Successful Leadership Practices Based on 'Tawheed": Study of A Muslim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a Government Linked Companies (GLC) in Malaysia

Khalidah Haron (Corresponding author)
Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang 43400, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia[1]
Tel: +6019-2710707 E-mail: khalidahharon@gmail.com

Hafizah Harun
Fakulti Pendidikan, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Johor Bahru, Johor, 81310, Malaysia
Tel: +6017-6824772 E-mail: hhhh.jb@gmail.com

Habibah@Norehan Haron,
International Campus-Kuala Lumpur, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
Tel: +6012-2240465 E-mail: habibah@ic.utm.my

Ismi Arif Ismail
Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang 43400, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia[1]

Turiman Suandi
Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang 43400, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

Abstract

Tawheed is the underpinning factor that binds and infuses the inner meaning and values of Muslims. Responsibilities to perform daily routines as 'amanah' – fulfillment of contract between the Creator and Man should be performed diligently as Muslims believe that humans are the servant and the vicegerent (Khalifah) of Allah. This study examines a prime, successful chief executive officer in a Malaysian linked company through data triangulation from non-participation observation, set of interview questions, and theory triangulations. The outcome of this study suggests that the development of one's leadership principles is shaped by personal life experiences under five major themes; inherent talent; leadership development out of struggle and hardship; developed for a cause that is worthy of strong commitment; developed for a process of learning from experience, such as personal mistakes or failures, influence of positive or negative role; and religious upbringing which includes his belief systems as being an integrative system of the organizational leadership. The in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing approach offers an appreciation of the challenges and opportunities facing leadership. Leadership is a question of "being" human and to live it through to the inner individual values.

Keywords: Leadership; Principles; Organizational Leadership; Experience; Tawheed

Introduction

Informed by a semi-structured qualitative interviewing research approach, document analysis, and non-participative observations, this study explores the leadership principles practised by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a Malaysian public listed Government Linked Company

(GLC). The CEO of the Government Link Companies (GLC) in this study is a Malaysian Malay and professes to be a Muslim, and as a Muslim he is a follower of Islamic teachings. As Muslims, whether de jure or de facto, they will be judged by their dual observations and obeisance (demonstration of obedient attitude) of both the Qu'ran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (Mohamed Noor, 2002).

The review of Kriger and Seng (2005) extended model to Yukl's multiple linkage integrative leadership model (Figure 1) framework and article, leadership with inner meaning based on values and worldviews that are implicit in five of the world's great religions (Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism) as reference; this study identified the salient aspects of the model based on the Islamic perspective, that is from the "Tawheedic Paradigm".

Adopting the biographical qualitative research approach, this study discovered the guiding principles that became the foundation of these CEO values and leadership principles and practices and the key people (actors) that provide the greatest impact in shaping his leadership principles.

Methodology

This study adopts biographical narrative qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claim that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach: "This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". It seems to be the most appropriate design as the main objective of this study is to understand the insider's perspectives of a person (Merriam, 1998).

For this particular study, the methodological approaches conducted were in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interview with the CEO, asking about what shapes leadership principles of a Muslim Leader, and to what extent this principle develops him as a leader. Collecting data directly from the leader provided me with an understanding into the underlying principles. Besides the interviews, data were also collected and supplemented using content analysis, observation, and through my own personal working experience with him as my CEO for 8 years. The study too was informed by the general literature about leadership principles, approaches and practices in both Islamic and Western literature.

Managing and Displaying the Data

Working with qualitative data means working with massive data. An initial effort should be made towards making the data accessible and manageable. The goal of qualitative data analysis is to uncover emerging themes, patterns, concepts, insights, and understandings, for that purpose, it could not be "crunched" easily by statistical software (Patton, 2002). The audio recorded data, handwritten fieldnotes obtained from intervews and observation were converted into verbatim form after repetitive reading of the interview transcripts and listening to the recorded interviews. Later, emerging ideas that transpired from the interview transcripts were sketched to help me suggest tentative themes for further analysis.These gave me the opportunity to look for illustrative cases that could be used to identify comparisons and contrasts.

