sacrifice and sabr (patience).”

According to Abdul Wahl Hamid (1989: 114) a Muslim leader should be:

a) God-Conscious (Muttaqi) and having respect for and a commitment to uphold the moral and legal code of Islam, the Sharia.

b) Knowledgeable in the Sharia, especially its main concerns its values and principles to be able to deal with the issues as they arise on the basis of sound knowledge. In addition, he should have competent and specialist advisers also rooted in the knowledge of the Sharia.

c) Having appropriate mental and physical ability such as courage, sagacity, and strength in addition to personal qualities that would inspire trusty and confidence in people

d) Responsive to the needs of the people.

Hamid notes that often the political leaders of Muslims have their roots in alien, hereditary or nepotistic practices that have no sanction in Islam, and are often at odds with the scholars of the community. He therefore suggests that the ideal situation is for leaders to be scholars and for scholars to be leaders, actively involved in political processes. Currently the Sheiks, Imams and the ulema bodies dominantly play a leadership role mostly confined to spiritual and personal matters, often ignoring broader community, ideological and developmental issues. Islamic institutions and organizations should play their role in presenting a comprehensive understanding of Islamic leadership that capacitates the entire Muslim community to take leadership on broader community and world issues.

According to Al-Mawardi (1058) (as cited in Al-Merdawi, 1983), there are six characteristics that are essential for an effective leader. These include righteousness, knowledge, sagacity, and courage (Al-Merdawi, 1983: 79-80). Ibn Taymiyah (1300) outlines the two basic characteristics that a Muslim leader should have. These are Ability and Integrity. He uses the term ability in a generic sense to denote the kind of competency that is required to execute the job. For a military leader, ability means courage and knowledge of war techniques. For a judge, ability means fairness and the ability to execute judgments. Integrity is used to denote righteousness.

It encompasses the personal attributes which are reflected in the behavior of a leader. One can draw a parallel between Ibn Taymiyyah’s ability and integrity and the modern requirements of structure and consideration (Yukl, 2005). Ibn Taymiyyah (1300) further explores the question of which is the more important of the two. He argues that the answer is situational. While ideally both characteristics should be present in a leader, if it proves difficult to find a leader who satisfies the two criteria, then the need for one criterion more than the other will be dictated by the situation.

Ibn Khaldoon (1377) requires four characteristics in a leader: knowledge, righteousness, effectiveness, and sound health. According to Al-Tartouchi (2005) Islamic law requires three characteristics in a leader. The leader should be kind and treat his followers with mercy; he should consult with people (Holy Qur’an, Ali Imran: 159) (Malik, 1997); and he should not appoint someone who is seeking a position of power. Altalib (1992) outlines the characteristics that a Muslim leader should acquire. These are allegiance to God, understanding of global Islamic goals, adherence to Islamic law and manners, and fulfillment of the trust. Hawwa (1988) provides a long list of the attributes that a leader should enjoy.

These include among other things knowledge, courage, chastity, generosity, leniency, disimpeuotuousness, truthfulness, firmness, intelligence, modesty, planning, and consideration. The Quran hints at few essential leadership characteristics. These include firmness, soft heartedness (Holy Qur’an, Ali Imran: 159) (Malik, 1997), integrity (Holy Qur’an, Al-Qalam: 4) (Malik, 1997), fairness (Holy Qur’an, An-Nisa’: 58) (Malik, 1997), and wisdom (Holy Qur’an, An-Naml: 35) (Malik, 1997).

