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Ibn Khaldun of North Africa: an AD 1377 theory of leadership

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper's purpose is to present the works of a North African early contributor to sociological theory, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), specifically pertaining to his conceptualization of leadership and the role of *asabiya* (group feeling) in leadership emergence.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reviews the *Muqadimmah*, (Prolegomena or the introduction), which contained his most important views of the issue.

Findings – The paper develops an early model of leadership as described by Ibn Khaldun. This research study presents a different understanding of leadership that has applicability in a different era and in a different culture. The paper summarizes Ibn Khaldun's views on human nature, how leadership emerges, and the role of group feeling or *asabiya* in leadership situations.

Practical implications – The paper presents some implications of Ibn Khaldun's work for understanding leadership dynamics in a non-western cultural context. It is suggested here that many of Ibn Khaldun's leadership propositions have particular significance for several non-Western societies especially in the Middle East and North Africa.

Originality/value – The paper argues, that leadership research could benefit from the contributions of Ibn Khaldun in developing models that take different cultures into perspective.

Keywords Leadership, North Africa, Islam

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In assessing the universality of modern leadership theories, it is acknowledged at the outset that some leadership perceptions and behaviors are universal. For example, after testing 62 cultures, Den Hartog *et al.* (1999) found that specific aspects of charismatic/transformational leadership were universally endorsed across cultures. Javidan and Carl (2004) assert that despite significant cultural variations between two distinctively different countries, there are major similarities in the leadership profiles across the two cultures. They conclude that despite some differences, many existing similarities can be attributed to a universal common set of values and preferences. On the other hand, other studies have indicated that there are significant differences among different cultures (House *et al.*, 1997). These studies seem to reflect a growing acceptance to the notion that Western management theories do not necessarily have a universal application. Yukl (1998), for example indicates that much of leadership research has been conducted in countries such as the USA, Canada and Western Europe reflecting a scarcity of studies conducted elsewhere.

Hofstede (1993) asserts that the validity of a theory is constrained by its national borders. He notes how the American culture has manifested itself in American management theories. He does indicate, however, that the roots of management theories came mainly from Europe with Adam Smith, Max Weber, Henri Fayol, Kurt Lewin and many others. This means that, such theories hardly reflect cultural factors outside these Western influences. Den Hartog *et al.* (1999) point out that

characteristics that are seen as prototypical for leaders may vary significantly form one culture to the other. Other studies have confirmed the fact that cross-cultural differences exist between leadership behaviors and styles preferred by followers (Smith and Peterson, 1988; Shahin and Wright, 2004). Likewise, House (1995) emphasizes the notion that virtually all commonly known leadership theories are based on research done in North America. Accordingly, the empirical evidence is mostly generated from individualistic – not collectivistic societies, based on assumptions that are not necessarily shared by many cultures (House, 1995; Den Hartog *et al.*, 1999).

Western leadership theory thus explains leadership and followership behaviors and interactions in individualistic urban societies. Western leadership understanding basically started as a psychological phenomenon that presented leadership from the perspective of specific psychological traits of the leader. Later conceptions also included the sociological aspect emphasizing the triple role of the leader, followers, and the situational context. There has been a growing perspective in leadership research and theory viewing leadership as a social phenomenon without neglecting the psychological dimension of the relationship. Figure 1 shows a model summarizing the modern current Western understanding of leadership (Gardner and Avolio, 1998; Pillai, 1995; Sidani, 1993). In this model, leadership is a function of the leader's traits and behaviors, followers' traits and attributions, and the situation/context. Organizational outcomes emerge including follower compliance with, and attachment to, the leader, and organizational performance.

