# SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN MALAYSIAN DA'WAH NGOS: WESTERN AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES

### *Kepimpinan Hamba Di Dalam NGO Da'wah di Malaysia: Perspektif Barat dan Islam*
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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the characteristics of servant leadership (SL) from Western and Islamic perspectives, and analyse those characteristics in Malaysian *Daʿwah* NGOs. Currently many *Da'wah* NGOs in Malaysia are said not to prioritize leadership characteristics in leading and serving the as well as the public interest. Characteristics are important to any organization, and they influence the way a leader leads its organization and staff by exercising specific leadership behaviour in response to a situation. Unlike other leadership styles that are organization-centric, this paper serves to explain the people or follower-centric characteristics of servant leadership through the combination of motivational approaches (MA) and voluntary actions (VA) in Malaysian *Daʿwah* NGOs – ABIM and IKRAM. The data from this qualitative research are collected from five main resources including media coverage, official reports, official websites, NGOs programs and public opinion. The data are analysed thematically based on the similarities and differences characteristics of SL between Western and Islamic perspectives. The findings revealed that servant leadership from Western and Islamic perspectives share some similar dimensions of characteristics in practice; however, Western SL characteristic does not draw attention to the religious perspective as underlined in Islam.

Keywords: *s*ervant leadership, da'wah NGOs, Malaysia, western and Islamic perspective

**Abstrak**
Artikel ini bertujuan meneroka karakteristik kepimpinan-hamba (*servant leadership*) dari perspektif Barat dan Islam. Kelihatan banyak NGO Da'wah di Malaysia tidak mengutamakan ciri-ciri kepimpinan dalam menerajui organisasi dalam memenuhi kepentingan umum. Karakteristik kepimpinan penting bagi sesebuah organisasi, di mana ia mempengaruhi cara pemimpin memimpin organisasi dan staf dengan mengamalkan sikap kepemimpinan tertentu yang bersesuaian dengan situasi organisasi. Berbeza dengan kaedah kepimpinan lain yang berpusat kepada organisasi, artikel ini menjelaskan gabungan pendekatan motivasi (MA) dan tindakan kesukarelawan (VA) yang menjadi ciri unik kepada *servant leadership*, seperti yang diamalkan oleh organisasi *Daʿwah* di Malaysia – ABIM dan IKRAM. Menggunakan metodologi kualitatif, rujukan utama kajian meliputi liputan media, laporan rasmi, laman sesawang rasmi, penganjuran program dan pandangan awam dari NGO *Daʿwah* di Malaysia, diikuti dengan elemen perbezaan dan persamaan dianalisis secara tematik berdasarkan perspektif Barat dan Islam. Hasil kajian menunjukkan *servant leadership* dari perspektif Barat dan Islam mempunyai dimensi karakteristik dan berkongsi objektif yang sama dalam perlaksanaan. Namun yang membezakan antara keduanya ialah kesedaran objektif tertinggi dengan mengesakan Tuhan di dalam *servant leadership* dari perspektif Islam, tetapi tidak dikalangan pemikir Barat

Kata kunci: kepimpinan hamba, NGO Da'wah, Malaysia, perspektif Barat dan Islam

**INTRODUCTION**
Robert Greenleaf, a pioneer of Servant Leadership (SL), formulated this concept which has received substantial attention in the contemporary leadership field (Eva, et.al, 2019). What distinguishes Greenleaf's servant leadership concept from other leadership styles is that the 'follower' is the primary concern rather than the leader itself and the organizational objectives (Stone, et.al, 2004). Greenleaf (2002) viewed meeting the demands of others is the premier concern in leadership, hence would be the only motivation and reason for leaders to serve. As described by McMinn (2002), a servant leader develops people and helps them to strive and flourish. According to Farling *et.al* (1999), leaders must provide vision, gain credibility, and obtain trust from followers and influence them. Hunter *et.al* stated that servant leaders ignite a cycle of service by role-modelling servant behaviour that is then mirrored through staff and followers' behaviour within and outside the organization (2013: 318).

