Chapter 3
A Critical Approach to Developing Culturally Relevant Leadership Curricula for Muslim Students

Eman S. ElKaleh

Abstract The secular and materialistic values imported to Muslim countries through globalisation and the uncritical application of Western models and theories are changing societies from being Muslim towards a materialistic and secular one where economic value is the most critical factor that drives people's behaviour and decisions. The real challenge for Muslim countries, then, is to develop and implement higher education curricula that reflect Islamic and cultural values while incorporating global knowledge developed by Western and other scholars. This chapter aims to achieve this balance by proposing a theoretical model that can be used for developing culturally relevant and critically reflective leadership curricula. The model is derived from Habermas' account of critical theory and offers a critical and holistic approach to leadership teaching. It adopts an intercultural and interdisciplinary approach to learning and aims to start a dialogue between Western and indigenous sources of knowledge. The model also proposes the content and teaching practices recommended by leadership scholars and leadership development literature internationally to provide students with a balanced and pluralistic learning experience that addresses both the spiritual and the intellectual aspects of knowledge.

Introduction

The main role of higher education worldwide traditionally was to maintain cultural values while providing students with valuable knowledge that enables them to reach their full potential and make remarkable contributions to their society. However, the increasing influence of neoliberalism and globalisation on higher education, with their greater emphasis on commercial values, private interests, and competition over moral and sacred values, has resulted in a shift of educational goals from being humanistic, where the focus is on students' intellectual, cultural, and moral development, to becoming socio-economic where the focus is on economic benefits, career

E. S. ElKaleh (✉)
Zayed University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
e-mail: eman.salah2@gmail.com

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advancement, and private interests (Cesari 2004; Donn and Al-Manthri 2010; Giroux 2002; Lipman 2011). This raises cultural security issues for Muslim nations and acts as a threat to Islamic and national identity mainly because the secular, commercial and materialistic values imported to Muslim countries through globalisation are contradictory to Islamic values that promote collectivism, dedication, self-denial and working for the well-being of society as a form of worship. Cultural security, as defined by Tehranian (2004, p. 7), is 'the freedom to negotiate one's identity'. However, this is not possible to achieve when one's cultural and religious values are excluded from higher education through the intensive use of Western knowledge and staff who are mostly secular oriented and use predominantly secular curricular material. Such a domination by Western knowledge and practices is changing societies from being Muslim, where Islam is a wholistic way of life, towards a materialistic and secular one where economic value is God.

A good example of how Western education can change one's soul and identity can be seen in Blanks' (1998) reflection on his teaching experience at the American University in Cairo. He noticed that the more his students were involved in liberal arts and Western education, the more they move away from their original identity as Egyptians. Eventually, he admits that globalisation, although driven by good intentions, is a form of cultural imperialism because 'there is something in the project that affirms Western values and undermines local cultural autonomy' (p. 5). Similarly, Adams (1958) concludes, from his teaching experience at the American University of Beirut, that the main problems that professors may face when teaching American curricula in foreign contexts are: a lack of knowledge and use of local traditions and practices; a lack of a common language and cultural heritage that hinder effective communication with students; and a natural antagonism of students to foreign curricula due to the textbooks that frequently refer to the American experiences which are of little help to foreign students who are not familiar with American life. This, according to Adams, runs the risk of imported curricula to be either misinterpreted or meaningless. He believes that for such knowledge to be meaningful to students, it must be linked to their own experiences. Stenberg (2004) also argues that Islam has an epistemology derived from the belief that God created the world and humans as his followers have the duty of studying it, and this is what makes seeking knowledge and science discovery a form of worship; therefore, Islamic principles and values cannot be left out of any curricula.

The real challenge for Muslim countries and higher education institutions, then, is to develop and implement a hybrid curriculum that reflects Islamic and cultural values while incorporating global knowledge established by Western and other scholars. This chapter attempts to achieve this balance by proposing a theoretical model that can be used for developing culturally relevant and critically reflective leadership curricula. This model may help higher education institutions in Muslim countries achieve their strategic goal of equipping students with the latest international knowledge that enables them to compete effectively in the global market without sacrificing or being alienated from their cultural and Islamic identity. The model adopts a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to knowledge and uses Habermas' (1971, 1984) account of critical theory as a theoretical foundation, focusing on his theories of knowledge

and human interests and communicative action in particular, due to its wide applications in higher and adult education (Brookfield 2005a; Murphy and Fleming 2010). The first section of the chapter discusses Habermas's work and how his account of critical theory offers a holistic and pluralistic approach to knowledge in which all sources and forms of information are regarded as complementary with equal importance and respect. The second section discusses how the planning and designing of the curriculum should be informed by a deep understanding of how people create knowledge through three cognitive interests: technical, practical, and emancipatory. The third section of the chapter discusses Habermas' theory of communicative action and how it contributes to developing people's communicative competencies. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the proposed theoretical model that can be used as a foundation for developing value oriented and culturally relevant leadership curricula and the author's own experience in using the model.

