

## Fethullah Gülen as a servant leader

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### INTRODUCTION

The leadership literature often enumerates different leadership types and qualities.<sup>184</sup> This article aims to examining servant leadership using an empirical example with a coherent theoretical basis. It centres on Fethullah Gülen, the initiator of a worldwide Islamic social movement. Gülen is of Turkish origin but has lived in the United States since 1999 because of the repressive political atmosphere of Turkey and due to some personal health problems. Ali Bulac defines him as a harmonizing leader and an intellectual-scholar (*ulama*) focussing on social reforms and mentality change.<sup>185</sup> The movement inspired by Gülen emerged in the late 1960s as a local group around Izmir, an Aegean city in Turkey. In the mid-1980s, it led to the establishment of educational institutions and spread to other parts of Turkey. As it spread geographically, it transformed from a local group into a nationwide social movement. In the 1990s, the Gülen movement experienced its second transformation. It changed from a national social movement into a transnational one by opening institutions internationally and gathering followers from various nationalities.<sup>186</sup> It is interesting to analyse the role of his leadership in the transformation process and the extension of his community. This article attempts to give an answer on the following question: which characteristics and dynamics, behind Fethullah Gülen leadership style, play a part in the spread and success of his movement? An exhaustive analysis of his leadership can give new insights into accomplished leadership approaches. Furthermore, this analysis can help to understand Gülen's philosophical and theological anthropology and his views on the human condition.

In this article we discuss the concept of leadership in Islam in general, and the leadership pattern of Fethullah Gülen in particular. First, we will provide a brief chronological biography of Gülen and the faith-based movement inspired by him to provide a global picture about his leadership style. Second, we will analyse his views and practices on leadership, with an emphasis on both his formative and determinant

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<sup>184</sup> Peter G. Northouse. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*; Gürkan Celik. *Stapsgewijs naar een Nieuwe cultuur en leiderschapsstijl [Step by Step Towards a New Culture and Leadership Style]*. European Centre for Servant Leadership: The Netherlands, 2002.

<sup>185</sup> Ali Bulac. Fethullah Gülen: An intellectual and religious profile. Paper presented during the conference, entitled Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice. November 12-13, 2005, Rice University, Houston, TX.

<sup>186</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru. Globalization and Diversification of Islamic Movements: Three Turkish Cases. *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 120, nr. 2, 2005.

leadership characteristics. In seeking to address the aforementioned topics we will take servant leadership concept as our main context where appropriate references will be made to the various dimensions of Gülen's leadership. To analyse his leadership approach a systematic review of speeches and relevant written works on and by Gülen was carried out. Additionally, a number of in-depth interviews held with Gülen experts<sup>187</sup> and students will be cited in order to gain additional insights into his leadership style. In our analysis of his leadership, we used not only direct quotations and writings of Gülen but also examine his actions and deeds in order to provide a well rounded picture of his leadership qualities.

## THE GÜLEN-INSPIRED MOVEMENT

Gülen was born in 1941<sup>188</sup> in Erzurum, eastern Turkey, just twenty-odd years after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. The war for Independence, transition from one regime to another, the Second World War and global phenomena of modernity versus religion had all taken its toll on Turkey and its newly emerging citizens. It is within this context that Gülen grew up and experienced the difficulty, degradation and poverty of his people. Education was sporadic, materialism most-rife and civic-consideration replaced by egocentrism. Seeing all this Gülen embarked on his humble, sincere and life-long journey to make a difference through promoting education, economic activism and a re-reading and understanding of religious texts to evoke voluntarism, worldly ascetics and a type of universalism that kept local values and customs alive.<sup>189</sup>

Fethullah Gülen has been confirmed to be and admired as a Muslim initiator and an intellectual leader who inspired a series of social and educational activities to develop a new sense of religiosity in touch with modern realities.<sup>190</sup> He is also known for his contributions to world peace through his dialogue activities and educational efforts around the globe.<sup>191</sup> In his interviews, talks and writings Gülen

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<sup>187</sup> Experts are people who are knowledgeable on Gülen en his movement, e.g., his students, several journalists, scientists.

<sup>188</sup> As appears in official records.