One can easily draw parallels between the characters suggested for Muslim leaders and the five behaviors that Dubrin (2007) suggests are necessary for an ethical leader. These are:

Honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity:

A person who has integrity, honest and trust worthy is a person who fulfills his/her promise, is entrusted by people, honor his/her pledges, and speaks the truth “God commands you to return the things entrusted to you to their rightful owners, and if you judge between people, to do so with justice.” (Holy Qur’an, An-Nisa’: 58)
(Abdel-Haleem, 2005); “You who believe, fulfill your obligations.” (Holy Qur’an, Al-Maidah: 1) (Abdel-Haleem, 2005); “Honor your pledges.” (Holy Qur’an, Al-Isra’: 34) (Abdel-Haleem, 2005); “It the one who brings the truth and the one who accepts it as true who are conscious of God.” (Holy Qur’an, Az-Zumar: 33) (Abdel-Haleem, 2005). “Truly you have a strong character.” (Holy Qur’an, Al-Qalam: 4) (Abdel-Haleem, 2005).

Fairness:

Building a community:
“Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong: those who this are the successful ones.” (Holy Qur’an, Ali Imran: 104) (Abdel-Haleem, 2005).

Respect the individual:
The Qur’an and the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) emphasize the equal worth of all people: “People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you get to know one another” (Holy Qur’an, Al-Hujurat: 13). People should treat each other with respect: “Believers, no one group of men should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them.” (Holy Qur’an, Al-Hujurat: 11).

Working in silence:
A Muslim should dedicate all his/her deeds to God. One should not expect any worldly reward for his/her deeds. God promised to reward these deeds. This reward may come in this life and may be kept for the person in the hereafter. Boasting nullifies God’s reward, because the deed is no longer dedicated to God. The Qur’an states that God does not like those who show off (Holy Qur’an, An-Nisa’: 38) (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

One can also draw a parallel between the characters of a Muslim leader and the five keys to successful and sustained leadership suggested by Thomas (2005). These are:

Principles:
All principles in Islam emanate from believing in the oneness of God and the accountability of people (Mahmoud and Faiza, 2009: 57). “Believers, be conscious of your God and speak in a direct fashion and to good purpose” (Holy Qur’an, Al-Ahzab: 70). The intent of this verse is that people should keep to the principles of Islam and should tell the truth whenever they speak. The Quran praises the Prophet (PBUH) for having a strong character (Mahmoud and Faiza, 2009: 57). “Truly you have a strong character” (Holy Qur’an, Al-Qalam: 4).

Passion:
Jihad (striving in the way of God) is a fundamental principle in Islam. Muslims are commanded to strive to improve their character and to excel in what they are doing. Jihad is fuelled by the passion that one is created to make life better on this earth. Jihad is practiced at many levels. A student’s jihad is to study hard, a father’s jihad is to work hard to support his family, a mother’s jihad is to work with her husband in raising up their family, a leader’s jihad is to fulfill his/her duties to their followers.

People:
Consideration for people has been highlighted as an essential characteristic for effective leaders in Islam. (Holy Qur’an, Ali Imran: 159) (Abdel-Haleem, 2005).

Performance:
The concept of ability introduced by Ibn Taymiah (1300) requires the effective leader to be able to perform the task at hand. Muslims are asked to be very careful in choosing the right person for the job.

Perseverance:
This attribute has been recommended in the literature above. It has also repeatedly mentioned in the Quran as one of the virtues that believers should strive to acquire. Quran praises those who persevere and promises them success (Holy Qur’an, Al-Baqarah: 177) (Abdel Haleem, 2005). A well known tradition of the Prophet (pbuh) states that perseverance is half the faith.

Conclusion
The basic concepts underlying Islamic leadership were stated in the Quran more than 1400 years ago. Qur’anic verses established in broad terms the characteristics of an effective leader from the point of view of Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) acted as a role model for Muslims and showed them how to apply these basic
concepts in real life. Early Muslim leaders followed in the footsteps of the Prophet (PBUH). The Islamic model of leadership emphasizes *khulq* or behaving ethically towards all Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Firmly grounded by his faith in God, and mindful of his role as a trustee, a Muslim leader is expected to be just, behave righteously, strive towards self-improvement, and never break his word. He is to consult with others, especially in areas where he is not competent. He is expected to bear adversity patiently, and remain forever humble. Lastly, Muslim leader must meet the criteria outlined by the *shariat* to ensure that they can perform the task bestowed with the best.

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