Leader-member interchanges are exhibited in different societies all over the world which do not necessarily bear similar characteristics. Kenis (1977), for example notes some differences between American and Turkish leaders in terms of leadership styles and follower perceptions and preferences. Dorfman *et al.* (1997) note commonalities and differences in effective leadership processes across five different cultures. These can be explained – at least partially by the varying dominant cultural values. Katsiaficas (1999) explains the difficulty western scholars face when analyzing situations where the individual's place is foreshadowed by group ties and identities. He moves on to indicate that the dire effects of European individualism have been so great that there is a need to rethink categories of individual and group. Price (2005) contends that Western understanding of leadership reflects a cultural framework, that is primarily task oriented
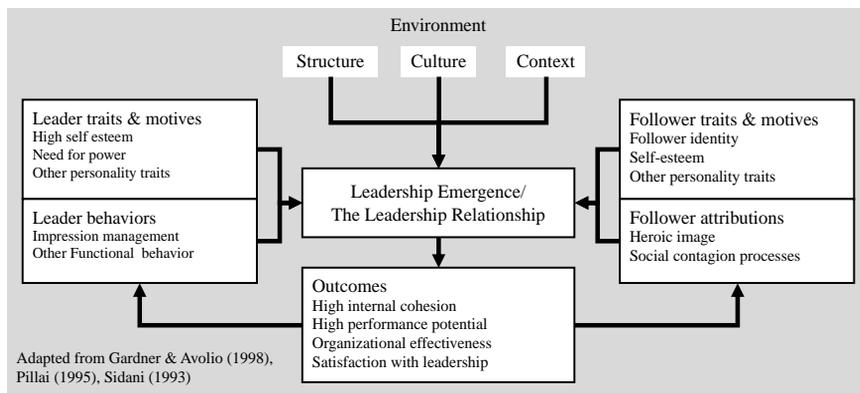

Figure 1.
Modern perspective
of leadership

and based on the unavoidability of a chain of command and control that is not necessarily shared elsewhere.

It becomes incumbent upon researchers to attempt to understand the determinants of leadership perceptions and behaviors in different cultures that do not follow the Western model. Western leadership theories have depended in their development on the contributions of several European and American theorists and researchers such as Max Weber and Henri Fayol, and more recently on the works of authors such as Bernard Bass and Robert House. Many other regions of the world seem to have not been able to come with proper explanations to leadership behaviors and perceptions that suit their cultures. While, Western leadership theories have benefited from the contributions of early European authors, this research study identifies an early contributor to sociological theory whose works have direct implications on our understanding of leadership in a different era and in a different culture. The place is North Africa and the contributor is Ibn Khaldun.

Ibn-Khaldun leadership theory
Who is Ibn-Khaldun?
Ibn Khaldun's legacy in the science of society continues to be overlooked by modern social science researchers although some scholars concede that he can be considered to be the founding father of scientific thought on the dynamics of human societies (Dhaoudi, 1990, p. 319; Alatas, 2006). Ibn Khaldun appeared at a time when the Islamic civilization reached its high point and started to decline and gradually fragment. He was born in Tunis (North Africa) in the year 1332. He descended from a prominent family that enjoyed exceptional political status. His life was characterized by significant (though mostly not successful) political undertaking and intellectual enterprising. At a certain point of great political disturbance that he faced, after being imprisoned for two years, he secluded himself in a fortress and started writing his version of the history of the world. He finished his most important book the *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena or the introduction) in the year 1377. In this book his formative ideas were advanced. After a life full of activity and intellectual endeavors and extensive traveling in North Africa, Spain, and the Middle East he died in the year 1406 and was buried outside Cairo.

Ibn Khaldun's contribution to the field of sociology
Ritzer and Goodman (2003) assert that by the time Ibn Khaldun died, he had produced a mass of work that had many ideas common with modern sociology. They note that while he did not have a dramatic impact on classical sociology, his contributions – as scholars have been rediscovering his work may prove to be of great significance. The famous historian Watt (1968) indicates that Ibn Khaldun has been acknowledged to be one of the first to develop a scientific study of the state and society. Long before August Comte's "invention" of sociology, Ibn Khaldun revealed his "science of culture" (Katsiaficas, 1997). Simon (1978) asserts that, he was the first to attempt to formulate social laws. Toynbee (1972, p. 321) asserts that Ibn Khaldun has "conceived and formulated a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever been created by any mind in any time or place." Despite the above acknowledgment of Ibn Khaldun's contributions, his works have been marginalized in contemporary sociology for a variety of reasons explained by Alatas (2006).

