

Leadership Ethics in Islam

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Abstract: *Leadership is a central aspect of managing society and organizations. In the context of Islam, leadership encompasses not only administrative responsibilities but also encompasses moral and spiritual values derived from the Qur'an. This study aims to examine the ethics of leadership from an Islamic perspective, emphasizing the ideal characteristics of a leader as outlined in the teachings of the Qur'an. This study employs a qualitative method with a literature-based approach, in which various Islamic texts and primary sources are analyzed in depth. The results of the study show that Islamic leadership emphasizes values such as trustworthiness, fairness, honesty, deliberation, and responsibility. An ideal leader in Islam is not only oriented toward achieving organizational goals but also has a commitment to social justice and the welfare of the people. The implications of this study suggest that applying the principles of Islamic leadership ethics can provide a crucial foundation for creating governance with integrity and justice in various areas of life.*

Introduction

Ethics and leadership are closely related in various organizational moments and contexts. Transformational leadership demonstrates ethical power when leaders not only inspire their followers but also lead them to positive changes in values and behaviors. In this case, leaders act as moral role models and change agents who instill values of honesty, integrity, and fairness (Kumar & Vij, 2014; Murari & Mukherjee, 2021). Charisma, which is often a crucial attribute in transformational leadership, also encompasses ethical elements. Charisma can be a constructive influence tool when used to build trust and loyalty based on moral values. However, it can also be used manipulatively by self-interested leaders (Chunhui et al., 2023). Therefore, ethical leaders—who provide fairness in the treatment of followers, convey accurate information, and are consistently present—will be much more effective in creating a healthy and sustainable work environment (Balasubramanian & Krishnan, 2012; Lacerda & Lisboa, 2015).

The word Ethics comes from Ancient Greek. The Greek word "ethos" in the singular form has many meanings, including residence, pasture, stability, habit, custom, morals, character, feelings, attitudes, and ways of thinking. In the plural (taetha), it means customs (Jufrizen, 2016). Ethics is a crucial element that has a significant impact on a leader. Then, leadership based on sound ethics tends to make followers more empathetic and receptive to direction. Conversely, if a leader does not demonstrate ethics, subordinates tend to be less respectful and have difficulty following his instructions. This indicates that ethics is a crucial factor in achieving charismatic leadership and fostering a positive organizational culture (Na'im, 2022; Sedarmayanti, 2014).

Ethics are an inseparable part of creating effective leadership, which directly affects the organizational atmosphere and improves the optimal performance of its subordinates. For this reason, leaders with high ethics and integrity are needed because such leadership can increase the work motivation of subordinates. Therefore, to better understand the importance of leadership ethics in organizations, this paper aims to examine the concept of leadership ethics from an Islamic perspective and its correlation with the performance of subordinates or individuals being

led (Na'im, 2022).

Leadership is the art and process of influencing a group of people in a way that motivates them to take their goals seriously (Kusumawati, 2015; Zulkifli, 2022). According to Jufrizen (2016), Leadership is one of the important factors that determine employee performance and an organization's ability to adapt to environmental changes (Setiawan et al., 2025). Therefore, Setiawan et al. (2025) describe that effective Leadership must provide direction to the efforts of all workers in achieving organizational goals.

In addition, leadership is a fundamental element in society and organizations, playing a vital role in determining the direction and success of an entity (Setiawan et al., 2025; Setyanto et al., 2024). In the context of human life, leadership has been a profound and relevant topic throughout the history of civilization. Leadership in the Islamic perspective possesses distinctive and profound characteristics, which not only form a philosophical foundation but also provide practical guidelines for leaders and followers in fulfilling their responsibilities (Arifin, 2023; Setiawan et al., 2025).

Method

This study uses a qualitative research method and a descriptive approach. This method is used to dig deeper into the ethics of leadership from an Islamic perspective and its relationship to the performance of subordinates or individuals being led. Through this approach, various documents or data related to Islamic leadership ethics and their relationship to subordinate performance are collected and sourced from references such as books, journals, and scientific articles. The collected data is then reduced and analyzed in depth to conclude the values of Islamic leadership ethics and their correlation with improving the performance of individuals or members being led.

Result and Discussion

Understanding Leadership Ethics

Ethics is the science and standards that determine what is right and wrong, what is allowed and what is not. Proper behavior is considered ethical, while wrong behavior is considered unethical. The word "ethics" is a noun, but when combined with "leadership," it becomes the adjective "ethical." Thus, "ethical leadership" refers to leadership that demonstrates appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and encourages such behavior in followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (Ferhani, 2025). Van Den dan Akker et al. also stated that ethical leadership is a concept of relationships formed through social interaction with followers (Na'im, 2022).

