

# Islamic Leadership: Towards an Efficient and Effective *Imām* to Drive Positive Change

Abdul Ghafoor Kamaldien  
abdul@kamaldiens.co.za

## Abstract

This paper explores Islamic perspectives on leadership and the lived experiences of *imāms* and role players in *Masājid* in the Western Cape. Firstly, it draws on the *Qurʾān*, *hadīths* and the rightly guided caliphs. Secondly, it examines academic literature to extract a theoretical understanding of Islamic leadership. Built on this understanding, it develops a model of variables and relationships in the context of this leadership. It explains how “individual leadership style” is affected and influenced, and how it impacts an *imām’s* (Muslim liturgical leader) effectiveness in his community and *Masjid*<sup>1</sup>. Through interviews with experienced *Masjid* administrators, *imāms*, and community members, the aim of this paper is to unearth traits, principles, and variables essential for *imāms* to understand, internalise and apply in their roles as *imāms* if they want to be effective in their communities and *Masājid*. Finally, it recommends a model that yields more significant levels of accountability and resilience in the *Masjid*.

**Key Words:** *Imām*, Islamic Leadership, *Masjid*, Western Cape

## 1. Introduction

The roles of *Masājid imāms* are complex and demanding ones that require specific traits, personal commitment, and specialised knowledge to excel. When an *imām* cannot deal with all the complexity and expectations of the committees and community, they may become frustrated, or feel helpless and undervalued. It follows

1 *Masjid* means place of prostration; it is a communal place of worship for Muslims. It is regarded as the house of Allah ﷻ, meaning where Allah ﷻ is worshipped.

that they may negatively discuss the role of *imāms* and discourage young scholars from accepting this noble role. Only after many years of experience, will an aspiring *imām* eventually develop and build confidence through acquiring the necessary traits and tools to deal with the challenges, and excel. By this time, several years may have been spent at a low level of effectiveness, which could also result in frustrated community members and collective tension.

This paper discusses the traits required and things that must be considered for an *imam* to excel and succeed. *Imām*, in its most basic definition, means leader. In this paper, *imām* and leadership are referred to interchangeably; *imām* refers to the spiritual leader of a *Masjid*, which comprises leading prayers, providing religious guidance, and overseeing religious events and matters. This paper approaches this topic using a phenomenological, qualitative approach. In the context of the Western Cape in South Africa, this paper explores Islamic perspectives on leadership and the lived experiences of *imāms* and the different role players in their *Masājid*. A series of semi-structured interviews with experienced *Masjid* administrators, *imāms*, and community members and their experiences form the data for this study. It also draws on the *Qurʾān*, *aḥādīth* and the examples of the rightly guided caliphs. Then it examines academic literature to determine a theoretical understanding of Islamic leadership. After building on an existing theoretical model, this paper also proposes a new model of relationships that influences the “individual leadership style” that ultimately impacts the transformation of the congregants and followers, which eventually affects the *Masjid*’s effectiveness.

## 1.1. Context

The Muslims of Cape Town are often considered a diaspora community. They were initially brought to the Cape via the Dutch East India company around 1654 as enslaved people, political exiles, and as indentured laborers in penal settlements. At the time, Muslims were prohibited from practising Islam; it was only in 1694, with the arrival of Shaykh Yusuf al-Maqassari<sup>2</sup>, a political prisoner from Java, that the first Muslim community was established. In 1794 the first *Masjid* was opened in the Bo-Kaap area of Cape Town. It acted as the “cultural-

2 His actual name was Abadin Tadia Tjoessoep but is commonly known as Shaykh Yusuf al-Maqassari.

ecological base for the grouping of the Muslim Community” (Davids, 1980, p. xxii). For the Muslims of the Cape, the *Masjid* represented a type of freedom and hope and was central to their lives and activities.

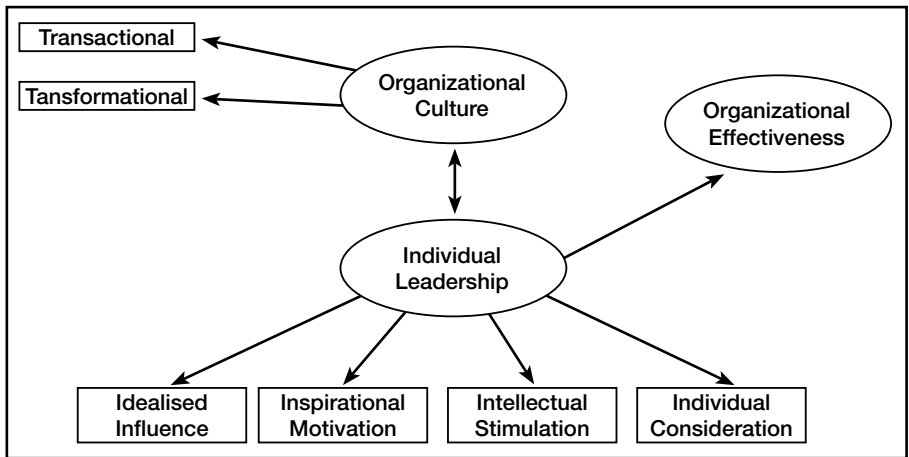
The role of *imāms* in the Cape is unique compared to their position in the rest of the Muslim world. This has been historically embedded in the role of the *imām* and the position of the *Masjid* since the time of the first Muslims in the Cape. Here, an *imām's* position has included taking a leading part in liberating Muslim communities from the shackles of intellectual oppression, liberating them from slavery, and in managing, overseeing, and executing life cycle events such as name-giving to new-borns, circumcisions of boys, teaching basic and advanced Islamic knowledge, advising and counselling community members on family matters, leading prayers during special occasions, and ensuring community members are buried according to Muslim rites.

To date, the *Masjid* remains the pole around which the life of Muslims rotates. Muslims generally have a deep connection and personal relationship with the *Masjid*; it is a place of belonging. This institution plays a significant role in forging the identity of Muslims. The *Masjid* is the house of Allah ﷻ, established for the worship of Allah ﷻ. Subsequently, Allah ﷻ honours the *Masjid* and has made it a place of *āfiya*, or guidance, knowledge, and spiritual illumination (*Qur'ān*, 24: 37). Once a property has been declared a *Masjid*, then it belongs to Allah ﷻ, and specific rules and conditions must be met. The *Masjid* connects creation with the Creator; a *Masjid* is where many Muslims find identity and meaning through collective worship. For many, it is a place of peace and tranquillity. To accept the responsibility of the *imām* of the *Masjid* is an *amānah*; a sacrosanct contract. Therefore, an *imām* must approach his duties with conscientiousness, diligence, and in earnest.