The *Muqaddimah*[1] is Ibn-Khaldun's most influential work. It is regarded as the first attempt by any historian to uncover a structure in the changes and developments impacting people's lives and their societies (Ibn Khaldun, 1974). Unlike other historical accounts, which merely reveal a chronology of events, the *Muqaddimah* offers an interpretation of historical events, a philosophy of history. The *Muqaddimah* offers an explanation of the structures of human relationships in relation to environment and history (Katsiaficas, 1999). Simon (1978, p. 11) indicates:

> ... the *Muqaddimah* is a scientific achievement of high rank. In spite of its many deficiencies, the *Muqaddimah*, in conception and exposition, by far surpasses everything that had been said about human culture until the time of Ibn Khaldun; and it is of equal rank with modern works that are concerned with similar problems.

The *Muqaddimah* included most of Ibn Khaldun's most renowned ideas and philosophical contributions. While it included lots of reference to historical events, economic sciences, education, and other fields, its sociological implications have been the subject of increased scrutiny and these comprise our area of interest in this paper.

Ibn-Khaldun's reference to leadership comes in context to his analysis of how societies develop. In writing about human societies, he explored reasons why people needed political leadership. While his ideas have predominantly emphasized political leadership in social entities, his conclusions can be extended to include leadership in varying organizational settings. In order to explore his leadership ideas, his views about the nature of human beings deserve special attention. Later we explore his views on the need for leadership, leader traits and leadership behaviors.

Nature of human beings
Although Ibn Khaldun is known for his analysis of human societies in which he distinguished between nomadic and sedentary societies, his ideas are more complicated and far reaching than mere explanation of nomad and sedentary behavior (Lacoste, 1984). As such the human being was a center piece in his analysis. Some statements in the *Muqaddimah* indicate that Ibn Khaldun had a negative view of human beings (Katsiaficas, 1997). He indicates for example that "as a rule [people] feel no desire for virtue and have no special interest in virtuous people" (p. 36)[2]. In other places, however, he asserts that man[3] is closer to the traits of virtue and any evil quality that he may acquire is based on the animal instincts found in him. Ibn Khaldun (1974, p. 355) hints to man's ability to develop and ascend: "the world of man is the most noble and exalted of the worlds of existent things."

Man is also distinguished from other living species through his perceptual ability. Many living species have the capability to perceive, that is, obtain consciousness of things that are outside their essence, through the external senses of hearing, vision, smell, taste, and touch. Yet only the human being is able to perceive things outside his essence through his ability to think, which is beyond his senses (p. 333). The ability to think has several levels. The first level is man's intellectual understanding which mainly consists of perceptions of the outside world. The second level is man's experimental intellect. This sort of thinking equips man with the ideas and behaviors needed in dealing with others and leading them. This level is comprised of apperceptions obtained through experience. The third level is called the speculative intellect which is the ability to think beyond sense perception without any practical activity going with it (p. 334).

Ibn-Khaldun further affirms that man is composed of two parts, one is corporeal and the other is spiritual. Each one of these two parts has its own perceptions although the spiritual part is the one that perceives in both cases. Sometimes, through its own essence, human nature perceives spiritual perceptions without any intermediary; at some other times, it perceives corporeal perceptions through intermediaries such as the brain and the senses.

Within such understanding of human nature, Ibn-Khaldun explained human organization, social structures, and leadership mechanisms as he understood them at the time. Ibn-Khaldun asserts that man is differentiated from other living beings due to his need to restraining influence and strong authority. Restraining influence refers to that force (such as political authority) that guides and controls people's behavior and prohibits them from following their animal-like tendencies. While some animal species exhibit forms of influence and authority and influence upon one another, it is only man that exercises such behaviors through thinking and reflection and through inspiration. In accomplishing this, man can only live through human social organization which is necessary for the existence of the human species.

Ibn Khaldun touches on what do people seek in their lives remotely resembling what Maslow later on explained in his theory of human motivation: "Man seeks first the bare necessities. Only after he has obtained the bare necessities does he get to comforts and luxuries." (p. 93) Despite his earlier apparently negative view about the human being, he presents in other passages of the *Muqaddimah* a different view. Man is more inclined toward good qualities than toward bad qualities and these good qualities are appropriate to political and royal authority. Ibn-Khaldun used his assessment of human nature and qualities of man to advance his understanding of societal relationship and leadership behavior in societies as will be explained later. This can be contrasted to McGregor's Theory X/Theory Y categorization which paved the way to modern understanding of organizational behavior.

