



Appreciating and Advancing Leadership for Public Wellbeing

Workshop Proceedings

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Executive Summary

In February 2010, the Research Center for Leadership in Action located at New York University's (NYU) Wagner School of Public Service and the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute convened 24 eminent scholars and practitioners committed to illuminating and nurturing leadership for public wellbeing in the Middle East and beyond. Whether working for youth and women's empowerment, engendering corporate citizenship, or organizing communities in conflict-ridden areas, they discussed leadership that transcends sectors, transforms ordinary citizens into agents of change, and opens up new public spaces for deliberation and engagement.

Collective theory building on leadership for public wellbeing was driven by practical accounts of on-the-ground experiences. Vignettes from civil society and the private sector experiences highlighted the following lessons:

- There are no clear and distinct boundaries between the state, civil society, and the private sector. At its best, leadership for public wellbeing takes advantage of such porosity through partnership or through direct policy change efforts.
- Leadership need not be about momentous action. In marginalized communities it is almost always about making subtle and incremental change.

Experiences studying or promoting the leadership of youth and women, two often-marginalized groups, revealed the following insights:

- Programs that support youth leadership open up spaces for youth to respectfully engage and deliberate about public wellbeing in their communities. These are much needed spaces for young people to make sense of their situation and agree on actions in contexts that often deny them opportunities to exercise leadership action.
- Women's leadership in the region is much more nuanced than what is put forth by international ranking reports, which paint simplistic images of the status of women in the Middle East.

Given the fluid nature of leadership for public wellbeing, practices of boundary spanning were seen as fundamental. "Boundary crossing" was really an umbrella term for various practices – enabling collaboration between government, civil society and business; maneuvering and drawing on multiple identities that traverse the local and the global; blending and mixing various methodologies in tackling public

issues; and drawing on the historical well of leadership and cultural practices while challenging and modernizing tradition.

The group discussed actionable ideas for the study of leadership, teaching of leadership in higher education settings and leadership development/training programs. Amidst the range of these ideas, participants expressed a common need for collaborative and supportive peer networks for scholars and practitioners advancing leadership on the ground. More specific suggestions include:

In Research:

- Taking new approaches that entail a radically broader definition of leadership, owing to the fact that people taking action on the ground may not see what they do as leadership
- Generating contextual cases about leadership, which are much needed in development and teaching programs using qualitative methods
- Co-developing an edited volume or an academic special issue on leadership based on existing empirical data and other forms of research within the group

In Teaching:

- Mapping existing leadership curricula and teaching efforts in the region and developing a network of peers on this work
- Bringing students into the design of programs since it is important to surface their assumptions and frameworks for thinking about leadership from their own experiences and repertoires
- Providing a continuum of offerings delivered through secondary schools, undergraduate and graduate programs, early career, mid-career and senior executive programs with a value proposition focusing on moral leadership, experiential learning, and up-and-down mentoring

In Leadership Development:

- Capitalizing on existing short-lived attempts at developing group or task leadership through international conferences by offering regular leadership workshops to sustain such groups. The workshops could develop leadership skills and tackle specific substantive problems whereby participants are exposed to experts and gurus in the field, while developing a joint agenda to make a difference as a group
- Surveying existing leadership programs, evaluating their relative successes and scaling up the effective ones in the region, hence lifting up and adapting good practices, rather than re-inventing new ones

The group recognized a generative, more collective approach to fostering leadership, rather focusing solely on individual skill-building. Supporting leadership for public wellbeing entails advancing the very discipline that has largely failed to recognize it. It entails working on a discursive level to advance a more inclusive and enabling

model of leadership, while building capacity for more groups to engage in leadership.

A starting point might be to capitalize on the network already formed among this group, by continuing to convene this group, while working to expand this community of learning. Participants found it invaluable to come together in peer-learning mode, sharing their conceptual frameworks and theories derived from their research, but also the very practical experiences of researching, teaching and developing for the advancement of public wellbeing.

I. Background

This workshop provided a forum for practical and theoretical learning around leadership in the Middle East and presented an opportunity for a continuing community of learning. It was convened by the Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) located at New York University's (NYU) Wagner School of Public Service in partnership with the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute. The workshop provided an opportunity for dialogue between academics and practitioners embedded within NYU and those committed to leadership in the Middle East carrying out their work either within or outside the region. For RCLA, the workshop was an opportunity to explore the resonance of the Center's approach to thinking about and advancing leadership in a new context and to learn from examples with different sets of challenges and opportunities. For participants, the convening offered a collegial space to share reflections from research and practice and unpack leadership models in a way relevant to the regional context.