Currently, the primary function of an *imām* is to lead congregational worship, teach Islamic sciences, etiquette, morals, and advise congregants on how to conduct their affairs according to Islamic teachings. They are also expected to be leaders in charity activities, social development, philanthropy, and act as facilitator when disputes and interpersonal challenges arise in the community. Moreover, congregants generally require guidance in all aspects of life, including social activities, ethical

values, politics, and current affairs. Like most religious communities, the *Masjid* is comprised of individuals and will inevitably give rise to complicated relationships with many interpersonal challenges. Although *imāms* are generally not trained in all the above-specialised fields, they are very often expected to fulfil them.

The efficiency of an *imām* has a direct correlation with the organisational effectiveness, i.e., the purpose of the *Masjid*, which positively impacts the congregants and community by encouraging them to make meaningful contributions to society.



**Figure 1:** *Individual Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness Adapted from Parry and Proctor-Thomson’s model (2003)*

In Figure 1, individual leadership is central and plays a vital role in organisational effectiveness. It demonstrates the relationships between the different concepts by the directions of the arrows that illustrate how one idea influences the other. Parry and Proctor-Thomson (2003) posited that their model would apply to any Western English-speaking economy and society (Faris & Parry, 2011). The above model demonstrates the key areas such as idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration in which one must excel as a leader.

Individual and personal leadership influences the organisational culture and vice versa. The organisational culture has an impact on individuals and the community at large.

## 2. Methodology

A qualitative approach was chosen based on Maxwell's Interactive Model of Research design which is comprised of five key components:

1. Goals;
2. Research Questions;
3. Conceptual framework;
4. Methods;
5. Validity.

As per Maxwell (2005), ethics is integral in every aspect of research design and methodology. Applying a subjective constructivism paradigm, a phenomenological research approach was used in this paper. This paper looks in depth at a sampling of perceptions and understandings of *imāms*, congregants, and committee members, to unearth their experiences and perceptions in the *Masjid* environment. The literature review builds a theoretical foundation to understand the different variables that may emerge.

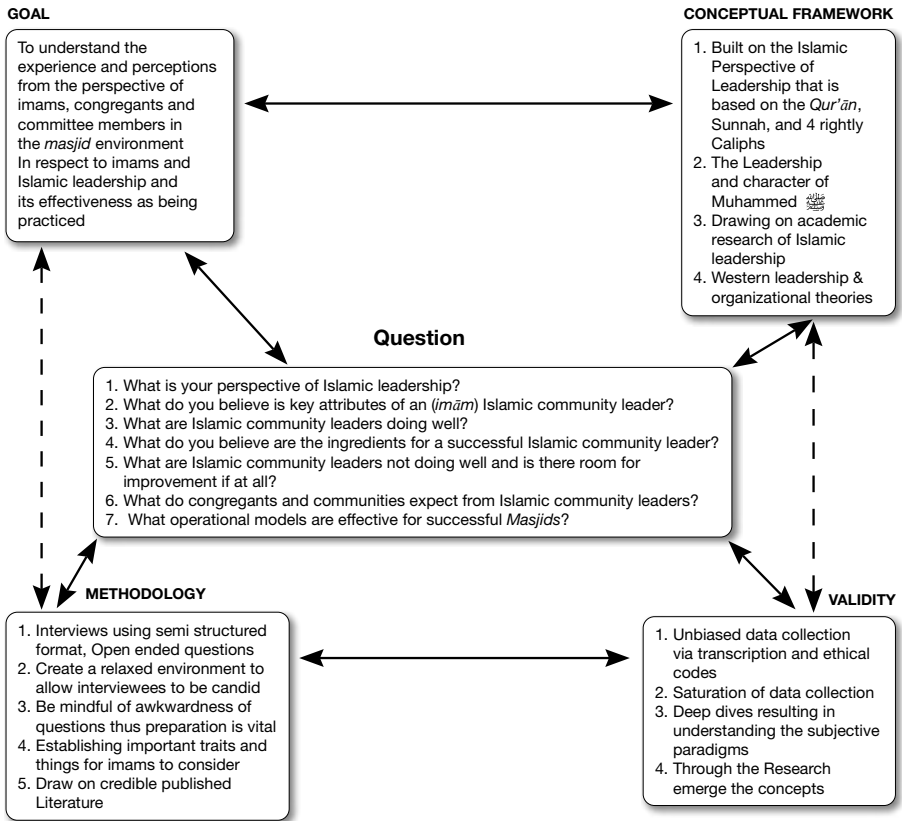


Figure 2: Research Design Framework (2005)

The interviews were conducted in 2019 where thirty-three people were interviewed for this study. The data of the study included *imāms*, congregants, *Masjid* trustees, committee members, administrators, and a youth group in the Western Cape of South Africa. People that have been either serving their *Masjid* or closely connected to the *Masjid* for at least 10 to 35 years were of particular interest for this study. Semi-structured interviews, Socratic questioning and discussion, participation, and open-ended questions were all used to gather information and raw data. The participants appeared generally candid and frank in their responses.

Some of the questions posed to inquire about the experiences of the interviewees were:

1. What is your perspective on Islamic leadership?
2. What are the key attributes of a good *imām*?
3. What makes someone qualified to be an *imām*?
4. What are *imāms* doing well?
5. What do you believe are the ingredients for a thriving Islamic community leader?
6. What are Islamic community leaders not doing well, and is there room for improvement, if at all?
7. What do congregants and communities expect from Islamic community leaders?

During the interviews, the interviewees were allowed to speak about matters that they believed were meaningful. The interviews together took approximately 25 hours and yielded useful data.

An interactive process was used to analyse the data and group data of similar meaning. These groups were eventually coded into themes, which were discernible after several interviews, saturation point<sup>3</sup> was reached. It is important to note that the data yielded multiple levels and layers of information. The data were analysed in terms of the first level of insights. This process took several weeks of reflection. Finally, themes emerged that were representative of the first level of data. The rough data is still rich with additional information that can be re-interrogated for secondary and even tertiary levels of information and insight.

The emergent variables were:

1. Character
2. *Ṣabr*<sup>4</sup>
3. Presence
4. Approachability
5. Accountability
6. *Tazkiyyah*<sup>5</sup>

3 Themes repeat themselves with no new themes emerging.

4 Patience, or gratitude.

5 Purification of the heart (inner being). The removal of spiritual ailments.

7. *Tawakkul*<sup>6</sup>
8. Unlocking the potential and role of women in society
9. Community Expectations
10. The relationship between the *imām* and the committee.
11. Mentorship

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Much existing academic work focuses on studying early Muslims in the Cape (Davids, 1980). Tayob (1995, 1998) focused on youth development and analyses Friday, or *Jumu'ah* sermons as case studies of specific *Masājid*. Jeppe (1996) presented a historical account of *imāms* in the Cape and the establishment of the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC)<sup>7</sup> in 1945. Long (2006) presented a thematic analysis of *Jumu'ah* sermons of *imāms* in predominantly black townships in Cape Town. Most of the available anthropological work regarding Cape Muslims takes a phenomenological approach.