Based on his understanding of human nature, Ibn-Khaldun concludes that human beings need a restraining influence. But because man cannot accomplish his ends individually, cooperation is needed toward accomplishing his ends: "Through cooperation, the needs of a number of persons, many times greater than their own number, can be satisfied." (p. 45). Ibn Khaldun (1974, p. 291) thus indicates cooperation cannot happen without a restraining influence which is embodied in the phenomenon of leadership. To him "leadership . . . is inevitable" and people, in varying degrees, have a readiness to accept leadership. That person acts as a mediator in every social entity to keep harmony among its members. Leadership cannot emerge without the adoption of *asabiya* or group feeling. *Asabiya* has been a central theme in Ibn Khaldun's work and accordingly a separate section below is dedicated to its discussion.

Asabiya
Many leaders fail, in Ibn Khaldun's opinion, because of their inability to understand the significance of *asabiya*. The original word in Arabic has several possible explanations (from *asaba*: to bind or *asab*: nerve). Likewise, its English translations have varied including "group feeling", "a sense of solidarity", "group loyalty" and "esprit de corps" (Rabi, 1967). Other translations are "patriotism" "national awareness" and "natural feeling" but such translations, according to Lacoste (1984), are faulty and too modern to be applied to the setting and context in which he wrote. Ibn Khaldun explains what

asabiya is and details its role in societal development. He also analyzes its importance in fostering leadership situations. *Asabiya* is mainly a bond of collective character between the human being and the social group to which he belongs (Dhaoudi, 1990).

Asabiya stems, in primitive cultures, from blood ties, alliances, and clientships, with blood ties having the most weight in fostering the leadership bond. Virtually all modern leadership theories would discount the role of blood ties in leader emergence in today's organizations. Such theories have limited application, from this perspective, to other cultures, especially those cultures described by Ibn Khaldun. One can only review recent organizational history in the Middle East and North Africa to see how much blood ties are instrumental in leadership emergence. In recently Middle Eastern societies, and probably other societies in other regions, leadership emergence is sometimes greatly aided by descent. This is the case in political situations and also in business organizations. Ibn Khaldun (1974, p. 98) notes:

> [Respect for] blood ties is something natural among men, with the rarest exceptions. It leads to affection for one's relations and blood relatives, [the feeling that] no harm ought to befall them nor any destruction come upon them.

In essence, Ibn Khaldun is recognizant of the fact that religious teachings are not welcoming of ties based on mere blood ties or *asabiya* used to exclude others. In early Islamic teachings, a negative connotation was given to the word *asabiya* with the attempts to resolve conflicts and wars among the different tribes and cultural groups in existence. Yet Ibn Khaldun explains that there is the good *asabiya* and the bad *asabiya*. The good *asabiya* refers to the group bond that leads to the fulfillment of communal goals while bad *asabiya* is the one that is used to divide and split people purely based on descent or tribal affiliation for unworthy purposes:

> ... when the religious law censures group feeling and says: 'Neither your blood relatives nor your children will be of use to you [on the Day of Resurrection]' [such a statement] is directed against a group feeling that is used for worthless purposes, ... On the other hand, a group feeling that is working for the truth and for fulfillment of the divine commands is something desirable ... (p. 161).

While *asabiya* is mostly found among people belonging to the same family or tribe, Ibn Khaldun stretches the concept to indicate that similar *asabiya* can be shared by people who are not related to each other by blood ties but by close contact (N.J. Dawood in Ibn Khaldun, 1974). Thus, he explicitly indicates that blood ties are not needed to develop a leader-follower relationship:

> ... between the two, there develops a special closeness of relationship which has the same effect [as common descent] and strengthens the close contact. Even though there is no [common] descent, the fruits of [common] descent are there (p. 148).

So despite the fact that he finds that blood ties greatly help in the development of the leadership situation, the leader and follower can develop the same impact through closeness of relationship.

Asabiya *and leadership*
Ibn Khaldun (1974, p. 101) explains the importance of *asabiya* to leadership:

> ... leadership exists only through superiority, and superiority only through group feeling. Leadership over people, therefore, must, of necessity, derive from a group feeling that is

superior to each individual group feeling. Each individual group feeling that becomes aware
of the superiority of the group feeling of the leader is ready to obey and follow him.

