



## **ISLAMIC VALUES, LEADERSHIP LEGITIMACY AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

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### ABSTRACT

The legitimacy of leadership is an important concern for any organization. A legitimate leader will be readily accepted by organizational members, thereby facilitating the achievement of organizational goals. The legitimacy of leadership is not only concerned about the legal aspect, but also moral and psychological aspects. This article proposes a conceptual framework of leadership, based on Islamic values as the main thrust of leadership legitimacy. Given that in Islam, legal and ethical values are integrated, a leader is expected to internalize the Islamic core values and realize them in his organization. Moreover, Islamic core values are implemented in conjunction with task-related values, leading to a comprehensive treatment of organizational leadership. As a logical development, organizational members will confer legitimacy on the leader and become loyal and committed followers. In this respect, the Conceptual Framework of Islamic Leadership (CFIL), which is in congruence with the concept organization sustainability, is a holistic approach in understanding leadership legitimacy.

JEL Classification: M1, Z12

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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 Mendonca (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).

The earlier conceptual frameworks mentioned try to explain the leadership phenomenon based on the researchers' inclination toward certain aspects, resulting in various approaches taken. Recently, other conceptual frameworks have emerged and they focus on aspects of charisma, transformation, transaction, spirituality, ethics, voluntary services (*bakti*) 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.

As we have stated earlier, 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.

This article proposes a conceptual framework of leadership, based on Islamic values as the main thrust of understanding leadership legitimacy of organization. Leadership legitimacy in this study is defined as the recognition and acceptance of power of a leader by those whom he leads. Specifically, this means that leaders to which the accomplishment of tasks is assigned, are recognized and their directives are followed voluntarily by the subordinates (Kane and Patapan, 2008; Mangu, 2009). Given that in Islam, legal and ethical values are integrated, a leader is expected to internalize the Islamic core values and realize them in his organization. Moreover, Islamic core values are implemented in conjunction with task-related values, leading to a comprehensive treatment of dealing with organizational leadership. Logically, organizational members will confer legitimacy on the leader and become loyal and committed followers. In this respect, the Conceptual Framework of Islamic Leadership (CFIL) which is proposed here is a holistic and integrative approach in understanding leadership legitimacy and the sustainability of organizations.

## 2. 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.

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 (Khaliq Ahmad, 2007). In addition, leadership, as asserted by Siddiq (2006) is one of trust and responsibility (*taklīf*), instead of being related to greatness and arrogance (*tashrīf*).

The word "leadership" in the Malay language is "*kepimpinan*". The root word of "*kepimpinan*" is "*pimpin*", which means "to hold another person's hand intimately and lead him toward the direction determined by the holder" (*Kamus Dewan*, 1989). Shahrir (2008) notes that the meaning of "*pimpin*" is not a direct translation of the English word, "lead" which is the root word of leadership. Moreover, in the Malay-Islamic context, the relationship between the leader and follower is intimate whereby the leader and the follower work in tandem, while the leader incorporates exemplary behavior. With this perspective, there should be no expressions, such as "follow what leaders say, not what leaders do," or half-hearted invitation to followers in directing them to a certain destination. The Malay-Islamic concept of leadership is thus not appropriate if it excludes togetherness, reciprocity and solidarity with the followers, as well as exemplary behaviors. In this regard, understanding of leadership issues and relations which include processes, entities, activities, behaviors, power and influences differs in terms of perceptions and expectations involving different communities.

The above perspective does not only aim at achieving task efficiency and organizational goals, but also emphasizes that the values and personality of leaders must also serve as a reference. Furthermore, within the context of Islamic leadership, the values and personality of the leader must fit with Islamic teachings. This value-laden conceptualization of leadership is in line with the views of early Islamic scholars (Alhabshi and Aidit, 1994). Hence, the role of values, which serve as the basis of morality, is important in describing leadership legitimacy. We postulate that an Islamic leader is deemed to be legitimate to the extent he/she abides by the core Islamic values. (See Figure 1 for the attributes of a Muslim leader). A leader's deviation from the core Islamic values would weaken leadership legitimacy and acceptance by their followers. These lines

of reasoning emerge from the values and beliefs as imparted to us and exemplified by Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), the foremost Muslim leader.