*Fiqh* texts like Al-Zuhailiy's (2010) deal with an *imām's* technical requirements for leading prayer (Zuhailiy, 2010). Similarly, Salie (2002) draws on the work of Al-Zuhailiy (Salie, 2002). However, neither *Fiqh* texts address the interpersonal challenges and emotional intelligence and character traits required for *imāms* to excel and be successful in their role.

#### 3.1. Leadership and Its Importance to Organizations

Leadership is the ability to transform vision into reality (Drucker, 1999). Hesselbein et al. opine that leadership is the ability to manage the organisation's mission and mobilise people around that mission (Hesselbein, 1999). Leadership is also a process of shared influence, and one that maximises the efforts of others towards the achievement of an established goal (Kruse, 2019). Jamil posits that leadership entails the capability of a person to lead a cluster of individuals to complete a particular mission while grooming followers for succession (Jamil,

6 Putting one's trust and reliance on Allah ﷻ alone.

7 The Muslim Judicial Council is a structured body of *imāms* in the Western Cape, which was established to represent the specific religious needs of local Muslims and to consider ways of protecting Islamic customs in South Africa (Jeppe, 1996).

2015). Leaders have the potential to influence millions of individuals; they can change the world (Baqutayan, 2016). An organization's success and culture stem from the leader's attitude, actions, and priorities, manifested through their choices, policies, and programs (Drushal, 2011).

Adair distinguishes between leading organisations and communities, although both are products of human activities. A community is comprised of individuals and families and is a kindred group ordered through their acceptance of common laws and some form of government. Organisations, in contrast, are formed to achieve goals that culminate in a particular kind of work or task. Adair argues that a leader is the one that facilitates the necessary functions to enable a team to achieve its mission and to hold it together as a working unit (Adair, 2011).

The essential elements of a leadership structure are (i) the leader, (ii) their followers, and (iii) their objectives, i.e., the goals the group sets for itself (Saeed et al, 2014). Many scholars such as Wilner, Conger and Kanungo assert that leadership is an attribution phenomenon. Thus, the characteristics and traits of a leader are central to their effectiveness (Ali, 2016). Ability is a measure of a leader's effectiveness. The higher the quality of leadership, the higher the degree of efficacy and vice-versa. A leader has a direct influence on the success of the organisation, and typically directs it. With a change in leadership, the direction of an organisation is changed. Leaders, however, can grow and develop over time, but many organisations may want quick and efficient change (Maxwell J. , 2007). It follows that if a leader is not competent and skilled, it can lead to a poor and inefficient organisation.

### **3.2. Islam Perspective of Leadership**

In Islam, leadership is generally viewed as a sacred trust (*amānah*), and a sacred responsibility (Mustapha, 2015) (Baqutayan, 2016). The subject of leadership is significant in Islam. Muslim religious leaders are tasked with guiding the affairs of their followers. This contributes to the success of the community by impacting their religious rituals and level of spirituality. Muslims commonly believe that the success of the community affects their position in the afterlife (Ali, 2016). Leadership is a process whereby a leader guides willing followers, pays attention to their needs, serves

them, and takes on the role of guardian (Baqtayan, 2016). Adair (2010) argues that organisations and communities have shared a common and constant human nature throughout history (Adair, 2011). Similarly, Ali (2016) argues that Islamic leadership is a shared process of influence between the leader and the follower, or, *shurā*<sup>8</sup> (Al-Raysuni, 2011).

Muhammed ﷺ was the first recognised leader in Islam and the best example thereof (Egel et al, 2016). He ﷺ led with wisdom, virtue, and a high degree of ethics and integrity. His intention as a leader was to please his Lord, Allah ﷻ. Muhammed ﷺ was a charismatic, ethical leader and lived according to a high moral code which was affirmed by his virtues. Ethical leaders develop their followers into leaders (Beekun, 2012).

Muhammed ﷺ demonstrated the multifaceted approach that a leader should have to lead communities. His ﷺ leadership techniques were instrumental in achieving his goal of delivering Islam to the world (Al-Olaqi, 2015). The *Qur'ān* confirms in the verse below that Muhammed ﷺ is an excellent example. "...And indeed, you are of a great moral character" (*Qur'ān*, 68:4). The *Qur'ān* further instructs in many verses<sup>10</sup> to obey the Messenger ﷺ. There can be no doubt that a Muslim needs to follow the example of Muhammed , Messenger ﷺ of Allah ﷻ if they wish to attain success both in this world and the hereafter.

Muhammed ﷺ was endowed with wisdom and virtue, both of which are widely considered desirable traits in any leader. Macintyre (1984) defined virtue as the qualities that enable and predispose a person to a good life and lead them to do the "right" thing in a given context. Both character and virtues can be taught and learnt. Dukerich et al. (1990) found that followers have higher levels of moral reasoning when they emulate morally mature leaders. If a follower needs to learn virtue, a "virtuous" leader and mentor is required to provide an adequate example and guidance (Beekun, 2012). Mohammad et al. (2015) argue that Islamic approaches to leadership are often characterised by the religious and moral spirit that dominated every aspect of government and administration under Muhammed ﷺ.

8 Mutual Consultation. It is a process that allows input from the followers that leaders can consider in their decision making

9 Arabic words of honour and salutations which is attached to the holy Prophet ﷺ.

10 See, for instance: (*Qur'ān*, 3:31-32; 41:78-81; 24:51-57; 64:11-18; 47:29-33; 33:28-34; 26:141-153).

Moreover, Muhammed ﷺ considered leadership to be critical. He ﷺ developed his followers to become leaders. He ﷺ was very careful when selecting people to lead Muslims, whether it was as a governor overseeing lands or for other specific tasks (Sahih Muslim, Hadith, 1733); (Sahih Muslim, 1825). According to Muhammed ﷺ, every person is a leader and has some domain for which they are responsible. Every person is a “shepherd” of their flock (Bukhari, n.d.). The degree of influence or responsibility may vary from person to person and from situation to situation (Beekun et al, 1999).