Habermas' Critical Theory

Critical theory is an intellectual tradition developed with an emancipatory and social justice goal by a group of scholars from the Institute of Social Research at University of Frankfurt. It was developed in response to the economic challenges, instability and the rise of Fascism that Germany was facing. Critical theory investigates social problems by combining a range of disciplines such as philosophy, social psychology, sociology, political economy and science (Murphy 2010). A critical theory for adult learning, according to Brookfield (2005b), will increase student awareness of social and political phenomena and help them challenge dominant ideology, power, and hegemony and reclaim reason by emphasising critical approaches to learning and deemphasising instrumental and technical learning. One distinction of the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas' work is that it combines philosophy with science to bridge the gap between theory and practice (values and facts). He is a strong advocator of the Enlightenment tradition and the modernity project to the extent that he has been called the theorist or philosopher of democracy (Brookfield 2005a; Fleming 2010). Habermas' account of critical theory offers a holistic and pluralistic approach to knowledge in which all sources and forms of information (Western vs. indigenous, objective vs. subjective) are regarded as complementary with equal importance and respect. He explains that scientific and practical knowledge are 'connected by the common form of critical enquiry' (1970, p. 10). His approach appreciates different perspectives and perceives diversity as an opportunity for developing a deep and comprehensive understanding of a certain phenomenon. Habermas' work has significantly contributed to our understanding of social change and social conflict. His work encourages us to challenge our own assumptions and make genuine efforts to understand other perspectives with tolerance and respect.

Habermas' (1970, 1987b) theories of knowledge and human interests and communicative action can provide a powerful framework for developing critically reflective curricula that leads to holistic learning experiences and positive social changes.

Englund (2010) argues that the implications of Habermas' work for education provide a solid framework for analysing the relationship between education and society. Adult education, according to Habermas (1970, 1987b), should help people realise their emancipatory cognitive interest in their professional and personal lives (see also Brookfield 2005a), and this, while achieved through the involvement of communicative action, may lead to significant positive changes in society. Habermas' (1970, 1979, 1987b) ideas have been of great influence in developing critical adult education discourses and in encouraging educators to critically reflect on their educational practices (Gouthro 2006). For example, Brookfield (2005b) points out that teaching from a critical theory perspective involves a social transformation intent. He believes that critical teaching is concerned with helping students realise their emancipatory cognitive interest, embrace self-criticism, and establish a more just, liberal, and ethical society. Critical teaching should also help in reclaiming reason by involving people in ideology and hegemony critique. Many authors like Brookfield (2005a), Endres (2006), Ewert (1991), Gouthro (2006), Heslep (2001), and Welton (1991) discuss the use of Habermas' theories in adult learning and adult education. Mezirow (1981) also developed his transformational learning theory based on Habermas' ideas. This chapter adds to this body of literature by using his theories of knowledge and human interests (1971, 2005) and communicative action (1984, 1987a, 2001) as a theoretical foundation for developing culturally relevant leadership curricula within a Muslim context. Following is a discussion of both theories.

Knowledge and Human Interests

Habermas' theory of knowledge and human interests (1971) has been frequently cited in adult and higher education literature. In this theory, Habermas suggests a model of three cognitive interests (technical, practical and emancipatory) that constitute how human knowledge is generated. According to Habermas (1971), the technical interest addresses the scientific aspect of knowledge and is concerned with the knowledge we need to predict, control and manipulate our environment. Such knowledge finds its roots in the empirical-analytic sciences where there is great emphasis on experimentation, hypothesis, and deduction and can be gained through empirical research, instrumental reasoning (finding the best techniques to achieve objectives), cognition (developing intellectual capacity) and skills. As discussed by Romanowski (2014), this interest assumes that science is neutral and objective. Therefore, human actions are informed by universal laws with less concern for the moral and ethical aspects of knowledge since decisions are based on empirical data rather than moral values.

