



## **MERGING SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION: DEVELOPING AN ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP THEORY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Leadership has been much talked about in the literature of social sciences. Numerous theories seem to have confused researchers and therefore scattered ideas about leadership continue to emerge from time to time. These theories can be classified into behavioral studies, contingency studies, transactional studies, transformational studies, charismatic studies, and integrative studies. Very recently, researchers have introduced a new concept of leadership known as 'authentic leadership.' This author argues that Islam provides the most comprehensive understanding of leadership through its highly developed and modern ethical system that seeks guidelines from the Qur'ān and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad [p.b.u.h]. The author also argues that grounds for leadership have already been laid by Islamic teachings several hundred years back. Nevertheless, there is a need to understand and comprehend these teachings and integrate them into a comprehensive and elaborate theoretical model of leadership theory based on Islamic perspectives. The paper first summarizes the theological beliefs and fundamental socio-economic principles of Islam and cultural setup of society based on the Qur'ān and Sunnah. It then presents a framework of Islamic Leadership Theory. The paper also discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the proposed framework. Recommendations are also made for further theoretical development of the proposed model.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islam is the last revealed religion which does not only emphasize spiritual development of its followers but also provides them a complete code of conduct to guide their lives. In all facets of life- religious, ethical, socio-cultural, economic, political, or legal - Islam provides comprehensive guidelines to underpin the foundations of a strong Islamic society that is built upon complete submission to Allah and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). Islam does not separate everyday life from spiritual life; rather, it makes the religion a part of everyday life and vice-versa. In order to build a society where the rule of Allah is supreme and His orders are followed by His creatures. The goals of Islam are based on the Islamic concepts of human well being and good life (Rice, 1999). Islamic teachings stress brotherhood, socio-economic justice, and require a balanced satisfaction of both the material and spiritual needs of all humans (Chapra, 1992 cited in Rice, 1999).

From the Arab lands, Islam spread all over the world within a few hundred years. Followers of Islam, wherever they went, endeavored to create a society of equals built upon the highest ethical and moral values accepted in human history. Great Islamic states or caliphates and societies placed great emphasis on theories of leadership and personal development (Kriger and Seng, 2005) that drew fundamental inspiration from the life of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h) and his companions or *Sahabah*. Muslims believe that Muhammad (p.b.u.h) is the best example and role model for humans being to follow. The Qur'ān states that

“verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the last Day, and remembereth Allah much (al-Qur'ān, 33:21).

Therefore, in every aspect the life of Prophet (p.b.u.h) provides examples of how Muslims should behave. The holy Qur'ān and life of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) together present a comprehensive code of conduct for followers of Islam. Muslims are encouraged to build Islamic societies upon the examples set by the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and his companions. From the way of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) manifested his leadership and trained his companions as leaders of the futures, there is much on which a robust theory of leadership and management in an Islamic perspective can be built on.

It should also be noted that the basic motivation of this paper is twofold. First, the author notes that various leadership perspectives have been presented based on spirituality as well as religion. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, no such framework or theory has been presented in an Islamic perspective. Second, most of the modern theories of leadership recognize the importance of ethics, morality and spirituality, and also emphasize leadership traits that are fundamental to the Islamic ethical system. Therefore, it is important to analyze leadership and the leadership process in the light of Islamic teachings. This paper makes an attempt to present a framework of Islamic leadership theory and calls for its further development in the literature. The paper starts with an introduction to the ethical and moral system in Islam, followed by its fundamental beliefs, practices, and guidelines. Discussion on spirituality and its role in leadership is also included. Finally, the construct of Islamic leadership theory is proposed. Some theoretical as well as practical implications of the proposed framework are also discussed.

## 2. THE ETHICAL/MORAL SYSTEM IN ISLAM

Researchers have argued that Islam as a faith is not an abstract theological dogma, nor an intellectual creed, nor a philosophical proposition. It must manifest into action in daily life, extending from the inner dimension to outer, from individual to social, from moral to legal. A major goal of Islam is to provide mankind with a practical and realistic code of life based on virtue, social justice and human well being. To make this code universal, it should also be logical as well as understandable. The Islamic ethical system contains specific guidelines concerning the moral filter needed for conducting business. These guidelines derive from the interrelated concepts of unity, justice and trusteeship (Rice, 1999). The Qur'ān, Sunnah, *Ijmā'* and *Qiyās* are the sources which give clear illustration of Islamic ethics. Ethics and standards of morality in Islam do not attempt to introduce entirely novel values and virtues. It accepts the traditional and commonly accepted moral norms and endows them with a sense of balance in an individual's life. Islam ensures that ethical standards result in the greater good of society. For example, the Qur'ān clearly defines what is righteous and what is not:

“it is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah 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, and for the ransom of slaves, to be steadfast in prayers, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing” (al-Qur’ān, 2:177).

In *Al-Baqarah*, Allah reminds mankind:

“do not devour one another’s wealth through unjust means, nor bribe the authorities in order that you may wrongfully usurp the possession of others - while you are well aware [of its being a sinful act]” (al-Qur’ān, 2:188).

To avoid social conflicts and anarchy, Islam condemns evil deeds such as backbiting, hypocrisy, and many other deeds which are mentioned as *harām* (prohibited).

“O ye who believe! Shun much suspicion; for lo! some suspicion is a crime. And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Ye abhor that (so abhor the other)! And keep your duty (to Allah). Lo! Allah is Relenting, Merciful” (al-Qur’ān, 49:12).