An individual may have several group feelings – *asabiyas* at the same time, for
example a group attachment towards the near family, the extended family, and the
large group or tribe. It is the skill and power of the leader that determines which
asabiya takes precedence thus annulling the other *asabiyas*. To Ibn Khaldun, *asabiya* is
necessary for mass activities. That is, a sense of group feeling should exist for any
leadership to emerge. *Asabiya* is more evident in tribal collective societies, but it can be
manifested in urban areas, albeit to a lesser degree. So important is *asabiya* to
Ibn Khaldun that he indicates that no real leadership and no authority can emerge
without it. When authority is established through *asabiya*, leadership develops into
legitimate/position power, and the role of *asabiya* slowly diminishes. As tribal societies
become more civilized and as tribal leaders become more like monarchs, *asabiya* loses
its significance to the extent that it is totally replaced.

Not only is *asabiya* needed for leader emergence and development, it is needed for
leader sustainability. As a certain society moves from a tribal structure into a
sedentary one, it typically witnesses a disintegration of *asabiya*. The ability of a leader
to gather support through group feeling weakens, and he can only sustain his power
through a drive to acquire royal authority or power derived from position:

> Leadership means being a chieftain, and the leader is obeyed, but he has no power to force
> others to accept his rulings. Royal authority means superiority and the power to rule by force.

In this regard Ibn Kahldun is describing how a leader sustains his power from being based
on group feeling and follower positive attachment, to one based on formal authority.

Ibn Khaldun notes that *asabiya* with the support of religion becomes the chief factor in
developing the leadership phenomenon. Such an observation is a good description of
leadership situations in many Middle Eastern societies. It is understood that modern
Western leadership understanding does not follow such logic. Yet countries of the Middle
East and North Africa, even in modern times, are replete with examples where religion and
asabiya intertwine to mold leadership situations. However, Ibn Khaldun asserts that
religion without group feeling cannot form the basis for leadership situations.

The concept of *asabiya* is very important in understanding how leadership in some
societies differs from Western societies. Lacoste (1984) explains how *asabiya* has been
playing an important role in North Africa among the different societies and tribes.
Leaders have been able to attract followers through their ability to bond the masses
together around the group bond. This has not been the case in Western Europe because
tribal structures ceased to exist and accordingly leadership had to be embodied in a
different manner there. So *asabiya* is the mechanism by which the leader attains great
power in such societies (Lacoste, 1984).

Traits and behaviors of leaders
Ibn-Khaldun also emphasizes the personal qualities of the leader. He calls those
qualities "perfecting details." While *asabiya* is needed for leadership to emerge,
"perfecting details" are needed to sustain leadership and institutionalize it. Such
qualities include generosity, forgiveness of error, patience and perseverance,
hospitality toward guests, maintenance of the indigent, patience in unpleasant
situations, execution of commitments, respect for the religious law, reverence for old

men and teachers, fairness, meekness, consideration to the needs of followers, adherence to the obligations of religious laws, and avoidance of deception and fraud.

Lest it is understood that leadership through *asabiya* means dictatorship, Ibn Khaldun emphasizes the role of consent of the followers. Good leadership, according to Ibn-Khaldun, requires kindness to, and protection of, subjects. He emphasizes the need of the leader to be mild to his followers and to gain their love. He notes, probably surprisingly, that a leader should not be too shrewd. This is the case because such a quality would distance him from his subjects.

Ibn Khaldun distinguishes between leadership and position/legal authority. He explains, in no uncertain terms that "the leader is obeyed, but he has no power to force others to accept his rulings. Royal [position/legal] authority means superiority and the power to rule by force." It is worth noting here that such ideas differentiating between leadership based on personal qualities and leadership based on legal authority have been advanced in modern leadership theory though these were never based on Ibn Khaldun's writings.

Ibn Khaldun asserts that man is a natural leader. In analyzing Bedouin societies, he explains how every Bedouin is eager to be the leader:

> Every Bedouin is eager to be the leader. There is scarcely one among them who would cede his power to another, even to his father, his brother, or the eldest member of his family (p. 119).