Both servants and leaders are usually perceived as being opposites, yet Greenleaf's revolution on how to view leadership gave birth to the paradoxical term servant leadership (Spears, 2010). Since then, servant leadership has gained considerable attention, and was acknowledged as an emerging leadership paradigm for the 21st century. This phenomenon seems proven by Zohar's prediction in her ground-

breaking book, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, which states that, "servant-leadership is the essence of quantum thinking and quantum leadership" (1997: 146). In the current setting, servant leadership is already widespread, and has been adopted by religious NGOs or known as Daʿwah NGOs in Malaysia, which behold the teaching of Islam as their activities' framework (Mohd Faridh and Sharifah, 2016). In this view, ABIM and IKRAM represent active and significant Daʿwah activism and Daʿwah NGOs in Malaysia which is the focus of this study.

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN RELIGIOUS NGOS

After receiving great acknowledgement from various experts in the academic field as well as from the industry, servant leadership has been espoused as valid for modern organizational leadership. As emphasized by Greenleaf (2002: 35), the application of servant leadership is appropriately suitable for business, education, churches, and foundations. The word 'churches' used by Greenleaf ultimately refers to organizations associated with true religious teachings and principles, which allow people to participate in all roles (2002: 36). According to Tam & Hasmath (2015), such religious organizations are not limited to religious houses of worship; rather, they can be extended due to its unique typology identity and motive similar to social services, educational organizations, and programs delivery.

Religious non-governmental organizations (RNGO) are generally associated with this identity, but are also capable of more than that. Unlike other leadership discourse that makes the organization the central point, in the servant leadership concept, both the leader and follower are an important part of the discussion in today's corporate world. Servant leadership aims to get maximum output from employees; therefore, a good leader is essential. Due to that, servant leadership is believed to implement various behavioural and emotional aspects in a very useful way, of which leadership is an opportunity for offering valuable services to employees and customers (Choudhary, et.al., 2013). As concluded by Deep, Hussain and Berhanuddin (2016), strong leadership would have significant consequences on the outcome of conflict resolution, which servant leadership is believed to have that the potential to fill in.

In a situation where leadership is seen to be in crisis, a demand for more ethical, people-centred management, God-conscious action, balanced spiritual-worldly worldview, and leadership inspired by the servant leadership theory may very well be what organizations need right now. Given concerns about society's well-being at large, in balancing the purpose of living in this world and the hereafter, thus filling the gaps that are left by the government, leadership that is rooted in ethical, caring behaviour and is religiously driven becomes of great importance. However, as argued by Sendjaya, Sarros and Santora (2008), both spirituality and morality/ethics that is perceived from religious teachings in addressing specific work behaviours are often

excluded from traditional measures of leadership. Due to this situation, leadership has been suggested as a key factor for engaging employees and flourishing organizations (Van Dierendonck, 2011). This fact has long influenced the pattern of Daʿwah NGOs establishment in Malaysia. Muhamat *et.al* (2012) explained how Malaysia is a product of ethnoreligious formulation and how it spread to the style of leadership in organizing organizations since Independence in 1957.

## Daʿwah NGOs as Religious NGO in Malaysia

In the Malaysian context, under the category of Religious NGO, Islamic NGO (I-NGOs) is leading in number. As of March 2016, 1,215 organizations have identified with Islam (Mohd Faridh and Sharifah, 2016). About the uniqueness of the Malaysian-Muslim identity, it encompasses three main races: Malay-Muslim, Chinese-Muslim and Indian-Muslim. This has affected the establishment and growth of I-NGOs in Malaysia. In a study by Faridh and Sharifah Hayaati (2016), it was found that there are three Chinese-Muslim based I-NGOs, 52 identified Indian-Muslim based I-NGOs, and the balance are Malay-Muslim based I-NGOs. While the focus of each I-NGO is varied, covering fields such as education, economy, social development and welfare, the utmost primary concern of all I-NGOs is *da'wah* activism (Badi, 2003).

Among the *daʿwah* activities are reaching out to people to tell them about Islam, living according to Islamic principles and values, promoting good and preventing bad, inviting non-Muslims to understand Islam as the only way of life, to believe in Allah as the only God, and being a good man in this world. In other words, *da'wah* is the offer of salvation in the worldly life and in the hereafter, and it is an obligatory and holy task for Muslims to retrain themselves from not doing it wholeheartedly as a force of social change (Muhamar and Saringat, 2014). Therefore, it can be understood that in the Malaysian context Islamic NGOs are also *Daʿwah* NGOs due to their prime leadership and activism are the promotion of Islam and its teachings as well as to prevent harm within the community.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP: WESTERN AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

## Western Perspective

The fact is, despite the existence of servant leadership literature ranging from books to journals, popular press to research, and has given rise to many interpretations; there is enough in the literature to characterize the attributes and characteristics that should exist among leaders. In fact, servant leadership was theorized and discussed by westerners to advance the practice that ranges in organizational setting until political dimension. Yet, not all leaders either in the organization or one who runs the state felt

they are servant rather boss (Kgatle, 2018). Thus, it is important to review servant leadership from Western perspective to emphasize its values and characteristics.