<sup>189</sup> Ali Ünal. *M. Fethullah Gülen. Bir Portre Denemesi*. Nil: Istanbul, 2002; [www.fgulen.org](http://www.fgulen.org). Official internet site of Fethullah Gülen.

<sup>190</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz & John L. Esposito (eds). *Turkish Islam and The Secular State. The Gülen Movement*. Syracuse University Press: New York, 2003; This view is also held by leading journalists, academics, TV personalities, politicians, and Turkish and foreign state authorities.

<sup>191</sup> The Romanian commission of UNESCO has presented Fethullah Gülen with an award for his contributions to tolerance and dialogue and for his efforts toward cooperation and peace between the nations of the world. [www.fgulen.com](http://www.fgulen.com), 10.26.2005; *Advocate of Dialogue: Fethullah Gülen*. Compiled

continuously and argumentatively underlined the importance of understanding, education, dialogue and tolerance, in addition to moral and spiritual values.<sup>192</sup> People know him as an advocate for tolerance and dialogue; a man of extraordinary proportions; a scholar with a profound appreciation for Islamic sciences and contemporary-modern thought; and a passionate activist.<sup>193</sup> He obtained his license to preach in 1959 at the age of eighteen and from then on began giving sermons at mosques, speeches at conferences and talks at public-coffee-houses in his native country. His ideal and objective was to cultivate the perfect individual who would combine spirituality with intellect, reason with revelation and mind with heart. He wanted the new generation of Turks to have sound faith; motivational-love; a balanced perception of science; a new and a re-evaluated view of the human condition. This goal was to promote free thinking and respect for freedom of thought where collective consciousness was combined with a multi-dimensional and mathematical logic and appreciation of art. Nevval Sevindi regards Gülen as an Islamic leader who puts the human and his or her spiritual and personal development at the centre of everything.<sup>194</sup> Gülen's particular purpose was and still is to urge a younger, 'golden generation' to harmonize intellectuality with wise spirituality and caring, humane activism. He developed a certain vision of an individual who can solve the problems of humanity.<sup>195</sup>

Forty-five years after beginning his movement his personal efforts have borne amazing results. His followers now constitute one of the largest faith-and-dialogue-based-movements in the world and have evolved into a dense web of trans-national charitable networks.<sup>196</sup> In Turkey, this movement has successfully established hundreds of schools and colleges; organized businessmen and entrepreneurs around a common platform; and set-up Turkey's largest daily newspaper (*Zaman*), a TV channel (Samanyolu) and a number of periodical magazines (e.g. *Sizinti*, *The Fountain*, *Yeni Umit*, *Yagmur*). Internationally, this movement has extended its network of educational and media efforts to all parts of

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by Ali Unal & Anphorse Williams, Fairfax VA 2000; Toktamis Ates, Elser Karakas & Ilker Ortayli. *Baris Köprüleri: Dünyada Açılan Türk Okullari*. Istanbul.

<sup>192</sup> *The Muslim World: Special Issue*. Special Issue. Islam in Contemporary Turkey: The Contributions of Fethullah Gülen. Juli 2005, vol.95, Issue 3, pp.325-471. M. Enes Ergene, *Gülen Hareketinin Analizi: Geleceğin Modern Çağda Tanıklığı [Analysis of Gülen Movement: the testimony of future to modern age]*. New Academy Publishing: Istanbul 2005; The draft papers in the volume of the conference "*Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, Rice University, Houston, Texas, 11-13 November 2005.

<sup>193</sup> Nevval Sevindi, *Fethullah Gülen ile Global Hosgörü ve New York Sohbeti*. Istanbul 2002. p.7-9 and 181-193.

<sup>194</sup> Nevval Sevindi, idem, p.9; Nuriye Akman, *Gurbette Fethullah Gülen*. Istanbul 2004.

<sup>195</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen. *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism. Emerald Hills of the Heart*. Vol.1, The Fountain. Rutherford, New Jersey. 2004.