## 4. Discussion

An *imām*'s persona is comprised of many attributes, qualities, and traits. What he believes about himself and how he conducts himself and interacts with others contribute to his persona. Moreover, his behaviour, cognition, and emotional patterns develop from his worldview. In this regard, an *imām* must be aware of and inculcate the character antecedents below that will contribute to him being an effective and efficient *imām*. Additionally, he needs to acknowledge, appreciate, and respect multiple perspectives to serve his congregation well.

Character is the mental and moral qualities which are distinctive to an individual. Ethics and virtue are part of these. Humility, intention, approachability, accountability, *ṣabr*, *tawakkul* and *tazkiyyah* are also crucial variables which were mentioned in the interviews for this study. Community expectations and mentorship emerged as additional aspects of leadership to consider. These aspects were mentioned in the practical lived examples and views given by the interviewees. The role of women was also mentioned as an essential catalyst for developing a thriving *Masjid* community.

### 4.1. The Importance of Virtuous Character and Humility

The importance of character was articulated by the interviewees when sharing their experiences, which in many cases demonstrated the emotion and conviction of the ideas shared. Most interviewees identified humility as a crucial part of a leader's character. Body language and facial expressions were also noted as essential. For example, smiling creates a

warm atmosphere, demonstrates pleasant feelings, and contributes to the impression created by the *imām*. Generally, a person only gets one chance to make a first impression; creating a good impression is vital for the *imām*. He is perceived as an inheritor of the prophets because he has been blessed with Islamic knowledge. Ideally, his followers respect and look to the *imām* as an ambassador and role model of Islam, and a representative of what the tradition should be. Essential considerations are highlighted in the comments of interviewee two below:

The other very important thing is the character, you know. As an *imām*, you will have to have good character even on the day that you're not feeling well. You must be able to put that smile on your face no matter what. It is imperative because your first impression is crucial. It is critical to welcome anyone that comes to the *Masjid*. (Interviewee two, 2019)

Similarly, interviewee one believes that character supersedes qualifications in the domain of an *imām*. An *imām* may be competent and knowledgeable, but he will not be effective if he does not demonstrate good character and treat people with a high level of respect. Character is developed by following a *tazkiyyah* process:

There must be humility – Even if the *imām* is an intellectual but doesn't have the *akhlāq*<sup>11</sup> to interact. When the *imām* has the *akhlāq* and doesn't have the standard of 'ilm<sup>12</sup>, I would go rather with the *akhlāq* than the 'ilm because through my experience I have seen in college with friends from all over the world, everybody's different. Allah ﷻ created everybody differently. Everybody's capacity is different. Everybody's *akhlāq* is different... It doesn't mean that if you're a shaykh, you are automatically pious or have this *akhlāq*. One of my colleagues knows his *Qur'ān* very well *ma sha' Allah*. The guy's a local graduate and an international graduate from a prominent university, so, in terms of credibility, *mā sha' Allah*, on a very high standard, but the guy lacks *akhlāq*. He doesn't know how to interact with people. He's always aggressive. He's [sic] own *ustādh*<sup>13</sup> said to him 'you can't be an *imām*; you don't have the

11 Character of virtue and high level of ethics; morality.

12 knowledge

13 "Teacher", or "master".

*akhlāq*. (Interviewee one, 2019)

The importance of following the example of Muhammed ﷺ was repeatedly exemplified by several interviewees, as in the example below. This corresponds with the Islamic perspective on leadership and the need to follow the example of Muhammed ﷺ. Interviewee 16 raises the importance of truthfulness as an expected trait by an *imām*'s followers. Followers and the community want to see the *imām* practice what he preaches:

Look, specific [patterns] are expected of a leader and any religious leader. In the case of the *imām*, we would expect that the *imām* emulates the examples which were set by *Rasulullah* ﷺ and what the *shari'ah* prescribes. It is vital for the *imām* because he speaks about it every day, and it becomes very shallow if he doesn't act upon what he says. If the *imām*, for example, talks about truth or [*ṣiddīq*]<sup>14</sup> then the *imām* must be a truthful person. He must speak with one single [straight tongue]. (Interviewee 16, 2019)

When the community expresses *ḥusnul zan*<sup>15</sup> regarding the *imām*, this may inspire the *imām* to live up to these good thoughts by leading prayers and worship with a greater level of *taqwa* and *ihsān*<sup>16</sup>.

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**Principle 1:** The *imām* must have good *akhlāq*.

**Principle 2:** The *imām* must be mindful that peoples' praises and respect do not create arrogance in his heart.

**Principle 3:** The peoples' *ḥusnul zan* of the *imām* must inspire the *imām* to improve his character and relationship with Allah ﷻ through an active *tazkiyah* process.

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14 "Truthful." Often bestowed as an honorific title.

15 Thinking good of something or someone.

16 Beautifying actions for Allah ﷻ and awareness that Allah ﷻ is present with them at every moment.

## 4.2. The Importance of *Ṣabr*<sup>17</sup> and Controlling One's Anger

*Ṣabr* was identified by many interviewees as an essential trait when working with the community. Within communities, one inevitably finds difficult personalities, and *ṣabr* is required to be able to deal with them. People with different levels of understanding or comprehension and levels of ability to rationalise exist in any community. This may require that the *imām* repeats himself several times over. Moreover, he may need to deal with disrespectful or rude people who are part of the community he serves. Interviewee six argues that with low levels of *ṣabr*, an *imām* will not attract the community to him, which will not aid him in his mission to call people to Allah . People will be more willing to listen to an *imām* that they respect and have a rapport with:

You must have good character because people want to be around people that have good character. You know, you need to have the necessary *ṣabr* with community – if you're just like short-fused, you're going to lose everybody. People are very much attracted to humility, so if we speak about the character traits, we can only look directly at the character traits of *Rasulullah* ﷺ. People are attracted to that, and they latch onto you. (Interviewee six, 2019)

The importance of controlling one's anger is highlighted in several *aḥādīth*. They state that mitigating one's anger is true strength and demonstrates strength of character (Bukhari,n.d.). This challenge is encapsulated in the comments below:

Because being an *imām* is challenging. You need to keep your cool all the time. You are the one that people look up to. You can't degrade yourself and go down as low as people go. So, you need to swallow all that anger, swallow that, and it is not easy and, on top of that, dealing with community issues, seeing what is happening in your community, dealing with youth. It is challenging. (Interviewee six, 2019)

<sup>17</sup> Patient, perseverant.