### 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP (CFIL)

In Islam, leadership is illustrated by the *Qur'ānic* 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’.” (*Qur’ān*, 2:30)

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’.” (*Qur’ān*, 38:76)

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 Muḥammad (pbuh) and this was emphasized in the *Qur’ān*:

“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.” (*Qur’ān*, 33:21)

The above verse considers Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) as the exemplar in all aspects of life, including his leadership. In understanding Prophet Muḥammad’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’ān* teaches that

the exemplification of a leader should be emulated by the followers. 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’ān*:

“Do ye enjoin right conduct on the people, and forget (to practise it) yourselves, and yet ye study the Scripture? Will ye not understand?” (*Qur’ān*, 2:44)

“O ye who believe! Why say ye that which ye do not?” (*Qur’ān*, 61:2)

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. 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 *Sharī‘ah*, that is, he must conduct himself in a manner as prescribed in the *Qur’ān* and the *Sunnah* (sayings and conduct of the Prophet Muḥammad (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'ān*:

“Say: ‘Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds’.”  
(*Qur'ān*, 6:162)

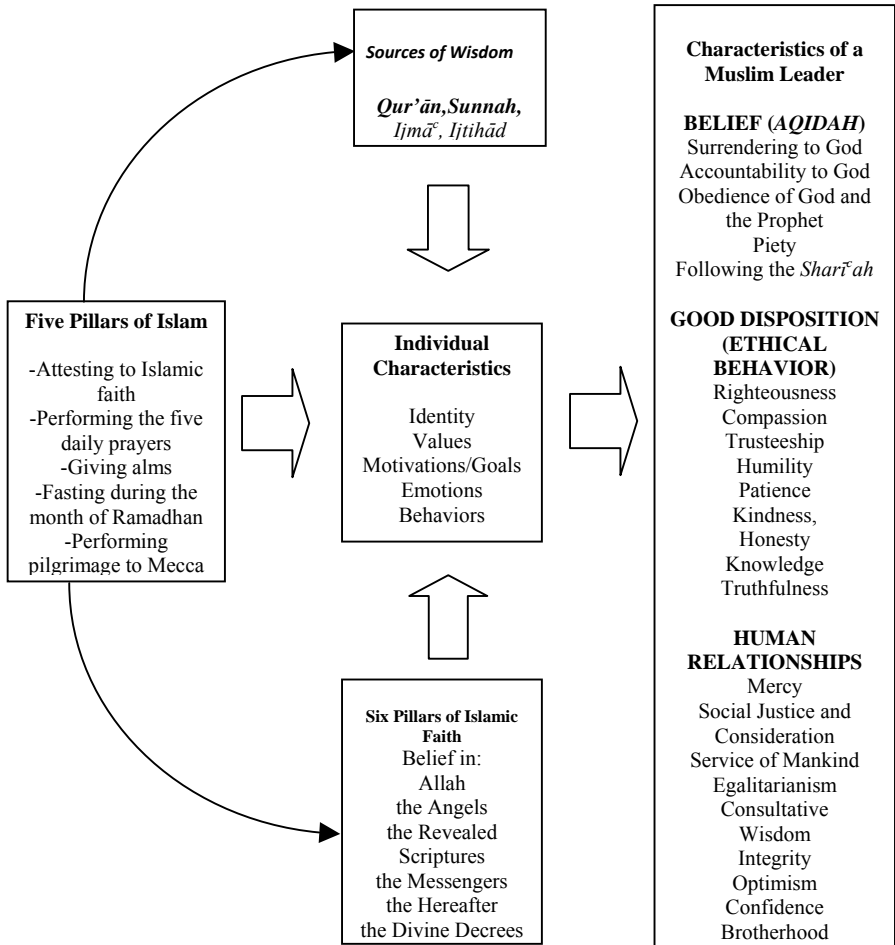
Therefore, leadership from an Islamic perspective is tied to the entire requirements for performing religious duties. In fact, all matters and responsibilities related to leadership, including responsibilities of subordinates to be loyal to the leader, is valued and thus rewarded, as stated in the *Qur'ān*:

“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.” (*Qur'ān*, 4:59)

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'ān*, the *Sunnah*, *Ijmā'* and *Ijtihād*; (b) upholding the five pillars of Islam, namely attesting to Islamic faith, performing the five daily prayers, giving alms, fasting during the month of Ramadhan 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).