<sup>196</sup> Bekim Agai. *Zwischen Netzwerk und Diskurs: Das Bildungsnetzwerk um Fethullah Gülen (geb. 1938): Die flexible Umsetzung modernen islamischen Gedankenguts*, Schenefeld 2004.

the globe. Gülen frequently emphasizes that his own position is more like an inspirational and guiding thinker rather than the formal leader of a social movement. While crossing borders, this movement has been engaged in promoting and advancing inter-communal, intercultural and interfaith dialogue between all segments of society. This movement, which evolved around the ideas of the charismatic figure of Fethullah Gülen, provides an example of a renewal with the potential to impact the relationship between modernity and spirituality in the Muslim world.<sup>197</sup>

## LEADERSHIP FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Leadership in Islam is based on trust and emphasizes sincerity, integrity and compassion. It is thought of as a psychological contract between a leader and his or her followers guaranteeing that he or she will try his or her best to guide them, to protect them, and to treat them justly. Leadership in Islam is rooted in belief and willing submission to the Creator. It centres on serving Him. This means that a Muslim leader acts in accordance with the injunctions of the Creator and His Prophet, and must develop a strong Islamic moral character.<sup>198</sup> The Islamic moral character requires that leaders emphasize the following five key parameters of Islamic behaviour: justice, trust, righteousness, the struggle within oneself towards self-improvement, and promise-keeping.<sup>199</sup>

From a general and historical approach we can divide the leadership types in Islam into three categories: spiritual leaders, opinion leaders, and 'application leaders'. Spirituality refers to leaders' aspect regarding Sufism and religiosity. Religious leadership can be seen as a relevant part of spiritual leadership. Opinion leaders include Muslim intellectuals, scholars and those who mainly contribute to intellectual development of the followers. 'Application leaders' refer primarily to pioneering activists in Islam.

The two primary leadership roles from an Islamic perspective are those of servant leader and guardian leader. First, leaders are servants of their followers (*sayyid al qawmi khadimuhum*)<sup>200</sup>. They look out for their welfare and guide them toward what is good. The idea of a leader as a servant has been part of

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<sup>197</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz, *Ijthihad and Tajdid by Conduct: Gülen and his movement*. Oxford Centre of Islamic Studies, Georgetown University. 04.26-27.2001.

<sup>198</sup> Rafik I. Beekun and Jamal Badawi. *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective*. Beltsville, Maryland, 1999.

<sup>199</sup> Idem, p.25-33.

<sup>200</sup> Selim Caldirali. "Hizmetkar Liderlik", in: *Sizinti*, nr.239, pp.489-493, December 1998, Izmir.

Islam since its beginning, and has only recently been further developed by Robert Greenleaf.<sup>201</sup> We will describe this later and attempt to explain the leadership characteristics of Gülen from the perspective of servant leadership. A second major role of the Muslim leaders is those of guardian leaders whom aim at protecting their community against tyranny and oppression. Guardian leaders also encourage God-consciousness and *taqwa* (piety), and promote justice, trust and integrity.<sup>202</sup> In other words, leaders are considered honest to the extent that there is “consistency between word and deed”. In the Qur’an, the Prophet Musa is described as “strong and trustworthy” by one of the young ladies<sup>203</sup> and the Prophet Yusuf is pictured as one who is truthful.<sup>204</sup> It is reported from Sahih Bukhari that Prophet Muhammad said:<sup>205</sup> “All of you are guardians and are responsible for your wards [...]”. Gülen characterises the Prophet of the Islam as a universal and unique leader, and indicates that the Prophet Muhammad has modelled the way for Muslim leaders and his followers for all time.<sup>206</sup> Successful Muslim leaders endeavour to acquire practical knowledge as well as the competence for applying it in appropriate situations. People are more likely to follow a leader’s directives if they believe that this person knows what he or she is doing. Additionally, in Islam aspirant leaders are encouraged to emulate such attributes as strength of character, patience (*sabr*), humility, magnanimity, self-understanding, the willingness to seek consultation, equity (impartiality), modesty (simplicity) and responsibility.<sup>207</sup>

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP

In social life people have a window (status) through which they see others and are seen. According to Gülen,<sup>208</sup> if the window is built higher than their real stature, people try to make themselves appear taller through vanity and assumed airs. If the window is set lower than their real stature, they must bow in humility in order to look out, to see, and be seen. Humility or modesty is the measure of one’s

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<sup>201</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf. *The Servant as Leader*. The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, Indianapolis, IN, 1991.

<sup>202</sup> Rafik I. Beekun and Jamal Badawi. *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective*. Beltsville, Maryland, 1999, p.15.