The practical interest addresses the moral aspect of knowledge and is concerned with the knowledge we need to communicate with others in just and reasonable ways. This knowledge is rooted in the historical-hermeneutic 'sciences' and can be gained through interpretive research, moral reasoning, and ethical judgment. This approach does not aim to manipulate the environment but rather to understand and interpret social phenomena and to attain possible consensus among social actors. According

to this interest, ethical judgment and decisions are made through dialogue and discussion rather than proved rules or laws (Habermas 1971; Milley 2004; Romanowski 2014).

Finally, the emancipatory interest is concerned with the knowledge we need to free ourselves from domination and taken-for-granted assumptions. This knowledge is rooted in critical social sciences and can be gained through critical self-reflection that examines how past experiences may inform current ones (Butler 1997; Milley 2004; Romanowski 2014). According to Habermas (1971), 'In self-reflection knowledge for the sake of knowledge attains congruence with the interest in autonomy and responsibility. The emancipatory cognitive interest aims at the pursuit of reflection as such' (p. 314). Therefore, the emancipatory interest is considered to be the highest form of knowledge that higher education institutions and adult education programmes should aim for (Butler 1997; Habermas 1971).

As suggested by Brookfield (2001), a critical theory for adult education should start with understanding how people learn to free themselves from ideological manipulation. Understanding how people learn helps us make informed decisions when planning and designing curricula. A balanced educational programme is expected to address those three cognitive interests proposed by Habermas in order to create a balanced human experience that leads to social evolution. Habermas (1971) points out that modern societies put a great emphasis on developing the scientific and technical aspect of knowledge to accelerate their economic development, at the expense of moral and reflection aspects. This creates imbalanced learning experiences that eventually result in losing one's capacity for making moral choices and expressing oneself in an authentic manner (Milley 2004). Consequently, a good and balanced leadership curriculum would contain sophisticated scientific knowledge, moral and cultural values, and opportunities for self-reflection and self-discovery. Such a curriculum would provide a balanced learning experience leading to social evolution, as indicated by Habermas (1979). For Habermas (1984), social evolution means that people live in harmony despite their cultural and ideological differences (cultural rationalisation) where they work towards establishing productive economic and administrative systems (social modernisation).

Communicative Action

The theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984, 1987a, 2001) is another important theory that has been extensively cited and used in adult education (e.g. Brookfield 2005a; Gouthro 2006; Milley 2004; Murphy and Fleming 2010) as it provides a comprehensive framework for developing critical and participatory approaches to learning (Gouthro 2006). For Habermas (1984), communicative action is the action or activity taken by two or more individuals to reach mutual understanding or agreement that leads to consensual decisions. He believes that mutual understanding lies at the heart of human speech. According to him, 'reaching mutual understanding is the inherent telos of human speech' (p. 287) and this understanding allows people to

enjoy 'the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accordance with one another' (1979, p. 3). He further explains that for communicative action to happen, three validity claims have to be satisfied: 'communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified' (1979, p. 3). Validity claims are the assumptions people make about the truth and sincerity of speech. The three validity claims identified by Habermas are: truth as the 'obligation to provide certain grounds'; rightness as the 'obligation to provide justification'; and truthfulness as the 'obligation to provide trustworthy' (1979, p. 65). Habermas argues that when people engage in conversation, they learn to assess those validity claims. Therefore, dialogic teaching and collective creation of knowledge should be central pedagogical practices in adult learning.

Habermas (1970) asserts that universities have a moral responsibility to bring back to 'consciousness, through reflection, the relation of living generations to active cultural traditions' (p. 9). For him, the main mission of higher education is to help learners develop the critical reasoning and communicative competency required for democracy (Fleming 2010). Habermas (1984) also argues that capitalism distorted learning to reason because it gives priority to instrumental rationality at the expense of communicative rationality by emphasising market values over socialisation and cultural reproduction. He also argues that capitalism invaded the lifeworld and contributed to the collapse of the public sphere. The public sphere is the common area where people gather to discuss their issues, problems or concerns (e.g. *Majlis* in Arab Muslim countries) while lifeworld is the basic assumptions and beliefs that frame our understanding and interpretation of the world (e.g. moral and cultural values). In Habermas' (1987a) view, lifeworld 'forms a horizon and at the same time offers a store of things taken for granted' (p. 298). As capitalism encourages self-interest and pursuing private goals with little consideration of how this would affect others, a colonisation of lifeworld by system took place through the great emphasis on money, power, and technical rationality (which what globalisation is doing in Muslim countries). As people become involved in communicative action, lifeworld is recreated and renewed. Thus, he argues that colonisation processes of lifeworld can be resisted through the re-cultivation of ethical, democratic and caring values in system (Habermas 1987a; Murphy and Fleming 2010), which can be achieved through the practice of communicative action. According to Gouthro (2006), communicative action offers a mechanism for developing critical and participatory approaches to learning, which can take place in higher education.