Among all researchers of this field, Larry Spears was the first person who categorized Greenleaf's servant leadership characteristics into ten categories; listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 1998: 85-92). Based on these 10 variations, another extensive effort has been made by different researchers. Laub (1999) developed six clusters of servant leadership characteristics. Those six clusters denote people values, people development, and community building, displaying authenticity, providing leadership, and sharing leadership.

The overall literature reveals at least 20 distinguishable characteristics of servant leadership according to Russell and Stone (2002). These 20 characteristics are further extended into two different attributes, namely functional attributes and accompanying attributes; nine fall under functional attributes, and eleven fall under accompanying attributes. They asserted that functional attributes are is the effective characteristics and are identifiable to actuate the servant leadership responsibilities. By observing the behaviours of leaders in the workplace, operative qualities, characteristics and distinctive features are the characteristics that belong to leaders and define functional attributes according to Russell and Stone (2002). On the other hand, accompanying attributes are not second, but are perceived as supplementary, and augment the functional attributes. In other words, they are prerequisites to effective servant leadership for some cases. Patterson's seven dimensions is another well-known model in characterizing Greenleaf's servant leadership style (Patterson, 2003). In her view, the anchor to servant leadership is a virtue, which brings excellence to a person's character.

With regards to the above explanation, there is a mixed perception to such characteristics' categorization, such as Van Dierendonck's overview. Regarding Spear's 10 characteristics, Van Dierendonck argued that Spear never took those characteristics to the next step, and failed to make them a model that could be measured within intra-personal aspects, interpersonal aspects, and outcomes. As for Russell and Stone's two types of attributes, Van Dierendonck said it is unclear why certain attributes are allocated to a particular category, and to him this is the biggest problem of this model (2011: 1232). Despite saying that Patterson's model has its strength that lies in the conceptualization of the notion of the need to serve, one important point that Patterson neglected is the leader aspect. In sum, Van Dierendonck said that all 44 attributes are clearly overlapping, and to some extent confusing our understanding. The main reason behind this situation is the lack of empirical evidence. Due to that, by combining the conceptual models with the empirical evidence gained

from the measures of servant leadership, Van Dierendonck proposed six key characteristics of servant leader behavior that brings order to the concept of plurality. Van Dierendonck's six characteristics are based on followers' experiences upon servant leadership behavior as follows; servant leaders empower and develop people, they show humility, they are authentic, they accept people for who they are, they provide direction, and they are stewards who work for the good of the whole.

## Islamic Perspective

In contrast to the West, servant leadership is not an alien concept in Islamic history and practices. There is one *hadith* that has always been used as a reference on Prophet's servant leadership style which is understandable and reasonable to explain what leader should act and should be in leadership understanding. Narrated by Ibn 'Abbās, Anas bin Mālik and Sahl bin Sa'di (ra), Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "The leader of a nation is their servant" (no.1502) (al-Albānī & Mashhūr, 2010). Hence, Prophet Muhammad is the 'father' of servant leadership theory since he had practised it all his life before and after he became a messenger to Allah, explained Mir (2010). For example, there is one great lesson shown by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) where he prioritizes his companion to get food rather himself after digging a trench during Al-Ahzab battle. It was reported that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) tied stones on his stomach as to prevent himself from getting hungry while digging the trench (Al-Sibā'ī, 2010).

According to Mir, there are two core principles that can be learned from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in practicing servant leadership, which are moral values and be just in power. Both principles birthed the following five attributes that constitute servant leadership under the belt of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). They are piety, humility, social responsibility, mutual consultation and self-development. Such characters clearly can be extracted from the two sources of Islam; which are Al-Quran and sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (Ahmad and Fontaine, 2011). While acknowledging that these attributes were significant in the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) time, especially during the Madinah period when Muslims and multiple tribes were living together, Nabi and Sarif (2015) extended the understanding servant leadership into the sphere of modern democracy. By inserting the *tawhidic* concept into the modern democracy diagram, Nabi and Sharif concluded that the *tawhidic* paradigm, roles/duties and core values are the main components, and therefore constitute the servant leadership practices which already bind with the ethical leadership perspective (2015: 193).