<sup>203</sup> See Qassas, 28:26.

<sup>204</sup> See Yusuf, 12:46.

<sup>205</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Hadith 3.733.

<sup>206</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, *Prophet Muhammad as commander*. Truestar, London, 1996. p.92-124

<sup>207</sup> See Rafik Beekun and Jama Badawi, pp.37-47.

<sup>208</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen. *The Messenger of God Muhammad: An Analysis of the Prophet’s Life*. Light: New Jersey, 2005, p.297.

greatness, just as vanity or conceit is the measure of low character. "The greater one is the one who is the modest" is the well-knowing adage in the Islamic tradition.<sup>209</sup> To Nursi, humility is the most important aspect of the leaders' servanthood.<sup>210</sup> A substantial principle of Islamic leadership and public administration is the following: "The people's master is the one who serves them".<sup>211</sup> This leadership principle was also written down hundreds years ago at the wall of the historical town hall of the city Den Bosh in The Netherlands as follows: "People can only be led by serving them".

Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990) is the scholar who reintroduced this leadership concept during the second half of the previous century.<sup>212</sup> "The servant leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead [...]." Servant leaders seeks to involve others in decision-making. His or her philosophy promotes ethical and caring behaviour, and it enhances the personal growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of organizational, intellectual and spiritual life.<sup>213</sup>

Servant leaders may or may not hold formal leadership positions. This leadership principle is one of the important keys to unlocking a dilemma of humanity: Is it possible to be virtuous and powerful, to serve and to lead? Opposites are blended in the universe. Synchronous manifestation of opposites causes a sort of wise and beneficial contest. Opposites transgress one another's bounds, and this brings conflict and change into being. The universe is subject to the law of change and transformation and the principles of progress and advancement. The dilemma of opposites opens the door to striving, which would be the means of all human progress. Servant leadership is a dynamic balance to produce and reproduce knowledge, identity and culture in a global world with dialogue, trust and sincerity.<sup>214</sup> Servant leaders are necessary to solve the common problems of humanity: ignorance, poverty and discord.<sup>215</sup> Gülen defined servant leadership as a way of the Prophets and it has itself developed in the

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<sup>209</sup> Fethullah Gülen, 2005, p.298.

<sup>210</sup> Said Nursi, Letters, vol.2, p.315.

<sup>211</sup> Gürkan Celik & Yusuf Alan. *Hizmetkar Liderlik [Servant Leadership]*. Libertas Media, Rotterdam, 2003, p.10; *Ibn Hisham*, 2:137.

<sup>212</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf. *The Servant as Leader*. The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, Indianapolis, IN, 1991, pp.7-8; [www.greenleaf.org](http://www.greenleaf.org)

<sup>213</sup> Idem, Gürkan Celik, 2002.

<sup>214</sup> Laub, J.A. Ed.D. (1999). *Assessing the servant organization*. Dissertation. Florida Atlantic University. Florida.

<sup>215</sup> Talha Furkan. Leadership Qualities in General Terms. *De Cascade*, nr. 2, p.19. Cosmicus, Utrecht, 2004.

daily life of leaders since the beginning of Islam.<sup>216</sup> Service reminds servant. A servant is a person who makes efforts to be useful to his or her nation and to the whole of humanity.

## **GÜLEN AND THE TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERVANT LEADER**

Larry Spears has identified a set of ten characteristics which he ascribes to the servant leader.<sup>217</sup> These characteristics of servant leadership have been extracted from the writings of Robert Greenleaf and are by no means exhaustive, and often occur naturally within individuals.<sup>218</sup> The possession of these characteristics marks the greatest and most prominent leaders in history and in the contemporary world. We applied these characteristics to Gülen to analyse his leadership patterns.

