

ACCOUNTABILITY ENHANCEMENT:
SOME RELIGIOUS, HISTORICAL
AND EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS*

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Good governance implies the exercise of wise judgment and proper knowledge. This is generally contrasted to ruling, which implies, rather, "the unqualified exercise of power, making the will the *rule*." A good leader *governs* by means of wise laws and upright administration, whereas a despot *rules* over a nation according to arbitrary decisions; if a ruler has no principles, his *rule* becomes an oppressive tyranny. The terms "answerable and responsible convey the idea of a pledge given for the performance of some act, or the fulfillment of some engagement, a breach of which subjects the defaulter to loss, punishment or disgrace."¹ To be accountable means to give an explanation of one's proceedings, normally to those who are superior in rank or position, failing which one may also be subjected to loss, punishment or disgrace.² In Islam, the exercise of wise judgment and proper knowledge should be guided by, and not transgress, spiritual, ethical, and legal parameters.³

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¹ See George Crabb, *Crabb's English Synonyms*. Revised and enlarged. Introduction by John H. Finley (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1945), s.v. "Govern."

² Ibid, s.v. "answerable."

³ See our article, "Konsep Pentadbiran dan Organisasi Beradab," *Buletin Pengurusan Islam INTAN* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1992); and Mohd Zaidi Ismail, "Tadbir and Adab as Constituent Definiens of the Concept of Islamic Management," paper presented at The First International Conference on Islamic Development Management: Management of Economic Development in Islamic Perspective, co-organized by the School of Social

Some of those who are concerned about administrative ethics and good governance of public institutions have identified several obligations generally required of administrators:

- 1) Legal obligations: those imposed by the governing body of a nation, state or an institution.
- 2) Formal Obligations: those which involve the right expression of authority, responsibility, benevolence or caring, good character, etc.
- 3) Commitment to professional excellence: those skills and attitudes which are developed through pre-service education, positive contribution to the field, and optimum working level.
- 4) Proper resolution or avoidance of conflict of interest.
- 5) Compliance with acceptable norms of behavior and ceremonies.
- 6) Justice to all, and non-discrimination based on ethnic, religious, social-economic, gender, and political orientations.
- 7) Prudence and common-sense in making everyday decisions.
- 8) Whistle-Blowing: exposing to the public those who are guilty of wrongful behavior such as gross wastage of resources, corruption, violations of laws, etc.
- 9) Adoption of a code of professional ethics.⁴

Six General Conditions

Many Western secular governments and public institutions have shown an exemplary attitude towards accountability to their citizens and have made various serious attempts to enhance accountability through the instruments of civil society. The practice of rational governance and the continuous search for civil society has made the material and socio-political existence

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⁴ See, for example, Ralph B. Kimbrough, *Ethics: A Course of Study for Educational Leaders* (Arlington: The American Association of School Administrators, 1985), 7-22.