FIGURE 1  
Core Values in Islamic Leadership

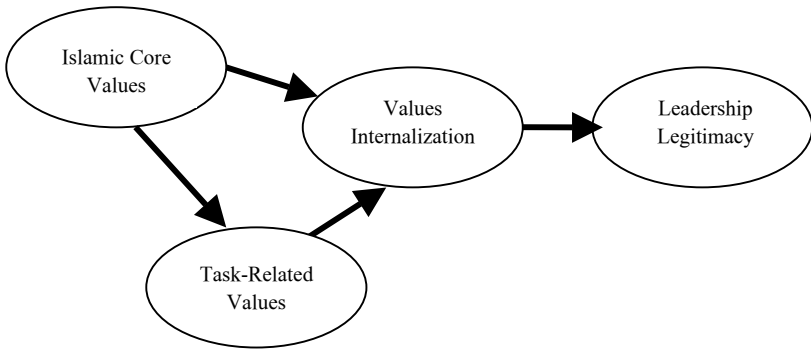


Source: Adapted from Toor (2007)

The above discussion logically develops into the Conceptual Framework of Islamic Leadership (CFIL) (Figure 2), which is adapted from Toor's (2007) model of leadership. This framework illustrates the relationship between Islamic core values and leadership legitimacy.



FIGURE 2  
Conceptual Framework of Islamic Leadership (CFIL)



### 3.1 ISLAMIC CORE VALUES

The sources of Islamic core values are the *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah*, *Ijmā'* and *Ijtihād*. The *Qur'ān* is the primary source of Islamic knowledge and serves as a permanent reference in the formation of Islamic values (Ali, 2005). It is not a mere reference for leadership but a complete guide, which is far-reaching and all inclusive for life, values and perspectives. The *Sunnah* includes the sayings and conduct of the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), which illustrate the principles contained in the *Qur'ān*. It is the second source of Islamic jurisprudence. *Ijmā'* refers to the consensus of Islamic scholars on matters of interest to Muslims, while *Ijtihād* refers to the process of working out Islamic rules by qualified scholars (Shafaat, 1984).

These Islamic core values pertain to belief (*ʿaqīdah*), good disposition, and human relationships, such as those listed in Figure 1. Islamic values of honesty, fairness, corroborativeness (□*iddīq*), patience, gratefulness, sincerity, trust in Allah (*tawakkal*) are mentioned by Alhabshi and Aidit (1994) and Kamar and Abdul Razak (2007). In-depth understanding of knowledge and faith in Islamic matters and priorities contained in the *Qur'ān* forms Islamic values that need to be practised by Muslims. For example, a Muslim who possesses understanding and has the most profound conviction in Allah's reward and punishment will be motivated to internalize these values such that good attitudes and inclination toward obedience to Allah are developed. Similarly, if a Muslim understands and has a deep faith in the value of justice that is enjoined by Islam,

we can expect that his attitude and inclination would fit better with the definition of justice, that is, “to put something in its proper place.”

### 3.2 TASK-RELATED VALUES

Of vital importance in the assessment of leadership legitimacy is the performance and accomplishment of assigned tasks through effective realization of task-related values. For example, leaders who are entrusted with the responsibility for financial performance will be more favorably evaluated on this aspect of accomplishment. In this paper, task-related values are treated as synonymous with instrumental values, which generally refer to “desired modes of behavior” as advocated by organizations (for example, hardwork, respect for traditions and authority, being frugal, being creative and courageous, being honest, taking risks, being conservative and cautious, and the like). These values are means toward achieving “a desired end state” (the terminal values), that organizational leaders seek to attain (Jones, 2007, 178; Rokeach, 1973).