**Principle 4:** *Ṣabr* and restraining oneself are required for *da'wah*.<sup>18</sup>

### 4.3. Sincerity

Sincerity is a fundamental trait of an *imām*. Everything stems from his intention, as Muhammed ﷺ has said; actions will be judged by their intentions. One must have pure intent; meaning everything an *imām* does must be to draw Allah ﷻ pleasure, per the *shari'ah*. A Muslim must not perform good deeds<sup>19</sup> to show off or for recognition; it must only please Allah ﷻ. When an *imām* is blessed with specific abilities, he needs to remind himself that it is a gift from Allah ﷻ because everything ultimately is from Allah ﷻ. The *imām* is only a conduit for the message, calling to Allah . Thus, he must refrain from thinking of himself as superior to others that may not have the same ability. These abilities can be many, i.e., a strong memory, a melodious reciter (of the *Qur'ān*), or good oratory ability. These notions were apparent in the views of many interviewees. For instance, comments made explicitly by interviewee four:

Yes, it is the sincerity with which the talk is given. Allah ﷻ has given different people different abilities but the most critical ingredient of all these abilities is the ability of sincerity. Humbleness is a part of sincerity. Otherwise, the person has that – keeping himself better – ‘Ek gaan die mense...; Ek moet die mense reg maak’ [I am going to fix the people...(from wrong doing) ]You must feel that you are used as a tool by Allah ﷻ, whether you are a person that can speak for three hours on end and mesmerise people or you're a person that can speak for three minutes, but what you said is essential from the point of view of sincerity and what you want to give over. Don't let your eloquence make you arrogant, be humble. All credibility belongs to Allah . We make *duāh* Allah ﷻ guides us, and Allah ﷻ puts the proper wording in our mouth to convey the *da'wah*. (Interviewee four, 2019)

18 Propagating and calling to Islam.

19 Good deeds refer to doing things that are essentially considered acts of worship, meaning actions recognized Islamically as acts of piety.

An *imām* must internalise knowledge and understanding before conveying it. It must be authentically conveyed with sincerity from his heart. He must refrain from trying to impress the congregation by speaking to their minds; this type of action and speech is very shallow and not influential.

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**Principle 5:** All actions must be with pure intentions.

**Principle 6:** The *imām* must speak authentically from his heart based on sound knowledge.

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#### 4.4. Approachability and Presence

Approachability in this context is understood to be one's level of openness, readiness to engage, and willingness to serve the community. Several interviewees noted approachability as an essential criterion of an *imām*. An *imām* should make himself accessible to his community and followers. A factor that contributes to the approachability of an *imām* is daily presence in the *Masjid*. When he is present and demonstrates welcoming, or friendly body language, it indicates accessibility. Visiting with the community and meeting and greeting congregants were also highlighted as part of the basic expectations of community members. Interviewee nine, a member of the *Masjid's* youth group, was particularly vociferous in expressing the importance of the approachability of the *imām*:

I grew up in this area, although I noticed that visiting *Masājid* in Cape Town and around the world is the approachableness of an *imām* is something key, even though it seems basic. Sometimes, it is difficult for people to approach someone well-known who stands in front (leads prayers) quite often or is even knowledgeable. It isn't easy to approach them with your own personal things, and that is sometimes what I think an *imām* is there for, to help some people through those things. If you are going to be an Islamic leader of a community, you must be prepared for people who don't know Islam as well as you do to come and query with you about the things they face in their own lives. I notice many people

don't necessarily see the *dīn*<sup>20</sup> completely, but they have such firm *yaqīn*<sup>21</sup> that they know that if they don't know something, they should go find out from someone who does know, and I think an *imām* should fulfil that role. That being said, approachableness, being like someone approachable and even further, I believe that they should be someone who approaches others, to an extent where they try to be – they are the ones who go into the community instead of waiting for the community to come to them, especially like after *Jumu'ah* or after *ṣalāh*; they don't wait for people to come, to greet them, but they go to greet people and find out more about them and see what they can do to help. Those things make them seem more like they're a resource, which they should be, I believe. (Interviewee nine, 2019)

An *imām's* approachability and keenness to share his knowledge with others was re-iterated by others in the youth group:

From my personal experience, I think an *imām* should be approachable and somebody readily available to share their knowledge because I believe knowledge is acquired to be shared with those who maybe not know less. (Interviewee nine, 2019)

An *imām's* body language, like anyone, portrays his attitude. He must be mindful of his body language. It can either silently support his mission or detract from it. Interviewee six's comments clearly illustrate this:

One of the things is body language – people can pick up by just your demeanour. [E.g.] just sitting in the corner, not wanting to be disturbed. Sometimes you'll find that the *imām* goes to the *Masjid*, and he sits, does his thing, and walks out immediately, so that's a demonstration that I don't want to be disturbed– I've got my own thing that I'm busy with...It says that I am not approachable and don't approach me. (Interviewee six, 2019)

Interviewees also mentioned the importance of having a compassionate and understanding approach and refraining from a harsh attitude. Interviewee four draws on the idea of “servant leadership.” In a diverse community, it is impossible to resonate with everybody. There will be differences. Not

20 Islamic way of life.

21 Complete belief and conviction in Allah . It is embedded in the notion that nothing will benefit nor harm you without the decree of Allah .

everyone will appreciate or like the *imām*. These differences can be for a myriad of reasons, which may result in the undermining of the *imām*, the committee, and even conspiracies to remove them. Despite these challenges, an *imām* must remain true to his mission and treat his community with kindness, following the Prophetic example:

The person who's a leader must serve. He must serve the community. He must help the people. Those things bring him closer to the people because the important thing is if you don't have people's hearts. It will be tough. There is an Abu Jahl and an Abu Lahab in every community – there will be those challenges, but *Alḥamdulillāh*, the majority will generally love you for serving them. (Interviewee four, 2019)

An *imām* must build a rapport with his community. He must support them during all life events, whether celebratory or grieving moments. An *imām* should accept invitations to perform special prayers at community members' homes, such as name-giving ceremonies for new-borns, engagement or wedding ceremonies or the funerals of loved ones. An *imām* should be revered in his community, and his presence alone should hold significant meaning to the relevant individuals and the family. This is reflected in the comments of interviewee four:

So, one must be close to people, and the way you get close to people is not to distance yourself. You must attend their functions because when that person loses a close one, how do you know what that person goes through? So at least if you are there, *Alḥamdulillāh*, whether it's a supporting word or your presence – it is comforting. It opens the door between you and that person. (Interviewee four, 2019)

An *imām* must remain focused on his key objective and purpose, which is to call people to the obedience of Allah ﷻ. Every opportunity must be sought to connect with his community. This will ensure that an *imām* gains the respect of his community, making them more amenable to his advice and guidance to serve his mission. Interviewee four articulates this notion:

Once the door is open, you can again - call to Allah ﷻ, but if I didn't share in his moment of sorrow or happiness, it closes doors. Maybe something good happened to him, and he invited you; "please come, man, *Alḥamdulillāh*; you shared in his joy; it would have opened the door for you to speak to him on another occasion also, but now you didn't turn up, and you didn't say anything, or you just shove the person away: 'Nee, daai is nie important dinge nie' [no, that is not the important thing], how does that person feel – you know? So, one has to do all these things – because it opens the door to call that person to Allah ﷻ. (Interviewee four, 2019)

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**Principle 7:** An *imām* must be accessible and reach out to the people with gentleness and kindness.