Alsarhi (2015) viewed that servant leadership is one component for the successor's attribute that is encouraged by collaboration, trust, foresight and the ethical use of power and empowerment. Not only that, accountability to and conviction in Allah are

the mainstream principles that existed within the servant leaders as described by Allah in the Al-Quʾrān (Al-Qasas: 77 and Al-Zalzalah: 7-8), as claimed by Alsarhi (2015: 7-8). Another study which incorporated the idea of servant leadership under the roof of Islamic leadership is Mahazan *et.al* (2015) and they established 25 themes that range from the perspective of servant leadership and managerial leadership, and constitute the Islamic Leadership Inventory (ILI). Furthermore, these ILI are grounded on the principle of *Maqāsid Syarʿiyyah,* which is testable for Muslim leaders. Muslim leaders are definitely a servant to Allah and to his people, as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) narrated in his saying; "*every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you is responsible for what he is shepherd of*" (Narrated by Bukhari: 6719; Muslim: 1829).

To be an effective servant leader that is distinguishable from the two perspectives of the West and Islam, one needs to consider the *Tawhidic* paradigm. According to Al-Attas (2007), Beekun (2012) and Jabnoun (2008), the *Tawhidic* paradigm (TP) echoes that Muslims should adorn themselves with Islamic principles of management and leadership which are based on Faith ('*aqidah*), Worship (*Ibādah*) and Ethics (*Aklāq*). This is a scheme which suggests that the existence of Muslim managers/leaders as a servant leader is linked to two dimensions of life: this worldly life and the hereafter, a viewpoint completely different from the conventional servant-leadership approach that is rooted in the Western perspective.

**METHODOLOGY**
This study is focused on using the observation and documentation method. It covers Malay-Muslim based *Daʿwah* NGOs in Malaysia's official websites, media coverage, programs offered, and public opinion. These are useful tools to determine the servant leadership practices and characteristics of *Daʿwah* NGOs in Malaysia. They are represented by *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM) and *Pertubuhan Ikram Malaysia* (IKRAM). This research has used an observational approach, and thus is a descriptive research study in nature. According to Ste-Marie, *et.al* (2013), information that is gained via observation could help in filtering down techniques for imparting knowledge via demonstration. Commonly using observation may not necessarily lead to benefits, yet there are different perceptions. This aligns with Altmann's argument that observational field studies of behavior tend to show a converse imbalance: low internal validity but, ostensibly, high external validity. However, such imbalance produces dynamism in searching for the relationship of servant leadership characteristics and Daʿwah NGOs' measurement. Therefore, the observational approach used in this study on both ABIM and IKRAM activities and feedback that they received from members as well as the public at their official events, official website and official reports.

All collected data were analyzed through a thematic analysis from the view of Islamic and Western perspectives. From the Western perspective, Van Dierendocnk's six characteristics of servant leadership was chosen due to its distinction approach on empirical study rather than repeating conceptual studies done by researchers before him. In the author's view, his framework that is based on six characteristics is a combination of literature with new theoretical perspectives that motivates leadership with a need to serve. This model puts forward that cornerstone of servant leadership and helps for better understanding in the issue relatedness to characteristics.

Whereas, for Islamic perspective, based on the work of Othman and Rashidah (2014), Beekun (2012) and Mahazan *et.al* (2015) identified 10 characteristics of servant leadership that was extracted from the 19 characteristics of Islamic leadership concept. They are; listening, empathy, healing, awareness, perception, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. The emergence of leadership spirituality or religiosity is regarded as an important theme that underpins those 10 characteristics according to Mahazan *et.al* (2015). In fact, as mentioned earlier, the *Tawhidic* paradigm is the utmost element that distinguishes the understanding of servant leadership from Western and Islamic perspectives. Due to the varied definition of leadership concept in Islam despite the organizations' forms, and while it seems different on one hand, indeed on the other hand all agree that leaders are servants of Allah and serve others (Ahmad & Fontaine, 2011; Opatokun, Hasim & Syed Hassan, 2013; Nabi & Sarif, 2015). This is the prime tenet of servant leadership in Islam where leaders have two approaches - to humans and to Allah, as described in Al-Quran: 3: 112.