The following steps follow: The sketched ideas done earlier were elaborated in the form of memos, comments, and reflective passages. The next step was to give codes; provide themes for Set of Key Events and Key Social Actors in the Informant's Life and Career Chronicle (history/accounts), called framework analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest ways of displaying data for a single case and across different cases, he suggested to use the matrics or networks to present it. Taking that suggestion, I used network, to show the links in the CEO's stories.

Results and Discussion

Having constructed the career stories and the data display, I wrote interpretive statements that supported the accounts and quotes collected from my informant in the form of a commentary. I used these interpretive statements as I continued to discuss, analyse, and interpret the informant's career experiences in relation to the research questions, the conceptual framework of this study and literature reviewed based on Kriger and Seng (2005) work on leadership with inner meaning: A contingency theory of leadership based on the worldviews of five religions, enabled me to transform and conceptualise the research findings, which were essentially descriptive, into my conceptual conclusions in the development of ledership principles.

Wanting to know what shapes leadership principles of a Muslim Leader, and to what extent this principle develop him as a leader and who are the key actors that provide the greatest impact in shaping this CEO's principles, five themes emerged as his personal leadership philosophy and five principles that emerged from it and from his values. These were based on his own authentic way of living experience on how he understands about life in general and on things that influence his decisions and behaviour.

Table 1: The link between the CEO's philosophies and principles including Islamic teachings

CEO's PHILOSOPHY	CEO's PRINCIPLES
1. Strive for excellence, be the number one, for number two is the first loser. Do it with dignity. *Have bearing with: "Take advantage of five before five: Your youth before your aging, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before your busy time, and your life before your death (Tirmidhi)."*	*Value: Dedication & Integrity* ***Principle 3***: Face adversity with determination to succeed: *Work hard, stay true to your cause, never lose heart, stay firm and steadfast.* *(Have bearing with Quran 3:142-148)* ***Principle 4***: See and seek opportunity to excel do not depend on others *"...if good befalls you, it grieves them; if misfortune overtakes you they rejoice (Quran 2:120)."*
2. Leadership is "amanah" a trust bestowed by the supreme power "Allah", a responsibility; Integrity is key, – steadfast and serious in ensuring adherence to good governance; *(Trust, Integrity)*	*Value: Integrity and Discipline* ***Principle 1***: God, "Allah" is the ultimate reality, seek His guidance and accomplish our duty with high integrity. Seek your parents blessing too. *(show your gratitude to me and to thy parents: to me is thy final Goal (Quran 31: 14))* ***Principle 2***: We are not important, what

	matters is how others can benefit from it
3. Provide opportunity -People have potential to take on demanding tasks and roles (*drive, trust, Nurturing*);	**Value:** Discipline and Integrity ***Principle 5****: Empowerment will be given, but be accountable and* do not betray the trust.
4. Constantly pursued challenges that will bring out the best in self and others	***Value: Dedication & Integrity*** ***Principle 3***: Face adversity with determination to succeed: *Work hard, stay true to your cause, never lose heart, stay firm, and steadfast.* *(Have bearing with Quran 3:142-148)* ***Principle 4****: See and seek opportunity to excel. Do not depend on others.* *"...if good befalls you, it grieves them; if misfortune overtakes you they rejoice (Quran 2:120)."* ***Principle 5****: Empowerment will be given, but be accountable and* do not betray the trust.
5. Do not dismiss day to day gut-feel leadership. At times, leaders need to be highly boss-centred, other times need to consult those you lead and use the dynamism of followers (*Humility and trust*)	***Value:** Dedication , Discipline and Integrity* ***Principle 1****: God, "Allah" is the ultimate reality, seek His guidance and accomplish our duty with high integrity. Seek your parents blessing too.* *(show your gratitude to me and to thy parents: to me is thy final Goal (Quran 31: 14))* ***Principle 2****: We are not important, what matters is how others can benefit from it* ***Principle 5****: Empowerment will be given, but be accountable and* do not betray the trust.