The term "leadership" originates from the word "leader," which refers to the primary subject in an organization. Leaders are in the highest position in the organization. They are ideally equipped to plan, provide proper direction and instructions to their subordinates, and make important decisions on behalf of the organization. According to the Great Man Theory, ideal and charismatic leaders tend to emerge naturally or due to heredity (Abidin et al., 2024; Sundari et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Skill Theory states that leaders can also be formed through adequate training and experience. Frisch & Huppenbauer (2014) explains that leadership ethics are guidelines or rules that govern employee attitudes and behavior while working in a company. Ethics in leadership refers to how a leader guides their subordinates while upholding the values, norms, and rules that govern society.

According to Imam al-Ghazali, an ideal leader possesses two main characteristics: knowledge and faith. (Na'im, 2022). According to Van den Akker et al. (2013), as cited in Wirawan (2013), the thinking of moral managers is based on three main concepts (Na'im, 2022). First, Ethical role models. Moral managers actively demonstrate ethical behavior and set good

examples, both professionally and personally. This includes the role of managers as models and guides for their followers. Second, Rewards and punishments. Moral managers consistently reward appropriate behavior and sanction violations to ensure that followers understand and adhere to moral standards, knowing what behavior is considered moral and immoral. This is achieved through effective Communication about ethics and values. Moral leaders influence ethical behavior by encouraging open Communication about ethics and values. This activity involves regular Communication about the ethical standards that guide organizational decision-making and actions, as well as an explicit discussion of the components of the decision-making process. In this case, the importance of good communication communication and openness between leaders and subordinates are emphasized to create a comfortable and family-like organizational environment.

Leadership Duties and Ethics

A state leader has the duty and responsibility to ensure that all Muslims can implement Allah's law. The head of state may not hand over religious matters to each individual with complete freedom to carry them out or ignore them. Leaders are responsible for ensuring that Muslims can practice Islamic teachings correctly. In the context of prayer services, for example, the Prophet once said to his friends, "If someone replaces me to lead congregational prayers, then I will go to the houses of Muslims. Whoever among the men does not come to perform congregational prayers, I will burn down his house." A similar situation occurred during the time of Caliph Umar Bin Khattab, who was on the verge of dispatching troops to certain areas because the population was reluctant to fulfill the zakat obligations that Allah SWT had determined. This example illustrates that state leaders do not just urge Muslims to carry out religious orders but are also responsible for enforcing them. Upholding religion means providing facilities, offering encouragement, supervising, and imposing sanctions so that religious commands can be carried out as effectively as possible by their adherents (Djunaedi, 2005).

Another task of a leader is to manage world affairs. In carrying out this task, the leader of the country is responsible for optimizing the country's resources, whether in the form of natural resources, human resources, funds, or technology, in order to achieve justice, security, peace, prosperity, and the welfare of the wider community. The leader is also responsible for protecting the weak so that they can lead decent lives as human beings (Djunaedi, 2005).

Leaders must not allow strong individuals to control state assets while the weak are oppressed. In addition, leaders must not betray their mandate by exploiting resources for personal, family, or group interests. These two tasks are not easy. Someone aware of this burden will not be able to shoulder it, except for those who have a great sense of responsibility to save the nation from significant losses, both in this world and in the hereafter. Considering the significant duties and responsibilities of a nation's leader, which include safeguarding religion and managing worldly affairs, Islamic scholars have established special criteria for determining who is worthy of being a state leader (Djunaedi, 2005). In carrying out their duties, leaders are expected always to hold deliberations, namely discussing with parties who are considered appropriate to formulate the best decisions for all parties. In addition, they are also expected to utilize all available potentials to achieve optimal results according to expectations.

Leadership Ethics in the Islamic Perspective

In the Islamic perspective on leadership, the primary focus will be on the figure of the Prophet Muhammad as an exemplary leader, as demonstrated during his role as an Apostle and leader of the Muslim community. In Islam, religion, morals, and spiritual elements dominate the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. It is common knowledge among Muslims that there are four leadership traits associated with the Prophet Muhammad, namely al-Siddiq, Amanah, fathanah, and tabligh.

First, Al-Shiddiq. One of the dimensions of spiritual intelligence lies in Honesty, which is

the hallmark of the personality of noble people whom Allah SWT has promised to bless abundantly. Honesty is a fundamental mental value of integrity, sincerity, and assurance. Balance Honesty of Honesty means basing one's speech, beliefs, and actions on Islamic teachings. According to Hidayatullah, Shidiq is "A true reality reflected in words, deeds, or actions, and his inner state." The character described above embodies Honesty in words, deeds, and inner states. This behavior is characterized by sincerity, where there is no deception or commonly accepted lie, and thus, it can be held accountable for its truth. However, the nature of Shidiq can also be steady, stable, mature, wise, honest, and authoritative, making them a role model for students and possessing noble morals (Ks, 2015; Manan, 2018; Yakub, 2022).