“That Allah may reward the true men for their truth, and punish the hypocrites if He will, or relent toward them (if He will). Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (al-Qur’ān, 33:24).

The ethical and moral system in Islam does not only define the boundaries of the system, it also talks of the reward for those who follow these rules. The Qur’ān states that:

“whoso bringeth a good deed will receive tenfold the like thereof, while whoso bringeth an ill deed will be awarded but the like thereof; and they will not be wronged” (al-Qur’ān, 6:160).

To summarize the ethical and moral system in Islam, one should note that whatever brings welfare to individuals, masses or the society, is morally good in Islam. On the other hand, whatever is injurious is morally not good. Hence, man should strive to ensure that he fulfils both *huq ūq Allah* (rights of Allah) and *huq ūq al ūibūd* (rights of men).

### 3. SPIRITUAL LENS OF LEADERSHIP

The concept of spirituality in modern leadership theories is not very old and until recently, most leadership theories did not address the role of religion or spirituality in political or workplace institutions (Hicks, 2002). The apparent separation of spirituality from the workplace was due to the implicit or explicit assumption that workplaces or other social institutions are secular (Hicks, 2002) and secularism attempts to keep religion a personal or private matter. Thompson (2006) also views the “gap between moral purpose and moral performance as a problem created in part by the alienation of spirituality from civic life.”

He further argues that:

“We are a nation of privatized morality that places corporate and civic leaders in a labyrinth of uncertainty when they try to establish a moral foundation for actions and decisions affecting the public interest. This uncertainty is compounded by an Enlightenment tradition of modern secular pluralism privileging rational discourse as the vehicle of public moral sentiment.” (p. 27)

Thompson’s view represents discontent with the secularist perspective of “private” morality. However, Yom (2002) argues that secularism is increasingly less relevant in the globalizing world where religious identities have strengthened and believers have grown in perpetuating and sharing their narrative visions of the past, present, and future. He further notes that:

“the return of religion, therefore, implicates the dimensions of autonomy, identity, and belief; it represents a new metric of identity.”

Perhaps that is why Mitroff and Denton (1999) argue that employees should be allowed to bring their personal identity into the workplace, including their spiritual ideas and expressions. This argument

is not only valid but logical as a person can not change/switch his whole identity between his home and workplace. Hence, growing interest in religion and spirituality, not only in general, but also in the specific context of the workplace is less surprising in the modern and global world.

Fry (2003) proposed a causal theory of spiritual leadership that incorporates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival. He further argues that spiritual leadership theory is not only inclusive of other major extant motivation based theories of leadership, but that it is also more conceptually distinct, parsimonious, and less conceptually confounded. By incorporating calling and membership as two key follower needs for spiritual survival, spiritual leadership theory is inclusive of the religious- and ethics and values based approaches to leadership (Fry, 2003). This work on spirituality is followed by various studies which emphasize on workplace spirituality and its positive outcomes in form of organizational performance and employee well-being (see for example: Dent, Higgins and Wharff, 2005; Reave, 2005; Parameshwar, 2005; Benefiel, 2005; Whittington et al., 2005; Kriger and Seng, 2005; Duchon and Plowman, 2005; Fry, Vitucci and Cedilo, 2005).

Some other works on spirituality in the work place include Ashmos and Duchon (2000), Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003), Mitroff and Denton (1999), Neal (2001), and Sass (2000). These works primarily emphasize on the significance of workplace spirituality and its impact on work outcomes. The central idea that each of these works advocate is that spirituality in the workplace is a positive phenomenon that leads to positive organizational culture and transcendent values in the organizational members. In Hicks' (2002) opinion, work on spirituality in leadership studies is a reflection of the social sciences' attempt to model modern as well as rational spheres of public life as free from the duties and trappings of religion. It is notable that most of these works mention a common set of spiritual characteristics which include *vision* (broad appeal to key stakeholders, defines the destination and journey, reflects high ideals, encourages hope/faith, establishes a standard of excellence), *altruistic love* (forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy/compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust/loyalty, humility), and *hope/faith* (endurance, perseverance, do what it takes, stretch goals, expectation of reward/victory). Though many of these dimensions have been derived from various theologies, religion has generally been kept separate from workplace studies.

In the Islamic perspective, spiritual development which is possible in this world should not take the form of man turning his face from the workplace and retiring in some uninhabited corner (Mawdudi, 1948). Rather, Islam encourages man to integrate his work and every day objectives with religion and spirituality and grow everyday on earth while establishing Allah's will. Mawdudi further argues that:

“Islam rejects and condemns the asceticism of life, and proposes a set of methods and processes for the spiritual development of man not outside this world but inside it, one that passes through the rough and tumble of life.”

According to the Islamic perspective, spirituality can be gained by living everyday life, through its daily activities, and performing routine tasks while establishing a discipline that Allah asks for.

Looking at the above characteristics of spiritual leadership, scholars have argued that many of the characteristics of “spirituality in the workplace” – the building of community, concern for social justice within the organization and its vision, and equality of voice— are basic themes of Islam (see Kriger and Seng, 2005). They further note that:

“the values of service, surrendering self, truth, charity, humility, forgiveness, compassion, thankfulness, love, courage, faith, kindness, patience, and hope, in the workplace spirituality literature, (Fry, 2003; Kriger & Hanson, 1999), are to be found not only in the Qur'ān, but also in popular Islamic wisdom literature, philosophical debates and the mystical guidance of esoteric Islam, Sufism.”