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#### 4.5. Accountability and Mentorship

The importance of accountability to Allah ﷻ, the committee, and the community is crucial for the success of an *imām* in a community and *Masjid*. An *imām* must consider those who contribute to the success of the *Masjid*. If he respects them, he will contribute to a pleasant and amicable environment, which is fundamental if the *imām* wants to call Allah ﷻ and ensure that the *Masjid* model is sustainable. When an *imām* acts as a law unto himself with unaccountability, he is likely to lose his community's confidence and respect. This is undesirable because it will contribute to the system's failure:

I believe there should be a certain amount of accountability to everybody, even though we're accountable to Allah ﷻ. In every position that we find ourselves in, there must be that accountability, and for the *imām* and the *Masjid*, Allah ﷻ states in the *Qur'an* that certain people are going to be in charge of running the *Masjid* affairs, etc. So, when a person [*imām*] comes in, there should be certain things that he needs to do, and that can only be done via the contract; otherwise, he can do whatever he wants to do, and even the person with integrity [at times] is going to feel I'm in charge; I can do what I want to do, but

there should be that framework. So, even within the framework, it should be for [the objective] the needs of the *Masjid* and the community's needs. (Interviewee four, 2019).

Furthermore, interviewee four attributed the success of *imāms* from previous generations to their dedication and commitment to the community. They were not distracted by the shortcomings of their employees or committee members. They remained committed to *khidmah*<sup>22</sup>. An *imām* should not give anyone reason to speak ill of him. He needs to work amicably with his committee, respect them and always strive to go the extra mile to fulfil his responsibility.

Traditionally, *imāms* always worked with a *gatiep*<sup>23</sup>, the *imām's* aide. The aide studied under the *imām* and was mentored by him to become an *imām* himself eventually. Several interviewees cited this process as essential for a young graduate to follow. They argued that the *imāms* who underwent this training process were the most successful. They learnt from the experience of someone that has already learned to deal with most of the complexities an *imām* must contend with. The mentor, senior shaykh, or scholar must possess 'adl, or an exemplary character, and is able to assist the aspiring *imām* with his *tazkiyyah*.

The role of an *imām* is not comparable to an ordinary job. It is not limited to a contract; it is a way of life. Often there will be matters that require his attention and care not written in his contract. He must be mindful that he is also a community member serving Allah ﷻ. When the *imām* performs *khidmah* for Allah ﷻ, Allah ﷻ takes care of his needs and elevates him with honour.

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**Principle 8:** An *imām* must have a mentor and remain connected to him.

**Principle 9:** An *imām* must have a clear (unambiguous) contract mutually agreed upon by all parties.

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22 Service to creation.

23 An understudy or someone that fills in for the *imām* when he is not available.

## 4.5. Community Expectation

The congregation and community have their expectations and ideas of how an *imām* should conduct himself and what he should be doing. The community wants an *imām* with an exemplary character that is in line with *fiqh* criteria of the position. Most notably, he must be a man of *‘adl*, which is that he must not be someone that commits neither major sins nor persistently commits minor sins. Specific standards are built on these worldviews. Interviewee three, for instance, points out the following:

First, the basic things – of course, they expect the *imām* to be an exemplary person in terms of how he behaves and all the things he does – he must not bring shame to them [the community]. Whatever he does, it reflects on them also. What they want also is that he must be able to connect them with Allah ﷻ and teach them about the dīn of Allah ﷻ according to their requirements. (Interviewee three, 2019)

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**Principle 10:** The *imām* is an ambassador for his community and Islam.

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## 4.6. The Role of Women

The role of women in the *Masjid* community was identified by many interviewees as a significant contributor to its success. It is widely believed that women are the bedrock of a society and make substantial contributions to their families and the community. Women should be respected and treated with dignity.

When women go through challenging times, many *Masājid* have development and support programs to include them, and so they are able to overcome their challenges because of this support. This transformation process can be a liberating experience, and after that, many women may be inclined to give back to the community in meaningful ways. Many unmarried women consider the *Masjid* as their primary, and sometimes only link to Islam. The *Masjid* for many

is something tangible and meaningful that provides a place of safety and refuge from the noise of the *fasād* and *fitnah* of the times; it is a place where all can connect to Allah ﷻ:

So, what we did was look at what was needed. Most importantly, in any thriving community, women are the strong point of a community and the most neglected in society. So, what I did was I brought in an expert, a *shaykha*.<sup>24</sup> I brought her in, and until today, she is still with us for the women, just women if you want (anyone) to consult with a woman expert. She was the first shykhah that came to South Africa, Cape Town. She is still with us, *Alḥamdulillāh*. Ten years ago, we introduced a housewife's class. We have a full-time *ḥifẓ* school for girls only running here at the *Masjid*. So very important is that we need to also look at our womenfolk because I believe they are the foundation of the home. They're the driving force behind the husband. If I ask you who is behind, you? If your wife is not happy at home, will you be happy in your environment? (*Interviewee 5, 2019*)

One *imām*, recognised by the radio Islam International awards (2019) as one of the top five most influential *imāms* in South Africa, took it upon himself to remain abreast to contemporary issues. He started with women as the focal point. This was his route to his community; he addressed the importance of family units. He strove to fully understand family issues by understanding their history and lineage. He confirmed his approach in his comments below:

My first focus here was women, so I started counselling. I went to learn to counsel. I studied all philosophies through reading – reading is power – I read it all. That's how I identified women, and that's how I drew them because I believe it's dedicated to my mother and, *Alḥamdulillāh*, no charge. You've got to be humble in this business. (An influential *imām* in South Africa, 2019)

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24 Qualified religious scholar.

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**Principle 10:** Women are central to a thriving society.