Siddiq (truth/honesty) is the presence of a power that can free oneself from lying or lying to God, oneself, or others. Siddiq also means truth and sincerity in attitude, speech, and struggle in duty (Hajjaj & Aimah, 2020; Maskur et al., 2022). Siddiq means honest, meaning what is conveyed is the actual situation. People with these characteristics feel that Allah is always there to supervise their behavior, so they are afraid to lie. Honesty is one of the main pillars of Islamic corporate governance. Some of the legal bases for this shiddiq trait are: "O you who believe, fear Allah and be with the truthful" (QS At-Taubah: [9]: 119). Apart from that, in a hadith, the Messenger of Allah said: "You must be honest (truthful) because honesty leads to goodness. Moreover, goodness will lead to heaven. Allah will record as an honest person, someone who always strives to be honest. Moreover, stay away from lies (kidzib) because lies will lead to evil. Moreover, evil will lead to hell. Someone who always lies will be recorded by Allah as a liar" (HR Al-Bukhari).

Second, Amanah. Amanah, which in Arabic is al-amānat, is interpreted as a responsibility given to someone to bear it (Fatimah, 2019). Fatimah (2019) explains that the word amanah, which in Arabic is al-amānat, is a masdhar form of the verb amina-ya'manu-amana (tan), aman (an) which lexically means "calm and not afraid". Amanah is one of the noble morals in Islam (Amanah & Al, 2020). Fatimah (2019) identifies Amanah into two categories: Amanah that comes from Allah, and Amanah that comes from fellow human beings. Furthermore, Amanah & Al (2020) identify seven types of amanah, including Amanah in worship, Amanah in maintaining one's body, Amanah in guarding entrusted goods, Amanah in working, Amanah in making purchases, Amanah in keeping secrets, and Amanah in speaking.

Fathanah means intelligent (Firdaus, 2025; Trisnawati et al., 2021). In conveying more than six thousand verses of the Qur'an and explaining them through tens of thousands of hadiths, extraordinary intelligence is required; thus, the Prophet Muhammad was able to explain the words of Allah to his people, enabling them to accept the teachings of Islam (Trisnawati et al., 2021). He was also able to dialogue and debate with the infidels most effectively and wisely. In a modern context, this fathanah trait highlights that a marketer must be intelligent and discerning—able to understand, appreciate, and thoroughly master everything within their duty and responsibility (Trisnawati et al., 2021).

Tabligh is derived from the verb ballagha - yuballighu - tablighan, which means conveying an understanding to others (Shodiqin, 2014). In terms, tabligh means conveying Islamic teachings from Allah SWT to humanit (Fitriani, 2025). More than just conveying Tabligh, it also includes an invitation to follow the actual teachings of Islam, guiding humans to believe, understand, and practice Islamic values in everyday life for the happiness of both the world and the hereafter. From the perspective of the Qur'an, the meaning of tabligh is reflected in Surah An-Nisa verse 58: "Indeed, Allah commands you to convey the trust to those entitled to it, and (commands you) when judging between people to judge with justice. Indeed, Allah teaches you the best teaching. Indeed, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing" (Al-Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa, 4:58).

These four traits—Siddiq (honest), Amanah (trustworthy), tabligh (delivering), and fathanah (intelligent)—serve as indicators to assess whether a leader has reflected the leadership

of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, these four traits are important keys to implementing good leadership, namely by carefully and comprehensively integrating the leadership values of the Prophet Muhammad in every aspect of leadership.

Conclusion

In the Islamic perspective, the essence of a leader is as a *khadim al-ummah*, namely, a servant of the people he leads. Based on this philosophy, leaders are required to serve with love, sincerity, and moral responsibility. Power in any form is truly a mandate from Allah SWT, for which one day he will be held accountable. Therefore, morality and ethics in exercising power must be based on the four main characteristics of the Prophet: *Siddiq* (honest), *Amanah* (trustworthy), *tabligh* (conveying the truth), and *fathanah* (intelligent). These four characteristics form the foundation of prophetic leadership, which not only guides people physically but also radiates spiritual exemplarity. The implication is that leaders who emulate the characteristics of the Prophet will be better equipped to carry out their leadership mandate in a reasonable, transparent, and responsible manner, prioritizing the interests of the people above personal ambition.

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