In another piece of work, Bouma et al. (2003) have examined the place of work in Islamic doctrine. They argue that one's spiritual endeavors in Islam must take place in the context of “ummah relations,” of which work is an essential part. They note that “if work becomes a purely secular activity, it alienates the worker from both the product of production and society.” Therefore, perceiving work merely as a secular activity or a means to attain material pleasures is unacceptable to Islam (Bani Sadr, 1980 cited in Bouma et al. In the following sections, leadership in Islam will be presented in more detail.

#### 4. FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

Muslims believe that Islam is a complete religion and Allah has perfected it through His revelations to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In the Qur'ān, Allah says that:

“this day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your way of life.” (al-Qur'ān, 5:3)

Let us examine the following Hadīth, one of many sayings of the Prophet (p.b.u.h):

“One day while the Prophet was sitting in the company of some people, (the angel) Gabriel came and asked, “What is *Imān*?” Allah’s Apostle replied, ‘*Imān* is to believe in Allah, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection.’” Then he further asked, “What is *Islām*?” Allah’s Apostle replied, “To worship Allah Alone and none else, to offer prayers perfectly to pay the compulsory charity (*Zakāt*) and to observe fasts during the month of *Ramadhān*.” Then he further asked, “What is *Iḥsān* (perfection)?” Allah’s Apostle replied, “To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you.” Then he further asked, “When will the Hour be established?” Allah’s Apostle replied, “The answerer has no better knowledge than the questioner. But I will inform you about its portents.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 1.2.48)

It is obvious from the above that an individual must have a set of beliefs to enter *Islām*. These beliefs require him to follow certain practices under the guidelines of the Qur'ān and Sunnah. To improve his spiritual status, a Muslim should follow the right path to find the ultimate truth.



#### 4.1 *Imān* (Fundamental Beliefs or Faith)

There are two belief statements which Muslims follow, *al-Mujmāl* (The Summary Declaration) and *al-Mufassal* (The Detailed Declaration). According to *the former*, a Muslim declares that:

“I have faith in Allah as He is known by His Names and Attributes and I accept all His commands.”

By embracing this statement, a Muslim completely surrenders himself in front of Allah and His commandments and pledges a life-long commitment to follow the orders of Allah. The latter pledge a Muslim makes states that:

“I have faith in Allah and His Angels, His Books and His Messengers, and the Day of Judgment and that all good and evil and fate is from Almighty Allah and it is sure that there will be resurrection after death.”

After embracing this pledge, a Muslim declares his comprehensive faith which is multidimensional and brings more responsibilities and duties. The above two declarations are common and mandatory to every Muslim and are doors to Islam.

#### 4.2 Five Pillars (Practices)

Once an individual declares the above mentioned faith, basic practices of Islam are obligatory to him with immediate effect. These fundamental practices are also known as the five pillars of Islam on which the overall building of Islam stands. The Messenger of Allah said:

“Islam is built on five [pillars]: bearing witness that there is no Allah but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet, establishing the prayers, giving *zakāt*, performing hajj, and fasting during *Ramān*.”

These five pillars help the man to climb the ladder of spirituality, get the favor of Allah, and to bring a Divine touch to his whole life. These fundamental practices are mandatory on every Muslim and provide ways to worship Allah. Nevertheless, worshipping Allah does not mean

constant seclusion, absolute meditation, and performing the rituals without understanding the purpose of these rituals. These rituals teach Muslims to worship Allah, to live life according to His commands, and to surrender completely to His will. These rituals also teach Muslims to love Allah, to obey His commands, to bring His will in all aspects of life, to be righteous and to abstain from evil, and to spend the twenty-four hours of day and night according to how Allah wants.

#### 4.3 Sources of Wisdom (Code of Life/Guidance)

Islam does not only ask its followers to have certain beliefs and follow a set of practices, it also provides them with guidelines which are available in the Qur'ān, Sunnah, and *sharāh*. If Muslims are not able to understand certain matters through the above mentioned sources, they are allowed to perform '*Ijtihād*' and '*Ijmā'*'. These sources of guidance are absolute solutions to living an Islamic life for followers of Islam.

### 5. FOUNDATIONS OF ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP

“According to the Prophet (p.b.u.h), Muslims must appoint a leader during a trip, select a leader (*imām*) to lead the prayer, and choose a leader for other group activities. The husband is the leader of his family. In the absence of her husband, the wife assumes the role of leader of the house” (Beekun and Badawi, 1999).

Based on the description of the fundamentals of Islam, which are applicable to all Muslims, this section presents the concept of leadership from an Islamic perspective. It is argued that both Muslim leaders and followers operate in a group under a common set of beliefs, perform similar practices, and have similar set of guidelines about everyday life. This whole system creates a common platform for everyone to operate within his own circle efficiently and effectively. This whole system guides Muslim leaders to perform their leadership role and Muslim followers to operate under the leadership of their leaders. Due to the common platform available to both sides, conflict of interest is less likely.

Leadership in Islam is a responsibility given by Allah to the chosen individuals. Therefore, it becomes a great responsibility and demands

immense conscientiousness from the person in the leadership role. The Qur'ān says:

“...Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, to high ranks. Allah is informed of what ye do (al-Qur'ān, 58:11).

At another occasion in the Qur'ān, Allah says:

“and We made them chiefs who guide by Our command, and We inspired in them the doing of good deeds and the right establishment of worship and the giving of alms and they were worshippers of Us (alone)” (al-Qur'ān, 21:73).