**Principle 11:** Women's needs must be considered and included in planning and programs.

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#### 4.7. Serving (*khidmah*) to Draw Allah 's Pleasure (*riḍā*) upon the Self

It is worth mentioning that the standout *imāms* were *imāms* who have been serving for at least 20 years and more. Their intentions as serving their community for Allah ﷻ were apparent. Moreover, they were not concerned about financial or material gain; they reported that their worldly needs were adequately met, and they were comfortable, satisfied and at peace. Furthermore, they expressed perplexity at young *imāms* seeking big salaries. They expressed the belief that if they take care of Allah 's house, and serve the congregation for Allah ﷻ, then Allah ﷻ takes care of their needs. They also mentioned that they practise *taṭawakkul*. This is beautifully illustrated in one *imām's* statement below:

If I need anything, I don't ask the committee. I ask Allah ﷻ and Allah ﷻ put it in the committee's hearts to facilitate what I need. (An *imām*, 2019)

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**Principle 12** - Allah ﷻ honours and takes care of the needs of the one in *khidmah* of his creation with reverence to those that build and support the *Masājīd*.

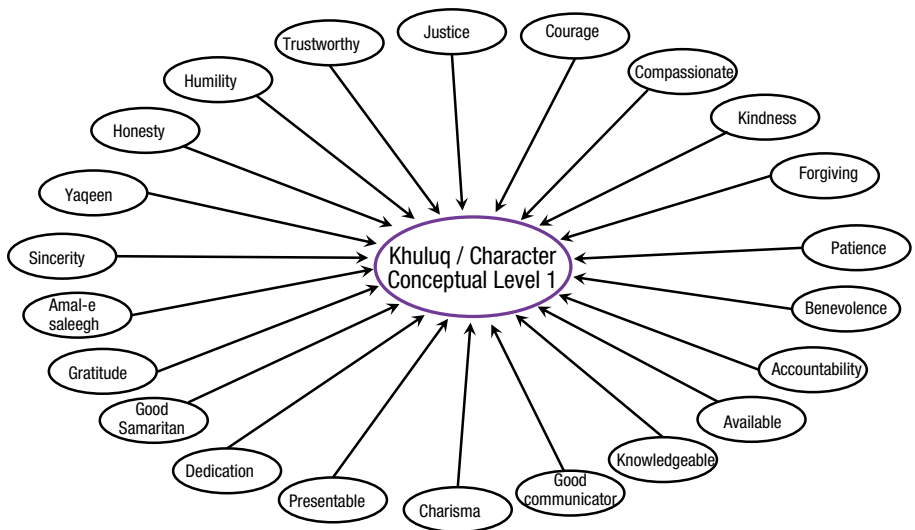
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An *imām* must be remunerated fairly. When determining an *imām's* salary, the committee must consider his years of study and the essential role he fulfils in the community. Moreover, he likely has a family with the same needs and wants as every community member. The *Masjid* committee should ensure that an *imām's* personal and familial needs are adequately fulfilled. Both the *imām* and the committee must refrain

from exploiting each other and be mindful of their responsibilities as per the sacrosanct contract they accepted, which is to serve Allah ﷻ.

## 5. Results

Individual, essential traits revealed in the study are depicted in figure 3, labelled character / *khuluq* conceptual level 1. *Khuluq* is made of antecedents of the leadership traits that contribute to character. These traits contribute to a value system and worldview, which informs the individual's conduct and etiquette. These traits influence leadership style, which gives rise to different leadership methods.



**Figure 3:** Conceptual Illustration of Character for Islamic Leadership Level 1

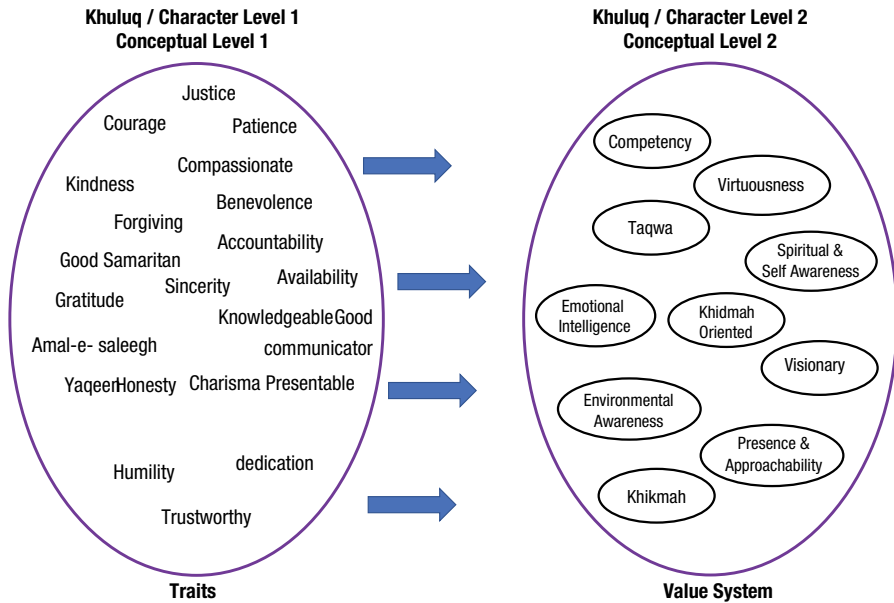


Figure 4: Conceptual Illustration of Character Level 2 Required for Islamic Leadership

Figure 4: illustrates the development of certain traits into a higher level of abstraction, which in turn forms a higher level of character and contributes to the competency and skills required to be an effective leader.

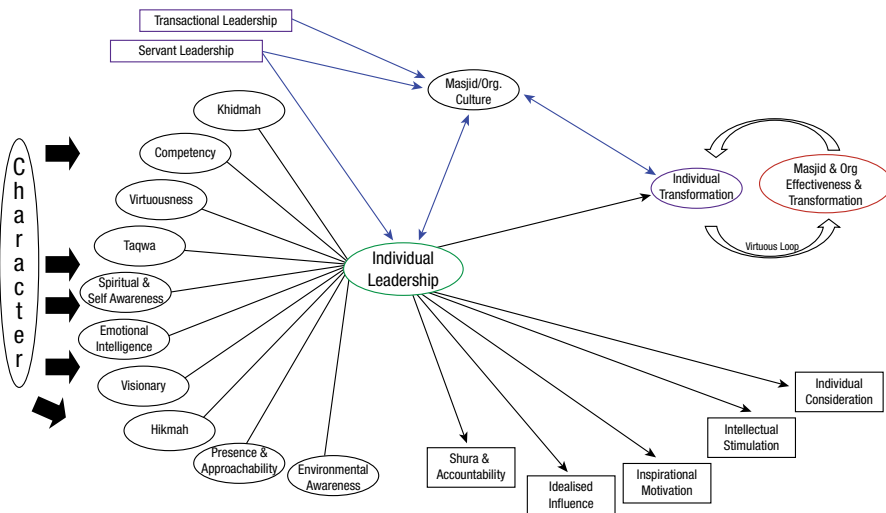


Figure 5: Kamaldien Model 3 – Developed from a Qualitative Study in the Construct of Islamic Leadership Adapted from Parry and Proctor-Thomson Model(2003)

Figure 5 is a novel contribution that draws on Parry and Proctor-Thompson's (2003) established model. It depicts key character traits and competencies that influence individual leadership. On the left appears character, which directs to oval figures, indicating where a leader must excel. The degree of competency achieved in these areas will ideally influence Islamic leadership capability. These areas are *kbidmah*, competency, virtuousness, *taqwa*, spiritual and self-awareness, emotional intelligence, vision, *hikmah*, presence and approachability, and environmental awareness.