While individual Bedouins have high desires to become leaders, their tribal norms neutralize such desires and make them obedient to those people leading them. Such leaders typically share with their followers a blood line or other forms of group bond that ensures compliance. In addition, Bedouins know that their survival depends on their closely-knit ties and accordingly they subjugate their desires to the aims of the collective group or tribe. Ibn Khaldun's comments about the Bedouin mentality are interesting and have modern significance. The significance is due to the fact that many societies in the Middle East and North Africa still have strong Bedouin backgrounds and constituencies. This would help in understanding such societies and leadership dynamics that exist in such contexts:

> The Bedouins are of all nations the one most remote from royal leadership ... It is difficult for them to subordinate themselves to each other, ... Their leader needs them mostly for the group spirit ... He is, therefore, forced to rule them kindly and to avoid antagonizing them. Otherwise, he would have trouble with the group spirit, resulting in his undoing and their. Royal leadership and government, on the other hand, require the leader to exercise a restraining influence by force. If not, his leadership would not last. (p. 120).

Ibn Khaldun talks about two methods by which leaders ensure compliance. While the leader should use persuasion in dealing with his constituencies, some leaders whose leadership develops into legitimate authority may resort to force. Ibn Khaldun, however, is critical of the leader's use of non-persuasive mean as this will only lead to lack of trust and eventual decay of the organization. On the other hand, mildness and persuasion will lead to trust, mutual love and willingness to sacrifice, and organizational order and stability.

Post-leadership situations
Ibn Khaldun dedicates part of his analysis to explain his views about what happens in a post-leadership environment. A leader emerges and gets obedience initially, not by

virtue of a position or by force, but because of his ability to use the *asabiya* and his ability to "acquire praiseworthy qualities." It is natural however, for a leader to develop his relationship with followers in a manner whereby he reaches the positions of mulk or domination over his followers. In a political environment, Ibn Khaldun calls this royal authority although, in our modern understanding, we can define it to mean authority emanating from position or institutional position. Ibn Khaldun asserts that seeking such positions is natural to human beings because of its social implications. Ibn Khaldun (1974, p. 124) indicates that mulk or position authority is in fact a goal of group feeling:

> . . . once leadership is firmly vested in the members of the family qualified to exercise royal authority in the dynasty, and once [royal authority] has been passed on by inheritance over many generations and through successive dynasties, the beginnings arc forgotten, and the members of that family arc clearly marked as leaders. It has become a firmly established article of faith that one must be subservient and submissive to them. People will fight with them in their behalf, as they would fight for the articles of faith. By this time, [the rulers] will not need much group [feeling to maintain] their power. It is as if obedience to the government were a divinely revealed book that cannot be changed or opposed. [The rulers] maintain their hold over the government and their own dynasty with the help, then, either of clients and followers who grew up in the shadow and power of group feeling, or of tribal groups of a different descent who have become their client.

Ibn Khaldun explains what happens to leaders who develop into position holders. A leader, who was able to get acceptance and obedience because of *asabiya* and perfecting details (good qualities), or because of descent, becomes "too proud to let others share in his leadership and control or to let them participate in it, because the qualities of haughtiness and pride are innate-in animal nature." Thus, he develops the quality of egotism, innate in human beings. This leads to authoritarianism or dictatorships. After a while the leader loses his leadership as more followers start to become disobedient. Ibn Khaldun is not against royal authority or position authority. He indicates that sometimes a leader develops into a position holder and he continues to operate in a gracious manner. However, he seems to indicate that often this is not the case, and with position, tyranny and authoritarianism ensue which would ultimately be destructive to the institutions and to relations between the leaders and the led. Ibn Khaldun seems keen to note that destruction of organizations, and thus to leader-follower relations, is related to the gradual destruction of the *asabiya*, or the loss of the group bond that was responsible for the initial emergence of the leadership relationship.

Followership

It is quiet understood in modern leadership theory that most research studies have concentrated on leaders, their attributes, and their behaviors. Very few studies, and most are recent ones, have been dedicated to understanding traits and behaviors of followers, or followership. It is interesting to note that Ibn Khaldun devotes part of his analysis to describe followers. He explains, how they seek to develop, and explains their roles in the leadership situation. In his analysis of nomadic versus sendentary individuals, he alludes to the fact that people differ in their readiness to accept leaders and in the way they respond to their leaders depending on their social belonging. He asserts that it is harder for bedouins to follow each other except in the existence of

a strong *asabiya*. Developing this idea, one can conclude that a low-degree of social development is a barrier to followership according to Ibn Khaldun, unless a potential leader is able to raise among them a strong group bond.