Referring to Figure 1, the extension of Yukl's integrative leadership model, there were three aspects of the model elaborated in the literature review that need to be focused. First, the constructs denoted by Roman numerals and the shaded boxes are proposed as extensions to the behavioural-based leadership contingency model presented in Yukl (2002; 2010). Second, the variable identified as "?" which is God. Since the study was based on five religions, this variable refers to that which is ontologically beyond names. However, for Muslims, it is referred to as "Allah", as in the statement of Oneness (*shahadah*), "There is no God-but God (Allah)" and clearly stated in the Quran (112: 1-2) " …Allah the one and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute;…". Third, the construct label "?" as a latent variable, to Islam in this case "?" which is God, it is a believed that God, "Allah" is the source and sustainer of the universe, and in this model it can be seen that it is also the source of all situational variables.
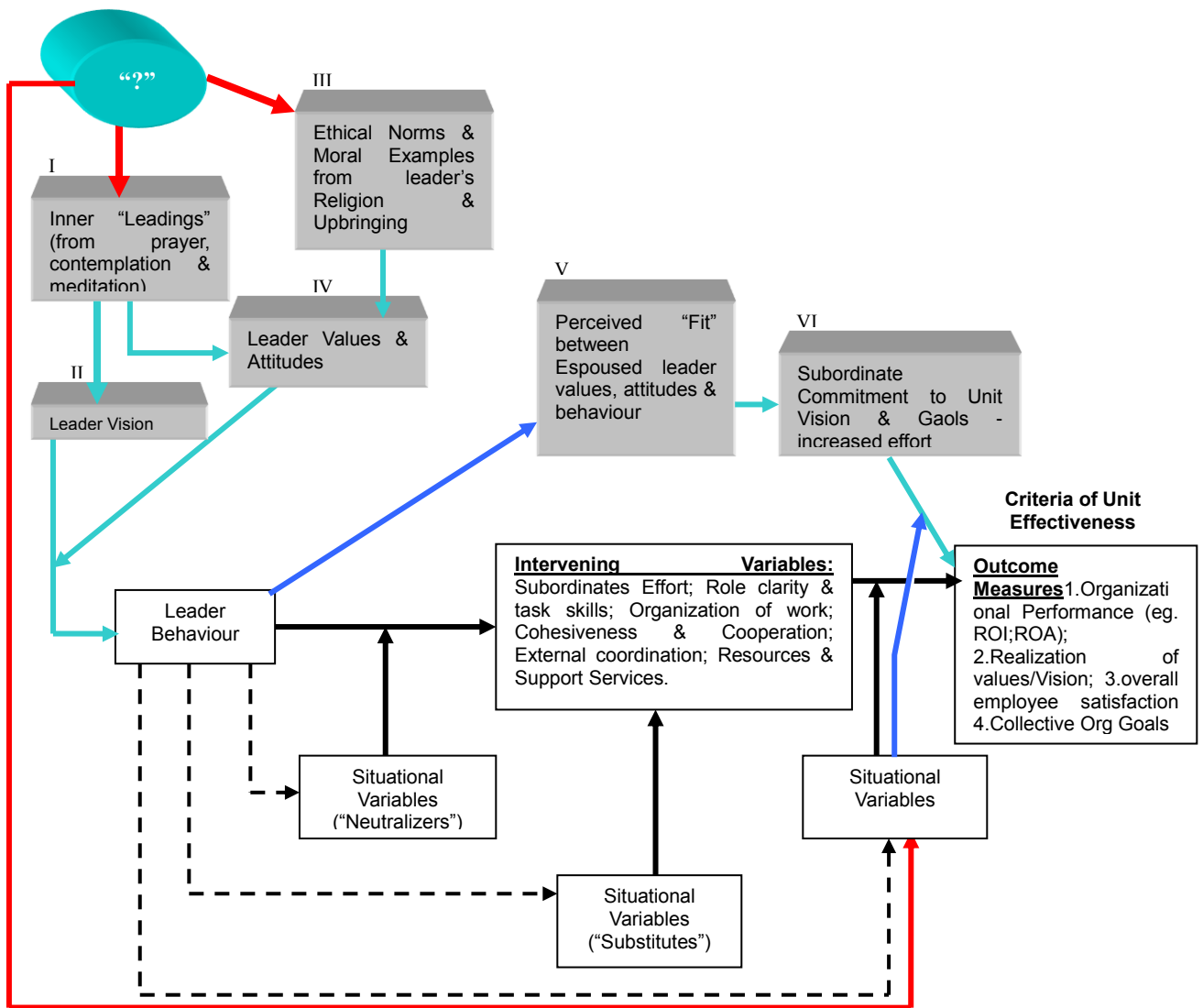
Figure 1. Kringer and Seng, Extension of Yukl's model to include spiritual leadership from a multi-religion perspective