Moreover, leadership in Islam is not about exercising power and authority. It rather emphasizes the service of mankind and encourages the leader to look after his followers with utmost sincerity and humility. As the Prophet (PBUH) said:

“All of you are guardians and responsible for your wards and the things under your care. The Imam (i.e. ruler) is the guardian of his subjects and is responsible for them and a man is the guardian of his family and is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband's house and is responsible for it. A servant is the guardian of his master's belongings and is responsible for them” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 2.13.18).

Abuznaid (2006) argues that though Islam does not provide a comprehensive theory in management, nevertheless one cannot ignore a set of general guidelines that could be applied to management. In a similar context, Rice (1999) also recognizes that the goals of Islam are not materialistic. Rather, they are based on Islamic concepts of human well being and good life which stress brotherhood and socioeconomic justice and require a balanced satisfaction of both the material and spiritual needs of all humans (Chapra, 1992, cited in Rice, 1999). Muslims believe that Allah has completed the religion and Islam is a comprehensive way of life.

Researchers have also recognized that specific guidelines are available in the Islamic ethical system for realising the moral filter and for conducting businesses (e.g. Rice, 1999). These guidelines are derived

from the interrelated concepts of unity, justice and trusteeship. In the view of Nasr (1966), Islam consists of three dimensions: the outward, the inward, and the path which leads from outwardness to inwardness. These dimensions of the Islamic revelation are called the *Sharʿah* (the Sacred Law), the *Haqʿiqah* (the Truth) and the *Tarʿiqah* (the Path). Some other scholars call these dimensions as islam, iman, and ihsan, or “surrender,” “faith” and “virtue” (Schuon, 1974). These dimensions are common to all Muslims. However, when it comes to the Muslim leader (or Amīr) he should be able to practice all of these three dimensions at a higher level.

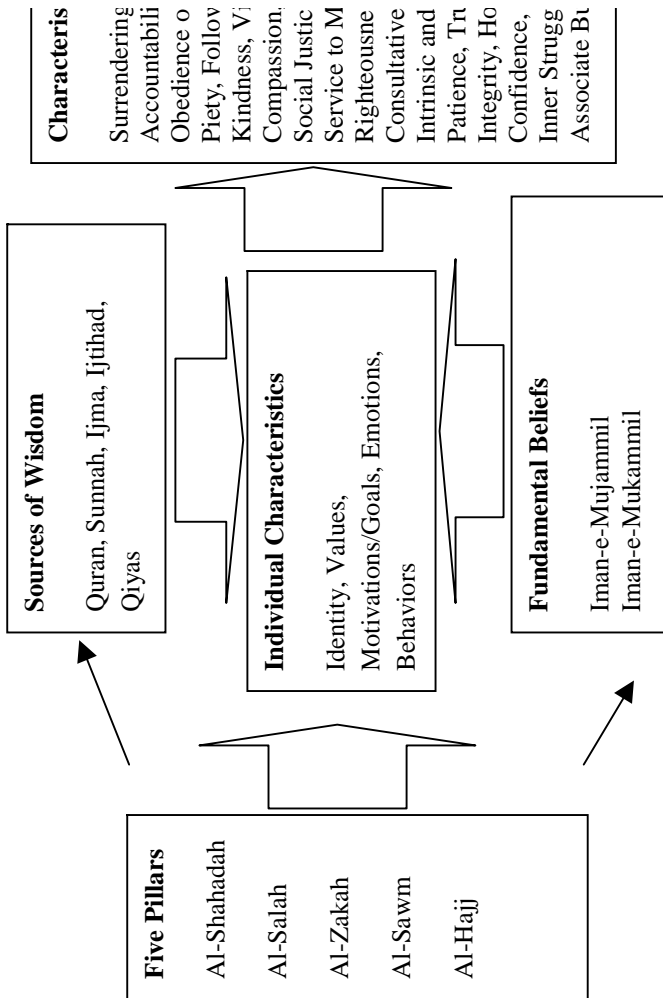
It is clear that leadership in Islam gives an entirely different perspective when compared to leadership in the secular framework. It brings in dimensions of Allah’s fear and complete surrendering to His will. These added dimensions also impart the four cardinal virtues to a true Muslim leader which al-Ghazzali considers as wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice (Umaruddin, 1988). Obviously, the elements of Allah’s fear in one’s heart and complete surrendering to His will also result in several other traits in a Muslim leader who lives the daily life with a smooth integration of religion, spirituality, and earthly matters. The relationship between the fundamentals of Islam and its relationship to leadership is given in Figure 1. Leadership in an Islamic perspective carries positive attributes and has the potential to provide an extra edge in the leadership process. Based on the perspectives presented above, a proposed definition of leadership from Islamic perspectives is presented as follows:

“Leadership from Islamic perspectives is a social process in which the leader seeks to achieve certain organizational goals by garnering the support from relevant stakeholders – primarily followers – while fully complying to Islamic teachings and principles.”

## 6. CHARACTERISTICS OF A MUSLIM LEADER AND DIMENSIONS OF ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP

Characteristics of a Muslim leader include: surrendering to Allah, trusteeship of Allah, accountability to Allah, obedience to Allah and the Prophet, piety, following the *sharʿah*, kindness, virtuosity, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, social justice and consideration, service of

FIGURE 1  
Fundamentals of Islamic Leadership



mankind, knowledgeable, righteousness, egalitarianism, consultative, wisdom, humility, intrinsic and long-term reward, patience, truthfulness, honesty, integrity, hope and optimism, confidence, positive firmness, inner struggle against the self, and associate building. It can be observed from Appendix A that these attributes have been discussed under several modern theories of leadership as well. There have been extensive references of these attributes in the Qur'ān as well as Hadīth literature. Although these references may not be necessarily in the context of leadership, however they have a strong relevance for the overall character of a Muslim. Appendix A also shows several striking parallels between mainstream positive approaches of leadership and that of Islam.