Habermas (1984) also points out that when people communicate, new meanings and concepts emerge leading to change in perspectives and the creation of new ideas. Thus, communicative action serves as a medium for reproducing lifeworld (p. 337). He argues that we should think of societies as a combination of systems and lifeworlds. Colonisation of lifeworld by administrative and economic systems takes place when instrumental and strategic communication (technical rationality) take

priority over communicative action (communicative rationality). Therefore, when people develop their rational communicative competences through communicative action, they will be able to disrupt the repressive structures of system (Gouthro 2006; Habermas 1987a). He also argues that colonisation processes of lifeworld can be resisted through the re-cultivation of ethical, democratic and caring values in the system (Murphy and Fleming 2010). This colonisation of lifeworld is currently taking place through the neoliberalisation and commodification of higher education where knowledge is being treated as a commodity or service for those who can afford it rather than a developmental process that enriches one's life (Gibbs 2010). Neoliberalism was identified by Giroux (2002) as the most dangerous ideology of our time because it promotes market and commercial values over sacred and social justice values leading to 'self-interested individuals' (p. 425). Consequently, Habermas (1987b) argues that universities should foster discourse and communicative action as higher education is an important context for developing people's communicative competences and ethical values that help them achieve progressive social evolution (Milley 2004). Habermas' theory is more concerned with undistorted communication through which equality, willing to accept better arguments, and free dialogue are needed more than transparent communication.

Morrow (2010) argues that Habermas' theory of communicative action provides a reasonable and practical framework that distinguishes between strategic and rational communication and allows for dialogical negotiation between indigenous knowledge and technical rationality embedded in Western science. Also, Habermas' theory offers an ethical and just form of discourse that recognises diverse and different forms of life allowing it to transcend gender differences and cultural differences. Similarly, Gouthro (2006) claims that Habermas' account provides a comprehensive and proactive analytical approach that should inform critical discourses in adult education. Furthermore, Habermas' account of critical theory is congruent with Islamic principles and practices, which make it very applicable at Muslim countries. For example, *Shura* (consultation) is a form of communicative action as both aim to achieve mutual understanding and consensual decisions. New ideas and knowledge are produced through the practice of both *Shura* and communicative action as both processes lead to higher levels of critical thinking. Khalifa Omar Ibn Abdul Aziz has argued that 'Both the ability to consult and debate leads to enlightenment and are the keys to intellectual clarity' (in Ali 2005, p. 118). Therefore, Habermas' work provides an excellent framework for developing culturally relevant curricula that offer balanced learning experiences between Western and indigenous knowledge and materialistic and moral values, and this balance is realised through critical thinking and self-reflection of what works best in certain societies or cultures. These values and practices are inherent to the Islamic intellectual tradition, found in the work of great scholars like Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd.

A Critical Theory Model for Developing Culturally Relevant Curricula

The model proposed below in Fig. (3.1) offers a critical approach to leadership education and aims to serve as a foundation for developing culturally relevant and critically reflective leadership curricula. It is based on Habermas' theories of communicative action and knowledge and human interest and aims to look for content and teaching practices that broaden 'the meaning of learning beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills' (Petriglieri et al. 2011, p. 446). The model adopts an intercultural and interdisciplinary perspective and attempts to start a dialogue between Western and indigenous sources of knowledge to show how different perspectives may interact to deepen our understanding of social phenomena including educational administration and leadership. As Brookfield (2005a) points out, teaching from a critical theory perspective is not only about how we teach but also about what we teach. Therefore, the model was designed to propose the content and teaching practices that are recommended by leadership scholars and leadership development literature worldwide. For example, Hotho and Dowling (2010) argue that leadership development programmes should move away from emphasising the technical aspect of knowledge and provide more opportunities for interaction and critical discourses. The model, through its four dimensions, addresses this point and aims to provide students with a balanced and pluralistic learning experience that includes the universal and the particular, the feeling and the intellect, the spiritual and material needs of human being (Nash and Scott 2009). As shown in Fig. (3.1), the first three sections of the model address the technical, practical and emancipatory aspects of knowledge as identified by Habermas' (1971) while the fourth refers to the practice of communicative action (Habermas 1984, 1987a) through which students develop their communicative competency and fully realise the emancipatory interest. The technical dimension of the model includes the scientific knowledge of leadership such as the most dominant theories and models from global, indigenous, and Islamic/religious perspectives, current research on leadership, emotional intelligence, motivation, effective communication and conflict resolution. This aspect should allow students develop a solid and universal understanding of leadership literature.