This study, and the model used by Kriger and Seng on leadership with inner meaning, provided a deeper insight into the variables that could influence the development of a leader. Referring to the model in Figure 2, the findings from this study provided the expended model with an input that will now include the new construct labeled by "a", "b", "c", "d" and "e". The construct "?" in Figure 1 the expended contingency model is now "Tawheedic Paradigm" not just labeled as "God". Construct "a" is the source of all situational variables, the source of and sustainer of the universe; "a" is God the creator. As for "c" is "Abd" for 'abdi' which means servant of Allah; "b" is "khalifah" the vicegerent on earth; "d" is the role models experience and wisdom; "e": Al Falah (felicity) happiness in this world earth, salvation in the hereafter.

"Tawheed" became the primary cause of the construct; (I) and (III). These two constructs in turn, have direct effects on the CEO's values and attitudes (construct IV). As Muslim, God (Allah) and the declaration of one true God (tawheed) is indeed the primary cause of the three constructs: 1) Inner leadings from prayer, contemplation and meditation; 2) Ethical norms

and leader moral examples; and 3) The situation. All these have direct effects on leader values and attitudes. The research conducted conforms to what Kriger and Seng (2005) in what their study hypothesized. Linking to that, the findings from this research study are able to make the complexity of leadership contingency theory simpler to understand by applying and adopting it in this research to get observable findings. As for construct "d" in Figure 2, as Piaget (1977), hypothesized that the values and attitudes of a leader does not only form from the individual's early childhood development, it is true, the research findings shows the development of this leader came from role models too, from readings of sacred writings and prayers. Based on the findings of this research, I propose an additional constructs into the model viewing from a practitioner perspective.