Ibn Khaldun (1974, p. 116) explains how followers imitate their leader "because they see perfection in him, exactly as children imitate their parents, or students their teachers." What is more interesting, however, is how followers internalize their leader's group feeling or *asabiya*, even when they do not initially share in that feeling. When a group feeling is intensified or strengthened through common descent, a leadership situation emerges. Sometimes however, some followers may belong to a different descent, yet by virtue of following and continuously interacting with that leader, they internalize the group feeling "and take it on as if it were their own group feeling". (p. 103). As such, Ibn Khaldun (1974, p. 104) explains why people may be willing to follow a leader whose source of initial leadership is a group feeling that they do not initially share:

> The nobility of [a client] is, in a way, derived from the nobility of his masters, and his "house" is derived from what they have built. His own descent and birth do not help him. His glory is built upon his relationship as client to a particular dynasty, and upon his close contact with it as a follower and product of its education.

Implications of Ibn Khaldun's work

In trying to model Ibn Khaldun's leadership ideas, it should be noted that he was not a management theorist and he did not advance a comprehensive theory of management or leadership. Ibn Khaldun never embarked on writing a comprehensive theory about leadership, political or otherwise. His leadership ideas were put forward in the framework of analyzing nations, cultures, and social institutions, and advancing the reasons for their rise, superiority, an eventual decline. Within this context, Ibn Khaldun put forward his leadership ideas. If it is agreed that Ibn Khaldun cannot be termed a management theorist, it is still hard to describe exactly who Ibn Khaldun was. While some may term him an early sociologist, others give him titles ranging from "historian" to "philosopher." Irrespective of the designation that we give to Ibn Khaldun, what is important is to advance the notion that his encyclopedic work includes passages that are of modern relevance to modern students of leadership and management. Ibn Khaldun explains leadership emergence and development in a specific context: that is the collective nomadic society of his times and he traces its development towards becoming more sedentary. As such, Ibn Khaldun obviously does not explain all leadership situations. His depiction, however, presents an interesting portrayal of leader-follower relations at his times that have recent implications in some societies today. Arab societies are characterized by moves from nomadic structures into more sedentary ones as they are at different stages of such development. Accordingly, Ibn Khaldun's portrayal could potentially explain leader-follower relations in some existing non-western human societies and social entities that cannot be extensively explained by generic leadership theories.

Based on the above ideas, we present a pictorial representation of Ibn Khaldun's leadership conceptualization (Figure 2) and a comparison between modern leadership theory and Ibn Khaldun's leadership conceptions (Table I). Such an understanding is mostly sociological in nature although Ibn Kahldun addresses traits of followers and
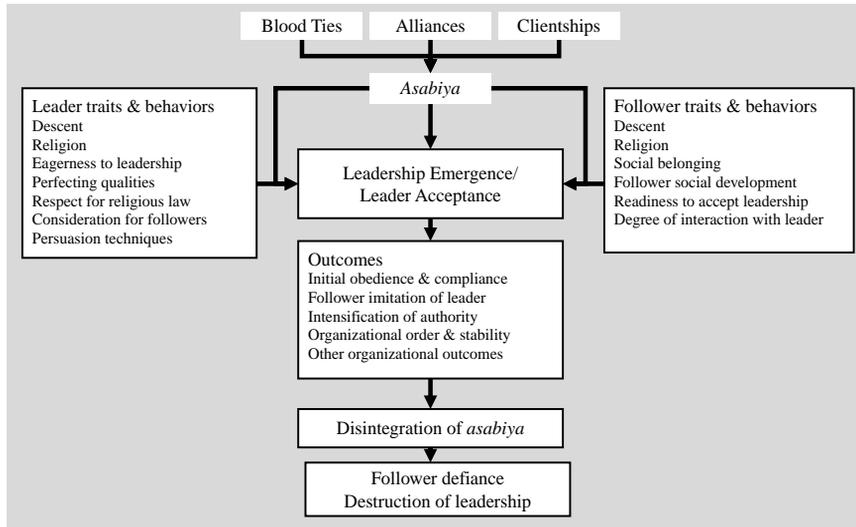
Figure 2.
Ibn Khaldun's perspective
of leadership