Leadership is associated with expectations and hopes regarding the implementation of specific tasks at the relevant levels in the organizations. Examples include, (a) national leadership and politics are to ensure good governance that provides benefits to the people; (b) corporate leadership is to generate returns (usually in the form of profit) to stakeholders; (c) family leadership is to strive for household’s well-being and harmony. Leadership achievements and effectiveness in accomplishing the desired tasks and expectations are influenced by the values possessed and practised by the leader.

In the proposed CFIL model, the task-related values can be learned in an integrated manner, through experience and understanding of the task’s environment in line with Islamic teachings. For example, in organizational leadership context, the value of teamwork is considered an important element in accomplishing tasks and productivity in organizations. However, the concept of collective work (*‘amal jama‘ī*) in Islam, as mentioned in the *Qur’ān*,

“Truly Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure.” (*Qur’ān*, 61:4)

has a wider scope compared to the concept of conventional teamwork. The former, being rooted in Islamic teachings, has a greater impact if appropriately internalized. Similarly, the concept of consultation (*shūrā*), as commanded by Allah in His verse,

“Those who harken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who conduct their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance.” (*Qur’ān*, 42:38)

“It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted they would have broken away from about thee; so pass over (their faults), and ask for (Allah's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in Allah. For Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).” (*Qur’ān*, 3:159)

is more comprehensive than the conventional concept of participative management. The concept of consultation (*shūrā*) encompasses both the act of consultation as well as the spirit of trust in God. Apart from these two examples (*amal jamā’ī* and *shūrā*), other concepts such as *falāḥ* (accomplishing success), *itqān* (perfection), *iḥsān* (kindness) and *iṣlāḥ* (purification), are also important task-related values in attaining leadership effectiveness.

### 3.3 INTERNALIZATION OF VALUES AND LEADERSHIP LEGITIMACY

The meaning of “internalization of values” (as intended in the CFIL model) is the extent of how values shape leadership personality through the integration of Islamic core values and task-related values (See Figure 2). These two elements are the main measures of leadership capability according to the requirements of Islam. These elements determine whether a particular leader has the traits acceptable to his followers, thereby, gaining their legitimacy in their eyes.

Legitimacy does not only pertain to legal legitimacy but also encompasses psychological and social legitimacy. Legal legitimacy, in the conventional sense, refers to official appointment, normally

through certain established process, of a leader with judicial authority. Psychological and social legitimacy refers to voluntary acceptance of a leader by the followers, based on the perceived congruence of the leader with certain desirable values. From the Islamic perspective, these values must of necessity conform to Islamic teachings. On the contrary, leaders who deviate from the accepted limits of desirable behaviors are not considered legitimate because of the absence of the psychological and social legitimacy component.

Such conceptualization of leadership legitimacy is consistent with that of Bangash (2000), who, based on the *Qur'ānic* verse of An-Nisa: 59, suggests that there are two types of leadership legitimacy: “divine legitimacy”, that is when the legitimacy of the leader is acceptable to Allah, and “popular legitimacy”, that is the voluntary acceptance of the followers. In highlighting this point, Bangash gives an example of how Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) successfully established control over the Islamic state of Makkah and Madinah, when Islamic laws were fully implemented, thus, demonstrating how divine legitimacy leads to popular legitimacy (See also Chowdhury, 2002).

Leader-follower relationship is partly perceptual in nature (Beekun and Badawi 1999), as followers may perceive a crisis differently than the leaders. As such, potential conflicts may arise between the two, and hence there is the risk of the legitimacy of the leadership being questioned. It is not always possible to avoid such conflicts altogether, as instances of conflicts can be found within the Islamic history as well, but perhaps with greater consciousness toward internalising these values, conflicts could be minimized and controlled. As CFIL consists of values derived from the two divine sources of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, adherence to these values as espoused by Islam serves as guidance and thus helps contain the conduct and behavior of the subjects in conflicts or disputes.