The workshop focused on leadership for public wellbeing, a form of leadership that transcends the narrow interests of an individual and his/her organization or community. This form of leadership addresses issues of social concern, such as youth unemployment, marginalization of women, or public healthcare – public and social problems that spill beyond the borders of any single organization or group and require concerted, collective effort and adaptive responses. Viewing leadership in this way highlights people's active and collective commitment to achieving the common good for their society.

Why a Conversation on Leadership at This Time

Given the seemingly intractable challenges facing the world today, there is growing agreement around the need for shared responsibility in tackling tough social and public issues. In these complex times, characterized by high degrees of uncertainty, no adequate solution can come from a single group or from one charismatic individual alone. Instead, robust solutions emerge from multiple actors located across the larger system they constitute, engaging together in negotiated efforts to find the vision, the collective will and sustained action to transform imagined possibilities into desired results.

At RCLA we have become increasingly aware that this reality calls for a form of leadership different from that offered in popular discourse: the heroic individual who enlists followers to achieve his or her pre-determined vision of change. This is not to say that individual momentous action is no longer needed, but if we see leadership existing only when we see heroic individuals acting on the national stage we miss much of the leadership that exists – in communities, across fields, in teams, through collaboration. Even heroic individuals depend on groups working collaboratively.

The Middle East offers a rich context for dialogue on leadership for public wellbeing at this time. It can be argued that amidst the global economic challenges and changing political and social conditions people have neither time nor spirit to exercise leadership that fulfils needs beyond their immediate own. Yet a number of patterns indicate that leadership for the public wellbeing abounds in the region, including a surge in youth- and women-led NGOs, growth in institutionalized philanthropy, and a heightened sense of corporate citizenship. Such leadership is located in collective as much as in individual action, is premised on interdependence and networking as well as hierarchical influence, and is concerned with the common good rather than the interests of a few. It transforms ordinary citizens into active agents of change, and in doing so opens up new public spaces for deliberation and engagement.

Workshop Participants

The group comprises scholars and practitioners committed to advancing a public-mission model of leadership in the Middle East. Their fields of practice include leadership research, teaching and delivery of civic programs with a leadership development component. Some participants are affiliated with universities including New York University; Johns Hopkins University; Zayed University, United Arab Emirates; Dubai School of Government, UAE; Sultan Qaboos University, Oman; the American University in Cairo; and New Zealand Eastern Institute of Technology, New Zealand. Other participants' institutional bases include private businesses, civil society organizations, diplomatic missions and philanthropic foundations. In terms of geographic locations, the group represents United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Tunisia, Oman, Iran, and the US. Representing NYU Wagner and RCLA were Bethany Godsoe, executive director of RCLA; Waad El Hadidy, senior associate at RCLA; Natasha Iskander, assistant professor of public policy; and Erica Foldy, associate professor of public and nonprofit management. Sonia Ospina, RCLA faculty director and associate professor of public management and policy at NYU Wagner and Nadereh Chamlou, senior advisor at the World Bank, also contributed to the conceptualization and design of the workshop.

In introducing themselves, participants defined their current passions and how they connect to leadership. Some of those mentioned were migrant worker issues, women's leadership, sustaining networks, community capacity, education reform, youth empowerment, civic engagement, corporate responsibility, and cross-sector collaboration.

A few of the themes that emerged over the three days began to surface as early as the introductions. Participants identified their many fluid identities as practitioner-academics, as business and social entrepreneurs, and as local actors and global citizens. From this very first session the notions of context, locale and identity were opened up to expanded definitions and nuance.

What follows is an overview of the discussions and key insights and a glimpse of future directions suggested at this convening. Given the cumulative and collective nature of the learning generated, the main themes highlighted in this report will not be attributed to any individual(s) except where session presentations are summarized and specific quotes are used.

II. Discussions and Key Insights

Patterns of Leadership for Public Wellbeing in the Middle East

The workshop kicked off with a series of vignettes offering perspectives from civil society and the private business sector on leadership for public wellbeing. During pre-workshop preparations, participants expressed their concern with Western-imported models of leadership that seldom capture the nuance of local contexts. Given the practical dimension of leadership for public wellbeing and that leadership scholarship is predominantly based on empirical data generated in the West, it was important to start with on-the-ground examples of leadership action. Since this was in a sense an exercise in collective theory-building, it was useful to start with specifics that could ultimately help inform and reshape conceptual frameworks and theories.