There could be several other characteristics, however, these are the ones that are most important for leadership. It is obvious that some characteristics in the list are more spiritual in nature while others are more general attributes a leader should have. Nevertheless, all these attributes are positive in nature and encourage a positive self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-development of a leader. Spiritual characteristics also provide several extra dimensions to Islamic leadership.

When compared to the positive form of secular leadership, Islam provides distinct dimensions that are likely to enhance the positive nature of Islamic leadership. The most important extra dimension in this regard is “surrendering to Allah.” When an individual completely submits himself to the will of Allah, he accepts Allah’s commands and fully understands that Allah is watching him all the time. This feature also brings in the appreciation of accountability of all actions in front of Allah on the Day of Judgement.

This dimension is also likely to lead an individual to materialise social justice and righteous deeds. Trusteeship of Allah makes man responsible for everything that operates under his leadership; whereas following the *sharīʿah* provides him with a code of ethics so that he can moderate his own actions and deeds. In an Islamic perspective, man is completely answerable to Allah. He is supposed to set his own interest aside and think of the greater good of his followers who are also men of Allah. Rather than commanding them with his position of power, he is expected to serve his followers and lead them to fulfill the responsibility given by Allah. Moreover, all this is equally true in the case of the followers who follow the leader, while ultimately following the teachings of Islam.

These extra dimensions of leadership in the Islamic viewpoint make the leadership process more objective and mutually beneficial for both

leaders as well as followers. These dimensions also help to develop mutual trust as everyone is eventually seeking the same goal, that is, the will of Allah.

## 7. DIMENSIONS OF ISLAMIC FOLLOWERSHIP

Islam does not only provide guidelines for those in leadership roles, but also for those in followership positions as well. Followers make-up a bigger portion of the leadership process and their continuous commitment and agreement to the leader ensures harmony and success. As there are guidelines for leaders, so there are for followers. During his life, the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) performed the role of an ideal leader and his companions set the exemplary style of followership. On several occasions, the Prophet advised his companions about the leadership process and prepared them for future leadership roles. The Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h) said:

“One who dislikes a thing done by his Amīr should be patient over it, for anyone from the people who withdraws (his obedience) from the government, even to the extent of a hand span and died in that condition, would die the death of one belonging to the days of *jāhiliyyah* (ignorance).”

On another occasion, the Prophet said:

“...Allah loves the servant who is Allah-conscious and is free from want and is hidden (from the view of people) (Sahih Muslim, 42.7072).

Followership in the Islamic perspective is equally important as leadership. If followers do not perform their role, leadership has a high likelihood of failing. Also, if followers follow the leader but their vision and commitments are not truly compatible, there would always be a gap between leadership and followership. Hence, in the Islamic perspective, responsibility has also been given to followers. A follower follows precisely the guidelines as the leader does. Islam also encourages followers to be more knowledgeable, active, dynamic, participative, and sincere to the leader. Similar to the leader, they are answerable to Allah for all their deeds. If they are not genuine and committed in their followership without justified reasons, they are being

unfair to the whole community. Followers in Islam are also encouraged to counsel the leader in his role and in doing that, they have to be fully impartial, unprejudiced, and completely honest. Their relationship with the leader should not be based upon their personal interest and voracity; it should rather be pure and based on the will of Allah. Islam sets a simple rule for this in the Qur'ān:

“Co-operate with one another for virtue and heedfulness and do not co-operate with one another for the purpose of vice and aggression” (al-Qur'ān, 5:2).

Hence, followers, in the Islamic perspective are encouraged not to follow the leader blindly. If they see that the leader is not performing according to what Islam says, they should bring it to the leader's notice and convince him to follow Allah's will. They should also not indulge in activities which flatter the leader or lead him to feel proud and pompous.

## 8. TOWARDS AN ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP THEORY

Islam is a universal religion which offers a complete package of socio-economic reform and policies. Though Islam does not lay a theory of management or leadership, it does offer a robust set of guidelines which are useful for its followers to run their businesses as well as perform leadership roles in various capacities. These guidelines are offered in the sources of *sharʿah* (Qur'ān, Sunnah, *Ijmāʿ*, *Qiyās* etc) and can also be observed from the practices of the *sahābah*. Therefore, a person seeking any directions regarding organizational issues, should be confident that Islam does provide a set of general principles which can be used in everyday business practices. These principles and guidelines are also useful foundations to develop a leadership framework in an Islamic perspective. In the presence of several existing leadership theories and frameworks, one could ask why another theory from an Islamic perspective is needed? The response to such a question is simple: Islam is the second largest religion practiced on earth. As explained earlier, Islam does not separate the daily life from spiritual life. In Islam, religion is not divorced from routine life, rather it integrates the socio-economic, legal, cultural, and other aspects of human life. Therefore, it is reasonable to explore how Islam influences leadership practices of its followers. Moreover, proliferating concepts and practice of Islamic banking, *sharʿah* compliance, and management in an Islamic



perspective, make it an imperative to look at leadership from an Islamic lens.