Competency is primarily comprised of communication style and charisma. Virtue is made up of ethical actions, good character, courage<sup>25</sup>, integrity, justice, and wisdom. *Taqwa* is comprised of sincere intention, effort, humility<sup>26</sup>, justice<sup>27</sup>, truthfulness, trustworthiness, integrity, *ṣabr*, *tarwakkul* and *yaqīn*<sup>28</sup>. *Taqwa*<sup>29</sup> is the crucial intrinsic driver towards doing good for the sake of Allah . It is about complying with Allah 's injunctions and refraining from Allah 's prohibitions. It restrains a leader or follower from acting unjustly or unethically (Mohammad et al, 2015). It is an internal moral compass, and the foundation of all actions.

Spiritual and self-awareness consists of knowing the self, and reflecting specifically on the hereafter, which includes awareness of the Divine, and the need for spiritual and moral guidance related to this. Awareness of these is also manifested when one expresses self-control in very challenging circumstances.

Emotional Intelligence refers to being aware of one's feelings and with whom one engages. It also relates to the awareness of one's environment, the uniqueness of individuals, and understanding of varying circumstances and when to act appropriately. A visionary refers to one who thinks creatively and plans for the future, maybe even beyond one's life. They are willing to challenge the status quo, to put

25 To stay the course and resist pressure of all kinds. Doing good despite the challenges often associated with it.

26 To always think good of others and not believe that you are better than any person no matter who they may be or what they may or may not own, even if they own nothing. To overcome selfishness and serve others habitually.

27 To give every individual their due.

28 Complete belief and conviction in Allah ﷻ. It is embedded in the notion that nothing will benefit nor harm you without the decree of Allah ﷻ.

29 It is the inner consciousness of one's duty to Allah ﷻ and his accountability towards Him ﷻ

a plan into action to realise a specific vision. *Hikmah*, in its simplest form, means that one is knowledgeable and can act appropriately at the appropriate time in response to a particular situation. Islamically, it means to act according to the *Qur'an* and the teachings of Muhammed ﷺ, while incorporating kindness, benevolence, and gratitude.

In Figure 5 two purple rectangular boxes with transactional and servant leadership appear on the top left. These concepts influence the leader as well as the *Masjid* and organisational culture. The relationship is represented by a black line that indicates one direction of influence. A leader's qualities determine how they will adopt the concepts embedded in servant and transactional leadership. Muhammed's ﷺ leadership incorporated elements of both servant and transactional leadership styles. Both of these concepts influence organisational culture. This affects the values and norms by which the people within an organisation interact and their expectations.

Once the above traits and leadership elements are internalised in a leader, he becomes transformative. This is depicted in Figure 5 by the single directional arrows that flow from the individual leadership, pointing towards (i) *shura*<sup>30</sup> and accountability in the decision-making process; (ii) idealized influence, or being a role model and leading with integrity and developing a shared vision to achieve the organisational goals; (iii) inspirational motivation, which conveys an achievable vision with enthusiasm; (iv) intellectual stimulation, which is to think creatively and critically, and encourage problem-solving behaviour through innovative ways and stimulates followers intellectually; (v) individual consideration is recognising and developing relationships with followers by giving them personal attention to become the best they can be.

Individual leadership has a direct influence on the organisational culture.<sup>31</sup> A leader sets the tone and influences an organisation's framework, both physically and socially. Likewise, the organisational culture influences the leader because the latter often either emerge from the organisation's existing culture or may be limited by it. Either

30 Consultation with knowledgeable and skilled persons regarding the subject matter at hand

31 Organizational culture focuses on how individuals collectively respond to the environment internally and externally.

way, it impacts the leader. A leader influences the culture through his actions that the followers admire, identify with, and ideally emulate. This ultimately affects the behaviour and conduct of the followers.

Additionally, he may facilitate education that prompts followers to consider new paradigms and fosters individual transformation. Similarly, an organisation's culture might be one of development and reflection. This creates the foundation and conditions for change of the individual followers.

Lastly, when congregants are transformed<sup>32</sup>, they are more likely to contribute to the *Masjid*, and the organisation's effectiveness in so far as its desired objectives. Congregants who perform *taqwa*, engage in worship, and demonstrate commitment and loyalty, are more likely to be transformed. Congregants may make extra effort to realise an organisations' goals. A virtuous re-enforcing loop is created because the more efficient and effective the *Masjid*/organisation becomes, the more it drives the individual to continue assessing, reflecting, and contributing to its effectiveness, efficiency, and transformation.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper investigated leadership by providing a brief survey of Islamic and general leadership literature. Critical character antecedents and traits were identified that *imāms* should inculcate if they want to excel. This paper also discussed ideal skillsets, beliefs and competencies that must be developed and enacted.

Twelve guiding principles emerged that would assist an *imām* in succeeding in his role. The discussion highlighted important variables and virtuous character traits that *imāms* should internalise and act upon to thrive in their roles. These are approachability, accountability, being present and accessible, compassion, tolerance, humility, *ṣabr*, sincerity, building rapport with the community, and understanding community expectations.

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32 To bring out the best of the individual.

*Taqwa and khidmah* were identified as critical drivers for success as an imām. Women were identified as a segment of the community that has a significant, positive impact. This paper found that the most impactful *imāms* understand how to unlock the potential of women in their community.

Five indicators were identified that measure the effectiveness of an *imām*:

1. Level of accountability and *shurā* application.
2. Idealised influence.
3. Inspiration motivation.
4. Intellectual stimulation.
5. Individual consideration.

A recommendation for future research is to extract principles and concepts relevant to *Masājīd* and its committees.

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**Abdul Ghafoor Kamaldien** is a GIA graduate gemmologist from the United States and an EMBA from UCT. He holds a *Shari'ah* Certificate from the Academy of *Shari'ah* and Law, as well as a BA Honours in Islamic Sciences from IPSA. He studied traditional Islamic sciences at Azhar Institute and traditional shuyooqh in Cape Town. He has been a community activist and *Masjid* chair. Kamaldien has been a businessman for more than 28 years and has received several platinum business awards.