#### 4. LEADERSHIP LEGITIMACY, CFIL AND RELEVANCE TO SUSTAINABILITY OF ORGANIZATIONS

In the broad sense, organizational sustainability refers to an organization's ability to continue in existence, to become institutionalized and to have enduring legitimacy in the society. From the institutional theoretical perspective, societal legitimacy is defined

as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, 574). This suggests that organizations behave and organize itself according to what their managers interpret as proper in the society (Dacin, Goodstein and Scott, 2002; Meyer and Rowan, 1990). Conforming to the demands of the environment which ensures legitimacy brings financial sustainability to the organization at the very least (Daft, 2010). The more the organizations conform to the societal demands, or values as defined by the society, the more legitimate the organization becomes, and thus the more institutionalized it will be in the society, and consequently become sustainable. These socially constructed values include the aspects of economics, social, moral and environments.

The Islamic perspective takes the definition of organizational sustainability further to include aspects of Islamic values in conferring legitimacy to organization in addition to the socially-constructed values. The Islamic perspective of organizational sustainability extends beyond meeting the myriads of societal demands. Above and beyond the preservation of society’s well-being, which is in fact the fundamental objective of *Shari’ah*, the Islamic concept emphasizes on certain core values (outlined in Figure 1). These values serve as the foundation that trigger the conception of the organization and facilitate its growth, which is precondition for organization sustainability. Sustainability is therefore a concept that explains firm development and growth leading to its continual existence, as a value-laden process.

Integration of values is enabled by organization leadership. Specifically, the tasks of supporting the organization growth for sustainability require organization’s leadership that is built upon the Islamic teachings. Theoretically, the organization life cycle concept view that in moving toward organization sustainability, each phase of firm development would face a number of mini-crises, thus, organization leadership task capability is required to overcome these crises. Leadership task capabilities are also needed in overcoming large crises, which is preconditional before the organization can move to the next phase of development (Greiner, 1998). Other than that, organization leadership is also required to acknowledge that each phase of firm development will encounter unique sets of problems that require specific interventions and solutions (Churchill

and Lewis, 1983; Greiner, 1998; Kroeger, 1974; Martin, 1994; Sullivan, 2000; Timmons, 1994). Integrating the Islamic core values in performing of the tasks would result in not only the leader accomplishing the task, but also support the legitimizing of both “popular” (achieving legitimacy in the eyes of the follower organizational members) and “divine” leadership (fulfilling leadership responsibilities as espoused by Islam). It is this divine leadership that is the ultimate aim of Islamic leaders, as Islamic leadership strives to achieve not just worldly aspect of organization sustainability but looks upon the leadership role as a form of worship (*‘ibādah*) for the sole pleasure of God (divine aspect of organization sustainability). As the leader continues to perform the tasks necessary to achieve the organization’s sustainability according to Islamic teachings, not only the organization develops toward sustainability, the leadership continued to be legitimized and validated by the organizational members. Thus, the concept of leadership legitimacy relates positively with and directly supports the sustainability of organization.

Conceptualizing leadership legitimacy within the contexts of organizational sustainability also highlights the processual nature of the legitimizing of leadership. Logically, as leaderships are legitimized in organizations, tasks are accomplished more effectively. As task-related values are deeply rooted in wider, comprehensive Islamic teachings, the actions of the leaders and followers are able to generate results beyond those expected of the tasks. Hence, leadership legitimacy, when effectively integrated with other essential growth vehicles, is bound to promote organizational growth for sustainability.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The leadership phenomenon is replete with various conceptual frameworks. One of the important issues associated with leadership is leadership legitimacy. Assessment of legitimacy is usually related to legal, as well as psychological and social perception of the leader by the led. The CFIL model suggested in this paper, while proposing Islamic core values also incorporate task-related values, which together address the importance of psychological and social dimensions of leadership legitimacy. Based on CFIL, the degree of internalization of Islamic core values and task-related values help

shape the leadership personality and capabilities. The higher the degree of internalization, the higher the acceptance or legitimacy of the leader. Consequently, the higher the perceived legitimacy of the leader, the greater the expected sustainability of the firm or organization

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