Another important rationale is that modern leadership constructs such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, and spiritual leadership seem to advocate much of what are also the fundamentals of the ethical and moral system in Islam. Positive attributes that today's leadership constructs prescribe for leaders, are also the ones that Islam has been preaching for more than fourteen hundred years. Therefore, the author argues that the development of an 'Islamic Leadership Theory' is a right step at this juncture when the world is looking at Islamic scholars to contribute to mainstream literature.

Although several scholars have attempted to articulate an Islamic perspective of leadership (see Beekun and Badawi, 1999; Ezzati, 1982; Toor, 2007; Beik and Arsyianti, 2007; Ahmad, 2007, Saleh, 2007), none has presented a theoretical framework that can explain leadership from Islamic perspectives. Saleh (2007) laments saying that "Muslim intellectuals have been unable to formalize an Islamic theory of leadership." He argues that attempts at explaining leadership from Islamic perspectives are apologetic in nature and do not lead to a comprehensive framework of what can be termed as an Islamic theory of leadership. Such attempts merely aim to prove that Islam has sufficient resources to formulate a theory of leadership. Toor (2008) also observes that there is an urgent need for formulation, testing, and validation of an Islamic Leadership Theory. He also makes several observations regarding definitional issues, measurement, and research developed from Islamic perspectives.

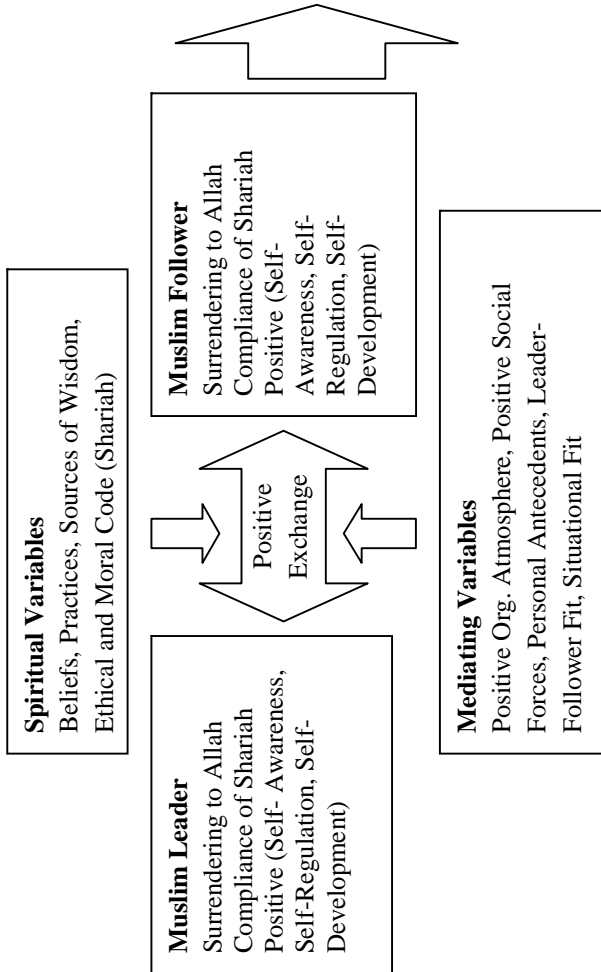
## 9. DEVELOPING ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP THEORY

Based on the theoretical background presented in the previous sections, Figure 2 illustrates the proposed construct for a framework of Islamic leadership theory. The model correlates several variables in a leadership process that include: the Muslim leader and followers, spiritual variables, mediating variables, and leadership outcomes. In the following sections, the variables in the proposed model are explained briefly.

### 9.1 Muslim Leaders and Followers

Characteristics of Muslim leaders and followers have been discussed in an earlier section. However, it is important to explain the role of

FIGURE 2  
Framework for Islamic Leadership Theory



positive self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-development. Various researchers have regarded these factors as important for the leadership process (see Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Baumgardner (1990) notes that self-knowledge is associated with adjustment and self-confidence. He also suggests that “a strong sense of identity, or certainty in self-attributes, promotes a sense of control over future outcomes, thus generating positive affect and confidence in self.” Gardner and Avolio (2005) argue that self-awareness and self-regulation are important assets of authentic leaders and result in authentic leadership development. In their conceptual model of authentic leadership development, self-awareness comprises values, identity, emotions, and motives. While self-regulation consists of three factors which are: balanced processing, authentic behavior, and relational transparency. The importance of self-related factors is not limited to leaders only. “Follower self-conception may mediate the relationship between leadership and follower behavior” (van Knippenberg et al., 2005). Therefore, leadership that is able to influence follower self-conception may influence follower attitudes and behavior (Lord, Brown and Freiberg, 1999). Hence, in addition to fully surrendering to Allah and following the *sharʿah*, positive self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-development are vital factors for effective and successful leadership process.

## 9.2 Spiritual Variables

Spiritual variables are the cornerstone of the Islamic leadership framework. They are the “extra dimensions” that have been explained in earlier sections. Therefore, *Imān* (or belief), the five pillars of Islam (or practices), and sources of wisdom collectively structure the ethical and moral system that guides the leadership process from Islamic perspectives. These spiritual variables also shape the characteristics of a Muslim leader. Recognizing the fact that spirituality and religion in Islam are not two separate entities – rather branches of the same tree – it is argued that many of the characteristics of “spirituality in the workplace” are essentially the teachings of Islam. These characteristics may include the building of community, concern for social justice within the organization and its vision, and equality of voice (see: Kriger and Seng, 2005). Positive and transcendent values – such as service, surrendering self, truth, charity, humility, forgiveness, compassion,

thankfulness, love, courage, faith, kindness, patience, and hope – that have been under the construct of spiritual leadership in the workplace spirituality literature (see Fry, 2003), not only found in the Qur’ān, but also in popular Islamic wisdom literature, philosophical debates and the mystical guidance of esoteric Islam, Sufism (Kriger and Seng, 2005). Nevertheless, it is important to appreciate that these spiritual variables are vital for any discourse in an Islamic perspective. Therefore, existence of spiritual variables within the Islamic leadership construct results in a positive exchange process among the leader and his followers. This positive exchange process results in several positive outcomes that will be mentioned later.