It is important to note that this study is limited only to *Da'wah* NGOs in Malaysia, and will not be extended to other Religious NGOs such as Christian-based, Hinduism-based or Buddhism-based NGOs. The study undertook a limited sample size and cultural context, which is Malay-Muslim based *Da'wah* NGOs in Malaysia. Therefore, each selected *Da'wah* NGO for this research is different from one another, and may have experienced different levels of situation prior to their establishment until their present setting. Their organizational settings such as objective, mission and vision statement, leaders' appearance and concerns on related current issues, programs offered to their specific and wide audience, the impact of their presence within the community, responses of the followers and customers toward organizational leadership and programs are measured accordingly to Western and Islamic perspectives. It is believed that the combination of insights from theoretical models and empirical research may help in revealing the underlying process of servant leadership in real practice. Looking at each sample of *Da'wah* NGOs, the validity of choosing them is acknowledged by their consistency in delivering various services which are related to Islamic principles and teachings, or in other words as *Da'wah*

activism. Therefore, below is a simplified matching of the thematic analysis based on Islamic servant leadership characteristics and Van Dierendonck servant leadership characteristics, in which used in the following section of result and findings based on ABIM and IKRAM vision, missions, programs and activities.

**Table 1: Matching Thematic Analysis (Author)**

| Theme | Islamic Servant Leadership (SL) Characteristics | Van Dierendonck's SL characteristics |
|:-----:|---|---|
| 1 | Listening<br><br>Healing | Interpersonal acceptance |
| 2 | Empathy<br><br>Awareness | Humility |
| 3 | Persuasion<br><br>Conceptualization | Authenticity |
| 4 | Stewardship | Stewardship |
| 5 | Foresight<br><br>Commitment to the growth of people<br><br>Building community | Empowering and developing people |

**FINDINGS**

Human have the conscious experiences and free will: which is one can generate any actions and be responsible upon it, thus it my effects the environment (Haggard, Clark & Kalogeras, 2002). Similar overview need to be given to Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) whom voluntarily is the perfect word to describe their movement. However, there are motivations that carried by NGOs and drove them to the end of corner in ensuring there is no one left behind or unsupported. Such combination of voluntary status held by NGOs and driven by sacred motivational approaches in running the organization and providing services/programs, can be determined by the leadership characteristic that they possessed. As such, servant

leadership – by definition is serving all for common interests - is seems at best to describe both voluntary action (VA) and motivational approaches (MA) were held by any type of NGO in this world, including *Da'wah* NGOs.

As pitched by Smith that research on voluntary action need to be done more (Smith, 1995), thus Hommel (2013) implies that voluntary action (VA) is a set of movement carried out to reach a particular goals. As he later claimed that VA must be supported by motive(s), motivational approaches (MA) is a stance that taken to develop or create an environment that is conducive to the articulation of social, political and economic factors that impact upon and individual's readiness and motivation for change (Geller, 2002). Therefore, it is clear to emphasize that any voluntary action for particular goal as many NGOs are intended to do, must be followed by motivational approaches in order to create a conducive environment for a betterment. However, any changes that are intended to develop, leadership must be in there.

In respect to that, the aim of this research is to determine servant leadership practices through the implementation of its characteristics where VA and MA were puzzled in it. Malay-Muslims based *Da'wah* NGOs that have significant experience in their *da'wah* activism which are ABIM and IKRAM, were chosen for identification of servant leadership characteristics. In tandem to that, God-consciousness is an imperative element that motivate both ABIM and IKRAM to pursuit their Islamic agenda in Malaysia, in which absent in the Western servant leadership worldview. According to Bakar (2015), as a pioneer in the emergence of Islamic movement in Malaysia since 1970s, ABIM has distinguish itself by combining hybrid approaches of Western and Islamic worldview in their activism. Such unique approaches adopted by ABIM is because its activists are graduated university students from local and abroad, like the United States, United Kingdom and Egypt (Al-Azhar University, University Malaya (UM) and University National of Malaysia (UKM). Due to its diverse understanding on Islam, and well-blended with the variety of local norms and traditions, ABIM successfully lead Islamic revivalism in Malaysia and be an instrumental Islamic NGO producing many Islamic-oriented institutions like in the sector of education, financial, and social-well being (Bakar, 1981).