Examples from civil society – agency and porous boundaries

Bushra Jabre and Carol Underwood of Johns Hopkins University provided several examples of youth- and women-led initiatives that address public concerns across the region. Whether endogenous or donor-supported, the sheer number and frequency of civic endeavors reflects an increasingly vibrant civil society, one in which civic activity goes beyond charitable giving. The sprouting of youth and women-led NGOs is driven by an identified need for change and the efficacy to take action despite preexisting social inequalities. Such initiatives are often spurred by unlikely individuals with no formal leadership experience, like an Upper Egyptian women who ran literacy classes for male fire fighters and represented 18 villages after winning the local council elections. These emergent social and civic spaces provide opportunities for ordinary citizens to express opinions and make decisions, even if initially only at the margins of society, to gain exposure to new ideas, and to think critically about public wellbeing.

While voluntary work was the impetus in many cases, discussants expressed the need for moderation when it comes to encouraging volunteerism, because it does not always lead to gainful employment – an important caveat given sparse job opportunities for young adults. One of the key points emphasized is that emergent leadership can promote efficacy and enhance public confidence, yet a change in the

quality or quantity of emergent leaders will not inevitably bring about expanded civic participation. Innovative, inspired leaders alone cannot create a viable civil society in the absence of a broader legal and support structure.

Natasha Iskander of NYU Wagner presented a case about the leadership of migrant-sending communities in the Moroccan Souss (a valley pinched between the two Atlas mountain chains). Iskander told the story of how a group of Moroccan repatriates used their severance pay from working at a factory in France to start small businesses in their home villages. Driven by the need for electricity to run their businesses, a public service unavailable in their remote mountain region, this small group of community members was able to electrify their villages through a series of explorations and innovations. When challenged by their traditional village structure for decision making, they adapted it by creating more open village associations. When they could only go so far on their own, they partnered with the Moroccan government to leverage their initial efforts at electrification. Within five years, the work of these communities became recognized by the Moroccan government as a model for development. The case highlighted three points:

- The confluence between the existing environment and the timing of leadership action can greatly influence outcomes– this type of organizing happened at a time when the government was contemplating the provision of basic infrastructure services to rural areas and so the communities' efforts demonstrated models for service that the government could ultimately adopt and scale up;
- Community-based initiatives can transform the state – the leader(s) may disappear but a leadership system that bridges sectors can endure; and
- Leadership, especially at the level of marginalized communities, can happen through incremental change.

The examples provided in this session highlighted civil society as one arena from which diverse leadership for public wellbeing can emerge. Some of the examples suggested that it is necessary to groom civil society leaders to take on public challenges, but the emergence of more leaders is insufficient to make systemic change in the absence of a broader support structure for civil society – the latter requiring shifts in public policy. The Moroccan case, on the other hand, demonstrated that leadership from civil society can transform public policy, perhaps *because* civil society entered into partnership with the state. Both experiences show that there is a relationship between civil society leadership and the state, be it directly through policy advocacy or indirectly through civil society receptiveness to partnerships with the state.

Examples from the business sector – beyond charitable giving

The private sector is another active contributor to public wellbeing in the Middle East and is increasingly practicing responsibility in a strategic way. Raji Hattar of Aramex

International, a global shipping and logistics company, shared the different ways the company practices social responsibility from contributing to the wellbeing of communities to acting responsibly toward the environment. As an example of Aramex's social commitment, Ruwwad, a nonprofit organization was established with the dual mandate of encouraging Arab youth to exercise leadership over public concerns and contributing to the wellbeing of impoverished communities. The organization was conceived to spark a 'movement' in corporate activism, shortly following the company's work with a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan that lacked major public services. Ruwwad connected the community to the relevant ministries and facilitated the provision of basic services, thanks to an influx of hundreds of international volunteers.

Ahmed Samy, a business and self-identified social entrepreneur presented examples of corporate citizenship from his experience in Egypt. Until recently, Samy was the Managing Director of Hewlett Packard Egypt, where the company was a partner in several consortia of corporations addressing public issues like education and micro-enterprise development. The success of these initiatives hinged on high level political sponsorship, a clear road map for contributing parties and stakeholder buy-in. Samy's experience points to three key considerations when tackling large-scale public issues:

One is the proper utilization of resources. Two is how do we properly coordinate among ourselves. And three is sustainability of the work. In Egypt for instance we have nearly 23,000 NGOs. Driven by good intentions, both NGOs and companies appear on the scene where there is a disaster but then the interest subsides. If this momentum is maintained, we won't end up with a continual fire fighting response.