### 9.3 Mediating Variables

In addition to spiritual variables, the positive exchange process in the Islamic leadership construct is also mediated by several other variables. These variables have appeared in a number of earlier leadership theories and are considered to moderate the leadership process.

#### 9.3.1 Positive Organizational Context

The issue of context has been discussed by various researchers of late. Luthans and Avolio (2003) have laid emphasis on a positive organizational context for authentic leadership development. Bass and Avolio (1994) also suggest that similar to leaders, organizations also have the characteristics of transformational leadership. Therefore, values, culture, practices, and the overall chemistry of the organization influence both the leadership process as well as leadership development. If organizational context is positive, there is more likelihood of positive outcomes and vice versa.

#### 9.3.2 Positive Social Forces

Leadership is regarded as a social construction and authenticity of leadership is largely attributed to the development of social capital, and social cognitive theory. Toor (2006) argues for various significant social forces such as significant individuals and significant social institutions. Significant individuals may include family members, teachers, role models, colleagues, mentors, bosses, etc. Significant social institutions may include the home (family, marriage, etc.), academic institutions

(school/college/university), media (electronic/print/internet), work and voluntary organizations, religion, culture, community, government, and economy. It is argued that a positive influence of social forces also mediates the leadership process. Influence of these forces is unquestionably an important dimension that mediates leadership development and hence, leadership influence.

### 9.3.3 Personal Antecedents

“Leadership antecedents” refer to those episodes, events, incidents, happenings, and transitions, which are directly or indirectly caused by a single or combination of various significant individuals and social institutions, and eventually originate the leadership schema. Timing, duration, spacing, sequence, context, and nature of these events are important factors in the development of consequential behaviors (Elder and Rockwell, 1979). Significant social experiences may occur within social institutions in connection with significant individuals. These experiences may take place during various stages of leader or follower development. They may be under full, partial, or even no control of the individuals. However, their impact is significant and can bring major variations in the behavior of the effected persons (Toor, 2006). Therefore, personal antecedents of leaders as well as those of followers also have important implications for the leadership process.

### 9.3.4 Leader-Follower Fit

A match between leader and follower attitudes and behaviors is another important variable that mediates the leadership process. Leaders and followers do not always choose each other. However, if there is high congruence between their approaches and perspectives, there is higher likelihood of a positive exchange process. A lack of such congruence may give rise to conflicting attitudes and difference of viewpoints.

### 9.3.5 Situational Fit

A variable that has been discussed for quite a long time in leadership theories is the fit between a leader and the situation in which he performs his leadership. Researchers have argued that in-match leaders experience greater positive affect, self-confidence, and task involvement. Situational fit has also been related to higher levels of effectiveness and performance of leadership.

From the discussion in the preceding paragraphs, it can be ascertained that leadership in an Islamic perspective is a positive phenomenon. This perspective of leadership is based on commonly accepted ethical standards in all societies. In addition, Islamic leadership provides “extra dimensions” that positively reinforce the leadership process. It is argued that an Islamic leadership construct has the capability to develop leadership that is most needed in today’s context. The author argues that the extra dimensions of Islamic leadership construct have the potential to achieve mutual trust, engagement, collective good, virtuousness, spirituality, positive values, and veritable performance of members in any kind of organization. Islamic leadership can positively influence the attitudes of followers and bring higher levels of satisfaction, motivation, performance, positive energy, and organizational loyalty. It will also result in increased fulfillment, commitment, and positive energy on part of leaders.

## 10. FUTURE RESEARCH

It should be well understood that this paper merely presents some preliminary thoughts about the development of a comprehensive Islamic leadership theory. The author calls for further development of the construct presented here. Considering long term and deeper implications of the construct across the world, the construct needs to be explored, developed, and tested in depth. Propositions and hypothesis should be formed and tested to see if organizations in Islamic countries can benefit from this theory by positively influencing their members. Studies can be conducted to see the outcomes of Islamic leadership in terms of: performance and effectiveness of leaders; productivity, satisfaction, extra effort, organizational loyalty, and development of followers; profitability, growth, sustainability, and overall performance of organizations. The construct should also be tested across various Islamic countries to investigate its robustness against different cultures, ethnicities, and genders. The construct can also make an interesting case for organizations in which employees belong to more than one religion. Some studies can also explore how the outcomes vary after providing training of management and leadership in Islamic perspective to the employees. Such multi-level and multi-dimensional studies can help to explore the construct presented in this paper.