1. **Listening:** Leaders have traditionally been valued for their dialogue competencies, communication and decision-making skills. Listening, coupled with periods of reflection, is essential to the growth and well-being of the servant leader. Gülen is experienced as a person and leader with a deep commitment to listening intently to others and seeks to identify the will, perceptions and intentions of his audience, and helps to clarify their will and views. He listens receptively to what is being said and to what is left unsaid. His listening also encompasses the idea of getting in touch with one's own inner voice. He has a strong will power and resolve. All respondents have indicated that they never saw Gülen experience even one moment of hopelessness.
2. **Empathy:** People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. The most successful servant leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners. According to the respondents, Gülen strives to understand and empathize with others, and he is characterised as a person who puts himself in the position of the other and tries to understand another man's perceptions and experiences. The cultivation of empathy gives one the basis for detachment, the ability to stand aside and see oneself in a perspective relative to the context of one's experience.
3. **Healing:** The healing of relationships is a powerful force for dialogue, transformation and integration. One of Gülen's great strengths is his belief in the potential for healing one's self and one's relationship to others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of

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<sup>216</sup> Some notes from the meeting program of Fethullah Gülen between Augustus 21-28, 2003, Pennsylvania. Not published.

<sup>217</sup> Larry C. Spears. *Creating Caring Leadership for the 21st Century. The not-for-profit CEO Monthly Letter*, Vol.5, no.9. Robert K. Greenleaf Center, Indianapolis, IN, p.1-3, 1998; Robert K. Greenleaf (Larry Spears-Ed). *The Power of Servant Leadership*. The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, 1998.

<sup>218</sup> Larry C. Spears, 1998, id. p.1-3; Gurkan Celik, idem, 2002, pp.39-48.

emotional traumas. Although this is a part of being human, servant leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to help make whole those with whom they come in contact. Gülen dedicates his life to solving social problems, satisfying spiritual needs,<sup>219</sup> healing relations between people, and encourages interpersonal and intercultural dialogue.<sup>220</sup>

4. **Awareness:** General awareness, and especially self-awareness or awareness of personal responsibility, strengthens the servant leader. Awareness helps one in understanding issues involving ethics, power and values. It lends itself to realism and being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. As Greenleaf observed:<sup>221</sup> "Awareness is not a giver of solace; it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably alert. They do not seek solace. They have their own inner serenity." Everything should be directed toward fulfilling awareness of personal responsibility. In no way should they be seduced by the world's charms and life's attractions. Gülen understands the issues and prevailing conditions as they actually are, and is aware of all advantages and disadvantages. His messages and demands do not contradict reality. His students also indicated that he produces intuitive insights in the future when needed, and his doors of perception are open wide.

5. **Persuasion:** Gülen is reliant on persuasion and absolute belief in his message, rather than on positional authority, when making decisions within his community. He seeks to convince others, rather than coerce compliance, and is effective at building consensus within groups, and promotes a sincere dialogue among cultures, religions and civilizations. Gülen has stated that in the modern world the only way to get others to accept your ideas is by persuasion.<sup>222</sup> This message comes to the fore both in his sermons as an emeritus preacher and in his activities. This principle is originated with Gülen's influential mentor: Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1876-1960). Gülen frequently cited the following from Nursi: "Victory with civilized persons is won through persuasion". In this respect, Gülen can be characterised as a person with a high level of persuasion. The respondents emphasised that his conviction has never faltered, and that he never renounced his mission. Persuasion is, according to respondents, also related to Gülen's personal courage. Even if left alone, he has enough courage to persevere and to resist all the difficulties he might encounter. Gülen shows great confidence in his followers, is very persuasive and is very proficient in his use of body and verbal language. Gülen also makes effective use of storytelling, including the use of symbolism and metaphor in order to motivate his audience. We observe in his speeches and

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<sup>219</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen. *Key concepts in the practice of Sufism. Emerald Hills of the Heart*. The Fountain. Rutherford, New Jersey.

<sup>220</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love & Tolerance*. London 2004; Id. *Love and The Essence of Being Human*. Istanbul 2004.

<sup>221</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, 1991. Id., p.20.

<sup>222</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love & Tolerance*. New Jersey, 2004, p.199.



sermons that he frequently used stories about the Companions of the Prophet Mohammed in order to motivate his audience.

6. **Conceptualization:** Gülen seeks to nurture his abilities to dream great dreams. The ability to look at a problem or a society from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. Gülen stretches his thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking, and seeks a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day operational approach. He always takes local conditions and circumstances into account. The respondents also indicated that Gülen pays a great deal of attention in scanning and studying his environment and conditions, and hones his actions and words to suit the situation and the conjecture of the society. Gülen's activism and global thinking strongly affirm his capability to conceptualisation.