The practical part deals with the moral and practical or applied aspects of knowledge by discussing the ethics of leadership, selecting topics from history and philosophy and discussing how they would benefit students as leaders, conducting interpretive research to understand effective leadership practices in their country, inviting business and educational leaders as guest lectures to speak about their experiences, inviting Muslim scholars to speak about leadership from an Islamic perspective, and conducting community service projects through which students can develop their leadership skills and experience the value of living for higher goals. This section follows scholars' recommendations to complement head learning with 'heart' learning. According to Nash and Scott (2009) and Samier (2009), leadership is an interdisciplinary field that is strongly connected to psychology, philosophy, history, literature, art, and religion studies. Those subjects foster heart learning more than head learning

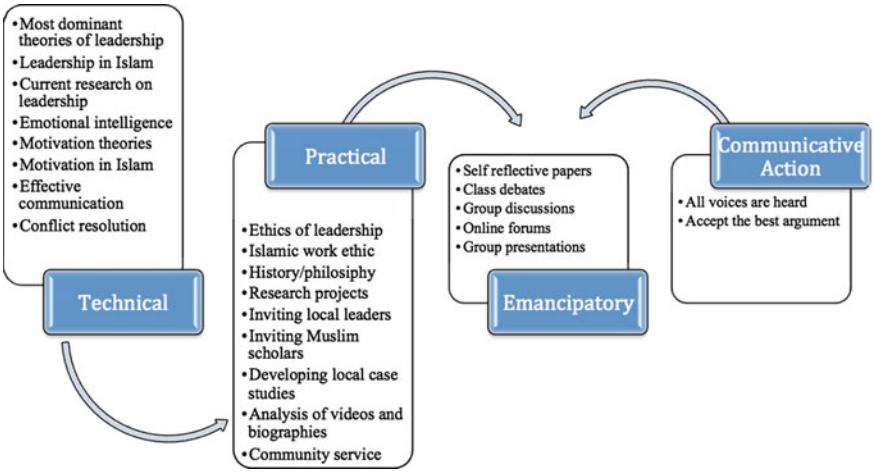

Fig. 3.1 A critical theory model for developing culturally relevant curricula

(Nash and Scott 2009), which is essential for developing a holistic learning experience and more complete leadership. Small (2004) also argues that teaching philosophy in leadership programmes develops students' critical thinking capacity which allows them to deal with uncertain situations, rapid changes, and the increasing challenges in the workplace. It also helps them find innovative and creative solutions to work problems. Similarly, Olivares (2011) argues that the use of autobiographies in leadership programmes informs student behaviour for a long time because they include personal memories and momentous events that are specific, detailed, and emotionally charged. He also believes that reflecting on those historical events, which has been addressed in the third and fourth dimensions of the model, will allow students to make sense of themselves and others because the inferences we make from real-life experiences are influenced by the assumptions, images, and stories we have in mind about ourselves and others (Petriglieri et al. 2011). Reflection and critical teaching techniques help students draw meaning from past and current experiences and become more conscious of those assumptions and images.

The third dimension of the model represents the emancipatory interest, which can be realised through reflective and critical thinking of the knowledge and information obtained by the technical and practical aspects as well as the practice of communicative action. Activities such as class debates, role-play, simulations, group discussions, online forums, group presentation, and reflective writing that includes students' life stories will help students question assumptions and think of their own leadership strategies. According to Reynolds (1999), critical reflection techniques help students question the taken-for-granted assumptions and raise moral questions about the ends as well as the means. This can be realised through the use of literature, role-play, simulations, and experiential learning. Finally, the practice of communicative action, which is the fourth dimension of the model, will develop student communicative com-

petences, help them to be open to new ideas and practices, and help them realise the emancipatory interest 'by steering the discussion toward the meaning making that underpins leaders' decisions and actions' (Petriglieri et al. 2011, p. 446).