At the same coin in reviving the Islamic agenda, although its visibility at first rooted in the United Kingdom by the name Islamic Representative Council (IRC UK), which later in 2011 known as IKRAM also has contributed to the legacy of Islamic revivalism (Malik, Safarudin & Mat, 2018). In between, as their activists are majority who graduated students from United Kingdom, and in order to be seen effectively involved in Malaysia *da'wah* activisms, they form an NGO in Malay name as *Pertubuhan Jamaah Islah Malaysia* (JIM) in 1990 (Siti Hamisah, 2009). Later she argued that both *Da'wah* NGOs were driven by the spirit of Islamic revivalism and

optimistic to develop *khayra* ummah (the best Muslims nation), IKRAM (or JIM before) focused on reforming the society based on the Muslim Brotherhood's *manhaj taghyir* (means of reform), which starts with the building of individuals, then the family and last ultimately the society. Ab Ghani *et.al* (2020) identified that ABIM has introduced a local-based approach known as *Manhaj al-Maliziy*, being an Islamic movement that carrying out its own *da'wah* activities based on local environment without imitating outside (international) Islamic movement ideology.

Upon these establishment of both ABIM and IKRAM for more than 20 years since its inception with impactful vision, mission and objective, it is clear that ABIM and IKRAM had successfully and bold in implementing theme 1, 2, 4 and 5 (see Table 1). These four themes can be seen through projects that ABIM and IKRAM work for as to develop the best muslims nation with Islamic values and attributes. Appraisal on ABIM given by many researchers and one of them is Chandra Muzaffar as he said, "ABIM since its day one has engaged with various organizations and community, local and international, as to make its relevance to the world" (1987: 54). In fact, Esposito & Emad (2013) hailed ABIM (included IKRAM in political agenda) has emerged as driving force in empowering progressive and moderate understanding of Islam in Malaysia since 1980s that this fall under theme 5 (see Table 1).

Departing from abovementioned discussion prior to both establishment and vision to develop an ideal *khayra* ummah among Muslims in Malaysia that fall under theme 3 (refer Table 1), it is important to analyse their *da'wah* activities that might be under theme 4 and 5. *Da'wah* activism is an Islamic propagation that call Muslims to practice the true teaching of Islam in their daily life activities based on Al-Quran and *sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). ABIM's propagation "Islam as a way of life" has caught eyes of university students to join them where *usrah* (study circle) became an official platform for them to exchange ideas and to learn more about Islam and practice it later. *Usrah* is a weekly group discussion and part of of *tarbiyah* process for ABIM and IKRAM leaders and activists. However, Shatir, *et.al* (2020) identified that *usrah* program conducted by ABIM is a place where leaders and members are freely to express and exchange their understanding without coercion to do so or expand it to others.

On the same weight, *usrah* program also practiced by IKRAM and become their core business of *tarbiyah* process. However, in IKRAM, members of IKRAM are categorized according to their *tarbiyah* and commitment level (Malik, *et.al*, 2018). Such categorization is gauged by their participations in programs of the *tarbiyah* modules where *usrah* is part of it. Although IKRAM does apply such categorization to its membership ladder, it does not represent inequality among the members, yet to differentiate the responsibility carried between ordinary member (new members),

active members and core members (leaders). Therefore, realizing the vision to establish the *khayra ummah* and able to lead reform agenda must be pioneered by leaders and activists who went through all *tarbiyah* process, it is clear that both ABIM and IKRAM has given so much attention in growing and empowering its members through programs like *usrah*. Another example of programs conducted by them as part of shaping the direction of Muslims in Malaysia are welfare projects, educational institutions and religious affairs. All such projects are part of the Islamic imperative of enjoining the good and forbidding the evils.