7. **Foresight:** leaders are expected to have a sense of direction and a long-term vision for their organisation or community. This characteristic is also closely related to conceptualization and the ability to be goal-centred. Foresight enables the servant leader to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. According to the respondents this aspect of his leadership is deeply rooted within his intuitive mind. Foresight remains a largely unexplored area in leadership studies, but comes to the fore as the most conspicuous characteristic of Gülen's leadership when we look at his community leadership since the 1960s. All respondents confirms that Gülen is farsighted and goal-centred. He is able to discern and plan for potential developments. He is able to evaluate the past, present, and future to reach a new synthesis.

8. **Stewardship:** Peter Block has defined stewardship as "holding something in trust for another."<sup>223</sup> Gülen's views of all institutions is one in which all members of the community played significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society. Servant leadership, like stewardship, assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. Gülen also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion, rather than control, and points out that dialogue, persuasion, and discussion based on evidence are essential for people who seek to serve humanity. According to the respondents Gülen has a strong character and praiseworthy virtues. He is determined but flexible while carrying out decisions, and knows when to be unyielding and implacable or relenting and compassionate. He knows when to be earnest and dignified, when to be modest, and is always upright, truthful, trustworthy, and just.

9. **Commitment to the growth of people:** Servant leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. This means that the leader should have personal knowledge of followers. Leaders should be fully aware of each follower's dispositions, character, competencies, shortcomings, ambitions, and weak points. If they lack this

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<sup>223</sup> Peter Senge. *The Fifth Discipline*. Random Housem, UK. 1999.

knowledge, how can they fill vacant posts with the appropriate people? As such, Gülen is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his community. He recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything in his power to nurture the spiritual, personal and professional growth of all people within his community. In regard to Gülen, this includes encouraging people to keep on serving humanity, involvement in decision-making, and caring for each other.

**10. Building community:** The servant leader senses that much has been lost in recent human history as a result of the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives. This awareness causes the servant leader to seek to identify some means for building a community among those who work within a given institution. Greenleaf said:<sup>224</sup> "All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant leader demonstrating his or her unlimited devotion to a quite specific community-related group." The community, which has formed around Gülen, is itself a concrete example of the principle of building community of servant leadership. The majority of the respondents stressed that modesty, an absence of worldly ambitions and abuse of authority are the crucial aspects of his enlarging community. Leaders should live like the poorest members of their community. They should never discriminate among their subjects; rather, they should strive to love them, prefer them over themselves, and act so that their people will love them sincerely. They should be faithful to their community, and secure their community's loyalty and devotion in return. Gülen concentrates on making the community very clear and distinct, by separating it from other communities. He constantly attempts to build the image of the community in the hearts and minds of his followers.

Based on our analysis we can argue that Gülen possesses a sufficient number of these leadership qualities mentioned above. The majority of the respondents believed Gülen to be realistic and convinced that the message he conveys to people is true. He has a courageous nature, and has strong will-power and resolve, and never falls into hopelessness. He is aware of his responsibility and of the possibly hindrances and stumbling blocks. Systematically and purposefully he is working on his projects and activities. He is far-sighted, pro-active and has determined his goals well. He knows the members of his community individually and mobilise them to reach their goals. He has a strong character and is equipped with praiseworthy virtues. Furthermore, according to the respondents, he has been described as a person who does not cherish worldly ambitions or abuse his authority.

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<sup>224</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf. 1991, p.30.

Gülen is characterised as a charismatic figure and has primarily been seen as a religious leader and as a prominent source of inspiration concerning establishing intercultural dialogue and initiating educational projects and institutions throughout the world.<sup>225</sup> An overwhelming majority of the respondents emphasised that Gülen is a servant first, and then a leader. We also found allusion to this conviction in his conversations, speeches, sermons and writings. Gülen is further typified as a man of deliberate action who never hung back in putting his plans or decisions into action. Respondents have indicated that consultation is one of Gülen's eminent practices demonstrating his decision-making process. Furthermore, he has been described as a leader who gains the love and trust of his followers by solving their problems, whether personal or public, related to individual, private life, or to social, economic, political affairs touching the community as a whole.