Without the 'Tawhidic Paradigm" fully internalized and engrained, one can profess to be a Muslim, but what is being practised might be simply endogenous (derived internally/ from within) to the individual. The latent variable "?" introduced by Kringer and Seng in their model is now "Tawheed", a paradigm that internalize and express the statement of Oneness (*shahadah*), "There is no God-but God (Allah)" and clearly stated in the Quran (112:1-2) " …Allah the one and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute;…" coming from the realization of being the 'Abd' and "Khalifah' of Allah. To be Allah's Khalifah (vicegerent of God) – and his 'Abd (servant), man comes to know Him (ma'rifah) and therefore does not see himself as owing allegiance to a being beyond himself (Muhamad 2004). Work in Islam is honorable, which establishes love among human beings with blessings of Allah (19:96), which is conceived as a trial for man (67:2) to achieve al-falah denoted as construct "e", in which through his work he will be able to achieve a station in his present life equals to that he will achieve in the hereafter (6:132).
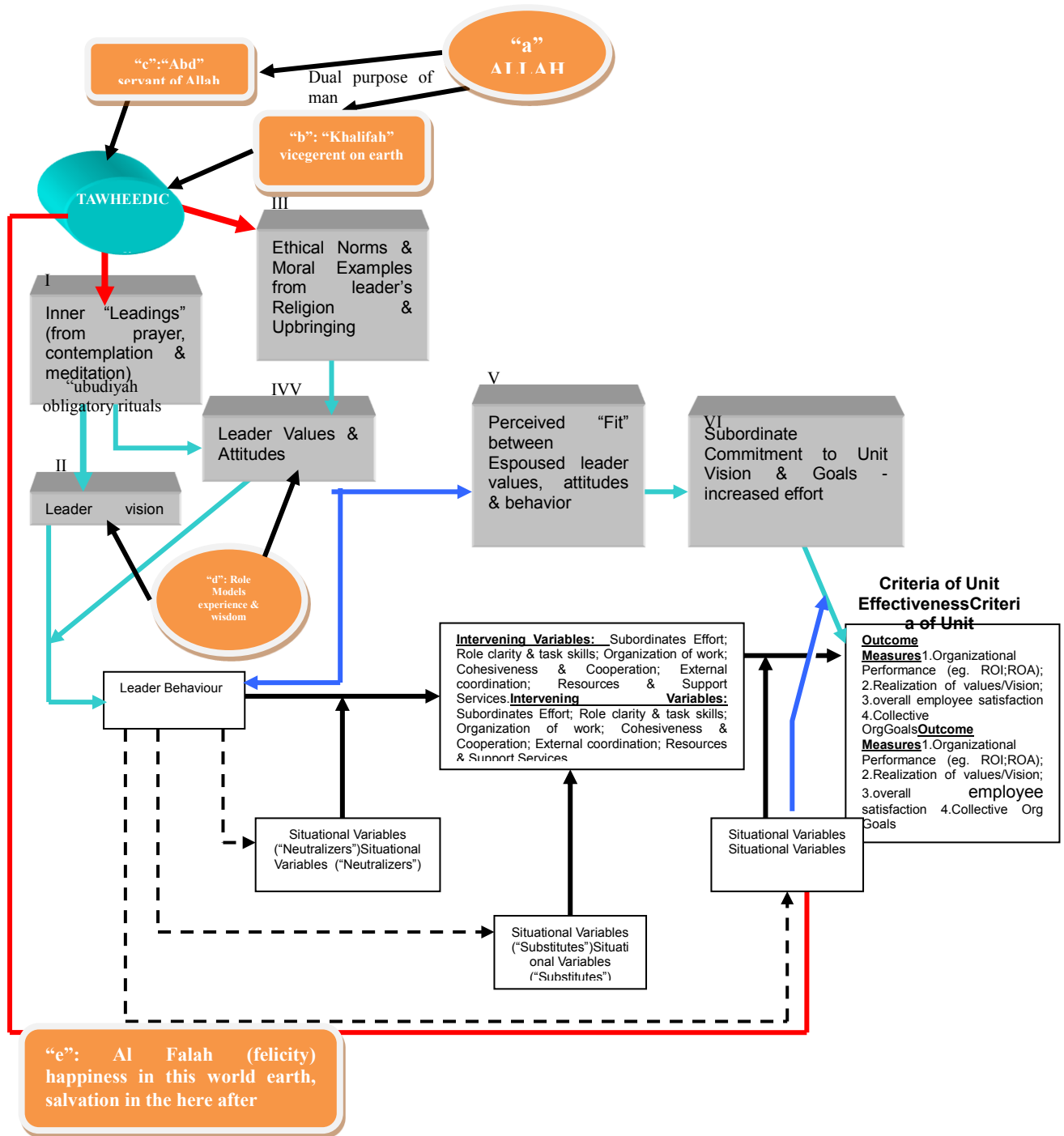
Figure 2. Extension to Yukl's Multiple Linkage Contingency Model

Conclusion

This CEO as a Malay and a Muslim leader has shown the characteristics of a believer in the efficacy (*synonyms: worth, value, efficiency, usefulness*) of Islam as a religion that motivates him as a person and as a leader. He is a Malay leader whose values and behaviours are guided and shaped by religious paradigm. Clearly observed when he adheres to his main principle and philosophy as shown in Table 1 which included: Job as a Trust "amanah" bestowed upon him and when he emphasizes, as a leader what matters most is what the people gets at the

end, a service to people, these are in line with what Beekun and Badawi (2005) highlighted. The two primary roles of a caretaker are those of servant-leader and guardian-leader. Servant-leader is servant first, to serve first. Quoting a well-known hadith of the Prophet: *"Kullu kum ra'in was kullu ra'in mas'ool an rai'yatay-hi…"* meaning that *"Everyone of you is a caretaker, and every caretaker is responsible for what he is caretaker of"*(Beekun & Badawi, 2005*). We made them leaders guiding (men) by Our Command and we sent them inspiration to do good deeds, to establish regular prayers and to practise regular charity; and they constantly served "Us" and "Us" only, (Quran, Anbiyaa 21: 73). In Islam, a leader is considered to be servant of God and his creations (Kringer & Seng, 2005).

Point to note

My approach to this research was to listen to the voice and experiences of a practising CEO of a GLC, to hear him and identify to what principles this CEO attached his leadership to. The intention was, therefore, not to generate an "objective" representation of the "truth" or "reality" of leadership principles in the contexts to be explored, but rather to create some compelling accounts that could be shared and referred to as a guide. The thought presented is rooted in the experience of one specific young, Malay, Muslim CEO of a matured and established GLC.

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