Another essential part to analyze under the framework of servant leadership characteristics is global advocacy. International issues that range of stateless person, human rights, xenophobic attitude and violence become a priority to *Da'wah* NGO like ABIM and IKRAM. As both shared a same vision to establish *khayra ummah* where Muslims lead the world, actively participated in affairs and issues concerning Muslim ummah globally is justified as an urgent call. ABIM through Global Peace Mission (GPM) has carried out a humanitarian mission that focusing on unfortunate Muslims in Afghanistan, Kashmir, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Indonesia, Cambodia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Australia and Palestine (Ab Ghani, *et.al*., 2020). Among the activities under this notion are providing emergency aid, humanitarian assistance, schools development, *ibadah korban* (during Hajj month) and building orphanage houses.

These global advocacy to ABIM-GPM is considered as a big responsibility in helping the oppressed Muslims abroad thus the mission known as *Misi Keamanan Sejagat* (universal peaceful mission). Unlike GPM which its coverage is diverse, on the same mission in global advocacy, IKRAM has set up an NGO for a very specific cause. There are three NGOs for such cause; Aqsa Syarif (for Palestine issue), Salam Iraq (for Iraq issue) and Nusantara Islah Center of Excellence (NICE) (for South East Asian Muslim) (Malik, *et.al*., 2018). Providing similar aid and assistance in lessening the suffering and plight of Muslims ummah around the world, IKRAM has extended its outreach by embarking on activities at local level such as on awareness talks in schools, mosques, government agencies, offices and public places; engaging with mainstream media; training the volunteers; and sending local representative to join the mission (Malik, *et.al*., 2018). In tandem, it shows that ABIM and IKRAM were a recognized *Da'wah* NGO in Malaysia that consistently and committedly fought for unfortunate Muslims ummah whom experiences violence, suffering, oppressed, and injustice treatment by their own government. Such characteristics carried by ABIM and IKRAM undeniably presenting theme 1 and 2 of servant leadership from Islamic perspective and Van Dierendonck's.

Through observation and thematic analysis, it was found that both *Daʿwah* NGOs represented by ABIM and IKRAM are practicing mixed-servant leadership characteristics from Western (based on Van Dierendonck framework) and Islamic perspectives. What distinguishes them is the exhibit of Allah's existence as the highest motivation in their works, which does not exist in the Western understanding. Furthermore, the servant leadership characteristics borrowed from Islamic perspective and Van Dierendonck are a combination of motivational approaches (MA) and voluntary actions (VA) of the leaders and the followers. At the same time, the audiences or customers who for example subscribe to the programs are directly or indirectly affected and influenced by the servant leadership style, although they are not forced to do so.

**CONCLUSION**

Bringing forth clarity on a new field of NGOs management research such as servant leadership is the main aim of this article. Referring to diverse peer-reviewed empirical contributions such as books and book chapters by Greenleaf (1998, 2002), Spears (1995) and Van Dierendonck et.al (2009); dissertations by Laub (1999) and Patterson (2003); plus peer-reviewed articles from ranges of interest on servant leadership, these papers greatly influence the current thinking on the concept of servant leadership. Despite some confusing characteristics, to some extent it is very helpful in providing a different understanding on how such characteristics evolved and existed and thus can be complemented.

By focusing on the main reasoning underlying the theoretical models and on the empirical material available – Van Dierendonck's servant leadership characteristics and Islamic servant leadership characteristics– including the experiences of *Daʿwah* NGOs in Malaysia, it is argued that servant leadership is displayed by leaders who combine their motivation approaches (MA) and voluntary action (VA) to lead with a need to serve. This refers to the observation on ABIM and IKRAM experiences measurement through the lens of Islamic servant leadership characteristics and Van Dierendonk's servant leadership characteristics. Islamic principles and understanding for God-consciousness in developing *khayra ummah* are positioned alongside the motivational dimensions for both leaders and the employees as well as the community as it was the backbone to the establishment of ABIM and IKRAM as a leading *Daʿwah* NGOs in Malaysia. Therefore, servant leadership is evidently found and demonstrated by ABIM and IKRAM as has been simplified in combination of Islamic servant leadership characteristics and Van Dierendonk's servant leadership characteristics in their activities, programs and works.

In conclusion, this overview shows that servant leadership is an intriguing new field of study for management researchers. As suggested by Plato in The Republic, the

ultimate form of leadership is leadership that focuses on the good of the whole and those in it. This shows the dynamism of this field that is moving from being prescriptive to becoming descriptive based on empirical evidence. It is hoped that this article's findings will be instrumental to servant leadership literature that encourages and directs future research in Western and Islamic literature within the framework of religious NGO.

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