Gülen offers great hope, more caring and responsibility for the future generations in producing and working better. He promotes the value and development of people, the building of community, the practice of authenticity, the providing of leadership for good of those led and the sharing of power, knowledge and status for the common good of each individual, and the total society. According to our analysis Gülen's leadership supports people who choose to serve first, and then lead as a way of expanding service to individuals, institutions and societies. His leadership style encourages enthusiasm, synergy, trust, foresight, listening, and the ethical use of power and empowerment.

In addition to the above characteristics Gülen's experts and students who we interviewed, pointed out that the Gülen's understanding and praxis of leadership bears primarily on his faith and concerns some theological bases: "Gülen's ultimate aim is to have the consent of God. His understanding of leadership is premised on the belief that there is no aim or reward beyond the approval and love of God. The easiest way to acquire this is obeying the rules explained by the Prophet Muhammad, and imitating the Prophet's way of life. Gülen's purpose is not to be or becoming a leader, he would rather be a slave and servant. He has so many followers even he does not have a desire to lead. He regards his 'reputation' as a credit from God, and uses this to motivate people. One who cannot manage his or her worldly desires cannot rehabilitate someone else. Gülen never 'contaminates' the realities, and does not 'shade' the realities with any personal interest. Therefore the messages reflect what is in his mind and heart and illuminates people. Gülen always interrogates himself and never deceives himself. He practices what he preaches. It is this sincere and honest search for reality that has won him millions of followers all over the world. His followers are disciples of sincerity, honesty and compassion." In the end the respondents stress that Gülen's inspiration comes from God and it is God that makes people follow him.

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<sup>225</sup> The analysis is based on the authors' personal interviews and observations within the Gülen movement.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we can arguably say that although Gülen is classified as an Islamic scholar and spiritual guide, he is also an example of a leader possessing such extraordinary competences such as intuition and foresight. From our analysis we have concluded that Gülen has led his community successfully in the every field (at an intellectual, spiritual, and social level), and has transformed a great traditional social movement in Turkey to a worldwide community in touch with modernity. Some scholars describe him as a charismatic figure. Rather than having charisma he describes himself as a servant. He has been seen as a community leader of profound appreciation of the Islamic sciences and contemporary-modern thought and a passionate activist.<sup>226</sup> Successful leaders represent and express what they desire to reach through their actions, and then translate their actions into words. In Gülen's own words,<sup>227</sup> "for us action precedes thought", and this is a distinguishing characteristic of Gülen's leadership style.

Moreover, we can say that Gülen possesses two important leadership characteristics. He developed his own philosophy and knows his way very well (*clear vision*), and he is reliable and on the way (*deliberate actions*). It is commonly understood that "the whole world steps aside for the man who knows where he is going". This leadership principle is also accompanied by the charm and grace needed to create followers. He is able to persuade other people (his audience) to go with him. Gülen has a great population of followers, and the Gülen movement counts millions of sympathisers worldwide. People follow others that they personally admire. Leaders gather followers through dint of personality and charm, rather than any form of external power or authority.

Great leaders have various leadership qualities and are able to be leaders not only in one aspect of life, but they can-and-should lead their community or organization to success in every field. The greatest and most influential commanders, statesmen, community leaders, religious leaders, and spiritual guides in human history have done this. From this point of view, we can characterise Gülen as a servant leader of his community in particular and of the humanity in general.

In sum, Gülen's leadership is based on a deep understanding of the faith and of the care values that drive his actions. Thus effective leadership requires the development of a compelling personal and spiritual vision that engages others by offering meaning, dignity, and purpose. He is a living example of a spiritual and religious leader, an Islamic intellectual scholar, and a pioneering activist in the contemporary world. One of the primary aims of his leadership is the building of the 'golden generation', more humane relationships, organizations, and societies. What can be learned from

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<sup>226</sup> *The Muslim World: Special Issue*. July 2005, vol.95, Issue 3, pp.325-471.

<sup>227</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, *Irsad Ekseni*. Nil: Izmir, 1998, p.91.

Gülen's example is that effective leaders need to develop the dynamism and critical imagination required to embrace individual, organizational, and global change from a stance of action, hope and courage. Further research can focus on Gülen's spiritual and religious leadership qualities based on primary Islamic sources.