	Modern perspective	Ibn-Khaldun
Traits and behaviors of leaders	Personality traits such as: self-esteem need for power impression management behaviors other functional behaviors	Descent/religion eagerness to leadership perfecting qualities consideration for followers persuasion techniques
Traits and behaviors of followers	Personality traits such as: self-identity self-esteem follower attributions	Descent/religion follower social development degree of leader acceptance degree of interaction with leader
Other key factors	Contextual/environmental factors	*Asabiya*
Outcomes	High internal cohesion High performance potential organizational effectiveness satisfaction with leadership	Initial obedience/compliance follower imitation of leader intensification of authority organizational order/stability

Table I.
Modern leadership
perspective vs
Ibn-Khaldun

leaders, albeit to a much lesser degree. The leader is able through *asabiya* to gain follower attachment and compliance. In the long run, as the model indicates, leadership crumbles as *asabiya disintegrates* and follower defiance materializes. This model of leadership is obviously not universal despite the fact that Ibn Khaldun would have probably thought that his ideas applied to all societies at the time. This model however, may very well explain leadership relationships in some cultures, especially those found in North Africa and the Middle East. It also worth noting that not all factors need to exist at all times for the leadership relationship to emerge. It was explained earlier how a strong *asabiya* can lead to strong and productive leader-follower interaction even in situations of very low-social development. The power of *asabiya* in this case compensates for the lack of social development.

Lacoste (1984) argues that understanding the works of Ibn Khaldun should not be a mere exercise of medieval orientalism. That is, his works have a significance that extends beyond his times as such works can develop our understanding of the reasons behind many modern-day problems. Despite the fact that Ibn Khaldun wrote in a different era, his analysis can further our understanding of some potential causes of underdevelopment in the region in which he wrote and which he covered in his analysis. From a leadership theory point of view, part of his investigation can be used to understand why do leadership relationships in such regions follow a pattern that the modern-day scholar cannot explain or identify with. In addition, it is a challenging issue to try to use Ibn Khaldun's analysis to see whether current administrative shortcomings in this region (Middle East and North Africa) can be explained by Ibn Khaldun's propositions.

It is suggested here that many of Ibn Khaldun's leadership propositions have particular significance for several non Western societies. Earlier we noted how the Western leadership perspective applies better in individualistic societies. Concepts such as *asabiya*, group bond or group feeling, may prove to be more relevant in collectivist societies. The role of the group bond in developing leader-follower interactions is more significant in such societies. In addition, Ibn Khaldun addresses the role of religion and how it may interact with *asabiya* to strengthen leadership situations. Again, religion as a social force intertwining with political and organizational dynamics, is instrumental. Any managerial or administrative relationship in many Middle Eastern societies would be deficient if it ignores concepts of group feeling and the pervasive impact of religion on everyday life. In addition, Westerners operating in these societies, at the political or business fronts, would benefit from understanding such concepts as their relevance is becoming more evident today than ever before, especially after the recent wars and difficulties in the region.

Ibn Khaldun also allocates a good part of his *Muqaddimah* to discuss the nature of Bedouin versus more urbanized societies. His commentaries on such issues are relevant for those societies who till today have elements of Bedouin life and urbanized living entangled in an interesting and challenging manner. Managers and researchers through understanding the leadership dynamics in such settings can better implement organizational policies which fit the environment more than policies which do not necessarily take the particularities of the region into perspective. Revisiting understanding Ibn Khaldun's 1377 A.D. leadership ideas may prove to be the starting point of better understanding of leader-follower dynamics and accordingly more effective organizational behavior in a demanding and changing cultural environment.

Notes

1. All quotations of the *Muqaddimah* rely on the translation by Franz Rosenthal (Ibn Khaldun, 1974). The original Arabic text was also consulted to clarify concepts.

2. All Ibn Khaldun's quotations are extracted from Ibn Khaldun (1974) translated by Franz Rosenthal.

3. This paper uses the sexist word "man" to refer to "human being" because this is the term used by Ibn Khaldun and the term used by the translator of the *Muqaddimah*.

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