## 11. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Various theories have been presented in the domain of leadership that explain the leadership process as well as styles, attributes, characteristics, and tactics of successful and effective leaders. Recent works of leadership have also incorporated the concepts of spirituality and authenticity in leadership and leadership development. In this paper, a framework for the development of Islamic leadership theory was presented. It was argued that a Muslim leader leads from the heart and soul, while following the teachings of Islam and surrendering fully to the will of Allah. He performs his job with utmost commitment as he is not only answerable to Allah for all he does but he is also answerable to Allah for his followers. This twofold responsibility makes an Islamic leader completely obedient to Allah and His Prophet, a true follower of Islam, self-less in his pursuits, devoted to mankind, and committed in his duties. A Muslim leader ensures that he does not do anything which can hurt his followers. He considers the followers as his fellow brothers/sisters in Islam and is well aware of his duties as caretaker of responsibilities given to him by Allah. He recognizes that he will be answerable for all of his deeds and that Allah is watching him all the time. This is true of followers who share equal responsibility of their deeds and demonstrate the same level of sincerity and commitment towards the task assigned by the leader.

The author believes that this proposal of Islamic leadership theory has the potential to form a new stream of research that addresses leadership issues in the Islamic context. This article provides awareness that an Islamic Leadership Theory is important and relevant to modern management studies and also a departure towards a broader understanding of leadership themes and its development process in an Islamic perspective. The author invites scholars to contribute to this new line of inquiry in the form of: development themes and interventions to develop understanding of Islamic leadership; research methods to explore the effectiveness and efficiency of those leaders who conform to Islamic leadership; developing the scales of measuring the compliance of Islamic perspective by leaders as well as followers; and a cross-cultural analysis in various Islamic countries. Considering the increased awareness about Islam, escalating demand for management in Islamic perspective, growing focus on Islamic banking systems, the emerging concept of *shar'ah* compliance, evolving a notion of dispute resolution in an Islamic way, and the prolific wave of Islamic revival, it seems to

the author that it is the most appropriate time to formulate and test the Islamic leadership constructs and gradually integrate it within Islamic management practices.

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APPENDIX A  
Leadership Attributes and Islamic Perspective

Leadership Attributes	Relevant References in		
	Mainstream Literature	al-Qurʿān	Hadīth
Kindness, Virtuousness, or Benediction	Spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005) Self-transcendence (Schwartz, 1994) Workplace spirituality (Fry, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Kriger and Hanson, 1999)	2:237 4: 114 7: 119 22:41	Al-Bukhārī: 8.73.9 Muslim: 031. 5880
Mercy, Forgiveness, Compassion	Compassionate leadership (Cameron et al. 2003) Spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005) Workplace spirituality (Fry, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Kriger and Hanson, 1999)	74:56 2:263 42:43	Al-Bukhārī: 8.78.649; Muslim: 037.6673; 037.6670
Social Justice and Consideration	Transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1990)	7:87 6:152	Al-Bukhārī: 3.49. 870 Sunan Abu- Dawud: 24.3568
Service to Mankind	Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) Moral leadership (Leo, 2000)	3:110	Al-Bukhārī: 7.71.583
Knowledge	Transformational leadership (Bass, 1990; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Bierly et al., 2000)	58:11	Al-Bukhārī: 9.89.255 Muslim: 8.1543 Sunan Abu- Dawud: 25.3634
Righteousness	Ethical leadership (Treviño et al., 2003; Treviño et al., 2000)	2:177; 5:2; 17:25	Al-Bukhārī: 3.38.511;

APPENDIX A (continued)  
Leadership Attributes and Islamic Perspective

Leadership Attributes	Relevant References in		
	Mainstream Literature	al-Qurʿān	Hadīth
Egalitarianism	Egalitarian leadership (Parry, 1996; Trevor-Roberts et al., 2003)	33:35;	
Consultation	Shared leadership (Manz and Sims, 1989) Democratic leadership (Gastil, 1997) Consultative leadership (Korsgaard et al., 1995) Participative leadership (Yukl, 2002)	3:159; 42:38; 2:233	Malik Muwatta': 39.11.13
Wisdom	Spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) Legacy leadership (Whittington et al., 2005) Quite leadership (Rock, 2006) Authentic transformational leadership (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999) Wisdom for leadership (Kupers, 2005)	2:269; 12:22	Al-Bukhārī: 2.24.490:
Humility	Spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003; 2005) Workplace spirituality (Fry, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Kriger and Hanson, 1999)	4:36	Muslim: 019.4327:
Intrinsic and Long-Term Reward	Transformational leadership (Bass, 1990; Bass and Avolio, 1994)	14:14; 2:262	
Patience	Spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003; 2005) Workplace spirituality	42:43	Muslim: 042. 7072; Al-Bukhari: 8.73.64

APPENDIX A (continued)  
Leadership Attributes and Islamic Perspective

Leadership Attributes	Relevant References in		
	Mainstream Literature	al-Qurʿān	Hadīth
Truthfulness, Honesty, Integrity	Cross-cultural leadership (Den Hartog et al., 1999) Spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005) Workplace spirituality (Fry, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Kriger and Hanson, 1999)	33:64	Al-Bukhārī: 5.59.323; 8.73.116; Malik's Muwatta': 54.16.42
Hope and Optimism	Authentic leadership (Luthans and Avolio, 2003) Workplace spirituality (Fry, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Kriger and Hanson, 1999)	17:57; 18:46	Sunan Abu-Dawud: 41.5071
Confidence	Authentic leadership (Luthans and Avolio, 2003)		
Firmness/Just (Al-Hamz)	Cross-cultural leadership (Den Hartog et al., 1999)	8:11; 3:101; 3:103	Al-Bukhārī: 5.59.642; 8.81.769; 8.81.779;
Associate Building	Authentic leadership (Luthans and Avolio, 2003)	33:21	1.10.576:
Inner Struggle against the Self	Self-leadership (Manz and Sims, 1989) Self-transcendence (Schwartz, 1994)	3:30	