Since the model aims to start a dialogue between different sources of knowledge and to select the practices that work best in a certain society given its unique cultural and religious values, it can also be used as a theoretical framework in Muslim and other countries worldwide to develop culturally relevant and critically reflective curricula that incorporate indigenous and Western perspectives of leadership.

Author's Own Experience in Using the Model

In Spring 2015, I was asked to teach two business leadership classes for 4th-year undergraduate male students at one of the United Arab Emirate's (UAE) higher education institutions. It was a great opportunity to test the model since I had the freedom to design the course content and to select materials that would support this design as long as they achieve the course outcomes required in the course common syllabus. The design of the model allowed me to combine Western models and theories of leadership with indigenous and Islamic perspectives. Under the technical aspect, I used Northouse (2013) and Zehndorfer (2014) as the core textbooks in addition to articles that address leadership from an Islamic perspective such as Ali (2009), Beekun (2012) and ElKaleh and Samier (2013). Also, during class discussions and presentations, I summarised the work of Ibn Khaldun (1967) and Ibn Taymiyyah (2005) on the Islamic perspective of leadership. Those teaching materials included the dominant theories of leadership from Western and Islamic perspectives and discussed other topics that are related to leadership development such as emotional intelligence, motivation, giving feedback, effective communication, and conflict resolution. Under the practical aspect, I used articles that discuss the ethical and moral values of leadership such as Abeng (1997), Ali and Al-Owaihan (2008), and Beekun and Badawi (2005). Also, to incorporate the current and indigenous practices of leadership, I invited an Emirati leader to speak about her leadership experience and the leadership challenges Emirati leaders may go through. Students enjoyed this activity a lot because they had the opportunity to interview a local leader and to analyse her leadership style based on the theories we discussed in class.

Course assignments were also designed to facilitate more learning about leadership in the UAE and Islam. I asked students to select one of these options: create a short video (8–10 min) on a work or leadership issue/problem (e.g. lack of motivation, coming late to work, ineffective use of resources) and how leadership can contribute to solving this problem; select a Muslim leader and analyse his/her leadership behaviours based on the theories and concepts discussed in class; or interview two or three leaders and analyse what effective leadership means to them and compare this with class theories and concepts. This assignment was group work where each group had to prepare a presentation and to write a research paper on their project. Most students selected Muslim leaders such as the Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr,

and Sheikh Zayed to write about. This assignment actually helped them to realise the practical and emancipatory aspects of knowledge by interpreting leaders' behaviours, linking them to class concepts and reflecting on what lessons they have learned from them. Also, a few of the students (7 out of 42) were working and that helped in bringing real cases to class discussions and to compare between current and past practices of leadership.

Since the students and I agreed from the beginning to practice leadership, rather than learning about leadership, students were expected to behave as leaders who act as responsible professionals, contributing effectively to class discussions, respecting other opinions and being open to learning from others. We also agreed to practice *Shura* (consultation) since it is central to leadership in Islam. Following the principles of *Shura*, I discussed with them the course outline, listened to their ideas and tried to accommodate their requests. Throughout the course, students were actively contributing to course content by suggesting new ideas and/or topics. The significance of listening to students' ideas and trying to accommodate their requests is that they had ownership in the course, and they were happy that their voices were being heard as long as they had good arguments to support their points and adhered to the basic requirements of the course and sound principles for quality and type of readings and work at the expected senior university level. Throughout the course, I also realised that students became more motivated and participative when we either worked on one of their ideas or discussed a local video or work issue in class. Being bilingual has been a privilege because I can watch and analyse videos of local leaders with them (however, other instructors may find these videos with English subtitles or ask for budget to get them translated). At the end of the course, students were grateful for being treated as professional leaders and for their ideas and opinions being listened to, which was a good opportunity to discuss that this is what leaders do, they involve followers, listen to their ideas, and act on them.

Community service was another important practice to use in helping students build their leadership skills and experience the value of serving and living for higher goals. We organised an open day for high school students in order to introduce them to university life. Most of leadership class students participated in this day where they talked to high school students about their own experiences and took them on tours around the campus. In reflecting on this activity, one of the students said, 'it was a great experience, I felt that I can make a difference and add value to their future. When I was a high school student nobody did that with me so I did many mistakes'. Other students were happy with this leadership experience and recognised how good leadership, even on a simple level, can really make a difference.

The third and fourth aspects of the model allowed me to use interactive and critical teaching techniques that help students think critically of the leadership concepts and what they mean to them as leaders. Using interactive methods such as class debates, role-play, and simulations keep students motivated and help them think critically about the different approaches to leadership and select the ones that work best in their local environment. While students sometimes resist any ideas that contradict their own views, I found that using critical and reflective practices broadens their minds and helps them be more open to new ideas and become more tolerant to contradictory

perspectives. For example, at the beginning of the course we conducted a debate on whether leaders are born or made. Before the class, I asked them to read broadly about the topic and come prepared to defend both perspectives. In the beginning, they were very resistant to this proposal. They believed that they should stick to only one perspective, which they believe is the right one. I asked them to try it just for fun and promised that they would enjoy the experience. On the debate day, they came motivated and excited. They were less concerned about which perspective was right and more concerned to win the debate. We divided the class into two groups, and each selected a leader to represent them. Then, we conducted a draw based upon which the winning group selected the perspective they wanted to defend. I gave them a few minutes to work together as a group to organise their ideas before starting the debate. In the beginning, they were not sure how to do it and they were not listening to each other with many students speaking at the same time. However, by the end of the first session they learned gradually how to defend their ideas and how to listen to others and respond to them.

In the second half of the class, we switched group roles—the group that was defending the leaders are born argument had to defend the position that they are made. This is the part of the activity that some students found very challenging. However, one group did a very impressive job in bringing evidence from research that supports ideas from both perspectives. Since they provided good justifications for each view, students learned a lot from their arguments and became more open to new ideas. After the debate, we spent some time reflecting on this experience. Some students pointed out that they had learned how to defend their ideas and bring evidence to support their views. Others believed that this activity helped them to realise that their views are not always right and that they should listen to others because they may have a more valid point. While this activity helped in increasing student motivation, curiosity, and interest in the topic, it also helped them to be more open and flexible in learning from each other. Furthermore, it resulted in more trust and harmony within the group. In each following class, students used to ask me whether leaders are born or made and my response was that 'this is what we are going to discover throughout the semester'. The debate actually sets the ground for an ongoing research journey and created a context and purpose to course readings and critique. Also, the class sizes (17 and 25) were suitable for effective application of the model because it allowed for communicative action and reflection to take place.

Finally, reflective writing that includes student stories and life experiences allowed them to analyse their own style of leadership and to think of themselves as leaders and how this learning experience may inform their current and future behaviour. Throughout the course, students were involved in different reflective writing assignments, in addition to the final exam where they were asked to develop their own approach to leadership using all the knowledge they gained from this class. That is, an approach that they believe would work well in UAE business organisations. That exam helped them think critically about the leadership concepts we discussed throughout the semester and how to combine the most useful ideas into one theory. Students' answers really impressed me. Most of them discussed very important and critical leadership issues in their theories. They were able to process and combine

different sources of information to create their own approaches to leadership. In their final comments on the course, many mentioned that this was one of the best courses they had in the university since it was about them and allowed them to think and act as leaders.

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Eman S. ElKaleh studied her MBA at the University of Wollongong followed by a Ph.D. in Management, Leadership and Policy at the British University in Dubai in association with Birmingham University, UK. She received an Academic Excellence Award by Dubai International Academic City for her dissertation entitled 'Teaching Leadership in UAE Business and Education Programs: A Habermasean Analysis within an Islamic Context'. While she hails from Egypt, she has worked in the UAE at two major universities for nearly twenty years. Currently, she teaches business leadership at Zayed University's College of Business in addition to overseeing the Admission and Recruitment Unit. Understanding the need to develop leadership capacity in Gulf-Region countries, she is actively developing programmes and workshops to help Muslim students as well as the faculty and staff with whom they interact gain a better understanding of leadership from an Islamic perspective. She has given guest lectures on Islamic leadership at a number of universities abroad such as University of Oxford Brookes, UK, the Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany, Qatar University and at the British University and Zayed University in the UAE. She was selected to serve as the Chair of Professional Development in the MENASA NASPA Advisory Board. She is also participating in a number of international research projects in leadership studies. She also has a solid experience in reviewing research studies and serves as a reviewer for a number of international and national peer-reviewed conferences and research awards. Tasked with developing a comprehensive programme for student success, she was recognised for her innovation in 2012 by receiving Zayed University's highest honour at a university-wide ceremony.