Pamela Abdalla, an attorney, social entrepreneur and resident of the UAE, provided yet another angle on the intersection of private individual and corporate, public and NGO sector contributions in the context of social consciousness. Her experience in UAE-based community service work informed her view that the Gulf faces particular and unique challenges to social entrepreneurship opportunities:

- The need for an independent press to inform and expose issues in a society that initially presents as utopian but on closer examination, contains several disadvantaged, disenfranchised pockets;
- The concomitant need for the incentives a free press offers to the corporate sector in the context of reporting out socially responsible corporate contributions;
- A lack of continuity in the largely transient, ex-patriot professional population that comprises more than 80 percent of the overall UAE population;
- The significant dearth of existing NGOs in the UAE.

The most disadvantaged population in UAE comprises migrant workers, many of whom suffer from extraordinarily poor labor camp conditions or are compelled to run

away from abusive employers in the domestic work venue. The plight of these worker populations is particularly poignant in light of the fact that they have all left home, family and children behind to send remittances abroad. Labor camps are beginning to give way to more humane “worker villages,” so there is reason to expect progress in these human rights violations.

The three experiences illustrated the range of corporate activity that contributes to public wellbeing the region, from setting up a structure to work with impoverished communities, to fostering collaborations among companies to address public challenges, to encouraging responsible business practices. The discussants suggested that theirs are not idiosyncratic examples and that there seem to be more interest and commitment by business to play a civic role. Yet, corporate leadership for public and social issues tends to be more systematic at the level of large and globalized companies. Small and medium businesses are mostly family owned, so civic activity tends to be limited to individual philanthropy, despite the earnest will for more coordination and scalability.

Leadership in Context: the Role of Youth, Women and Culture

Two concurrent sessions were dedicated to youth and women’s leadership given the additional structural challenges they face in Middle Eastern society. Most Arab countries grapple with the ‘youth bulge’ problem where it is estimated that 65 percent of the population is under the age of 25, too big a supply of young talent for the job market to absorb. This situation leaves few options for young people other than leaving their home countries in search of better livelihoods or turning to illegitimate routes. Several countries in the region have made strides on women’s issues, but on the whole, women still face a number of inequities.

Enabling youth leadership – spaces for deliberation and engagement

The youth session addressed several ways to reintegrate youth as active members of society and enabling them to take up leadership on important issues. Thuqan Qishawi discussed his experience running the Public Achievement program supported by the American Friends Service Committee. The program is based on the principles of human rights, citizenship, democratic practice and public service. Groups of young people ages 18–25 are provided with training and a learning process for addressing public issues. The process constitutes deliberation, decision-making, study and action planning, and implementation. The groups are expected to train another group of youth ages 14–17 in their communities and to invite partner stakeholders to leverage needed talent or resources in order to address the community issues they decide on. While some of the issues addressed by these youth groups may be as basic as creating a community library, Qishawi sees that the value of the program is in the space provided for young people to

understand their worth and channel their energy for the betterment of their communities:

The creation and the expansion of the area ‘specified’ for the participation of young people in society really matters. [What youth can achieve through the program] gives a new story to tell – not a story of victims but of hope. If they can make a library at age 14 or 15, when they are grown they can provide the leadership the country needs.

The Takatof volunteer program directed by Maytha Al Habsi through the Emirates Foundation offers another model for engaging youth in meeting community needs. With a vision of embedding volunteerism in Emirati culture, Takatof provides opportunities for youth to volunteer with hospitals, schools, homes for disadvantages families, etc., and through such opportunity discover themselves as leaders. Al Habsi recounted the remarkable progress the program has made, including building a roster of nearly 13,000 Emirati volunteers and the completion of over 200,000 volunteer hours. Such progress happened despite the popular perception of Emirati youth as a spoiled group concerned only with material accumulation. Al Habsi also suggested that what matters most is not the material output of volunteer work, but the process that brings young people together as productive members of society. Al Habsi cited the late Sheikh Zayeb bin Sultan:

No matter how many buildings, schools, foundations, hospitals that we build, or how many bridges we raise, all these are material entities. The real spirit behind progress is the human spirit.

While the promotion of youth leadership maybe seen as placing the onus on a group pressured by negative social perception and/or a stifling economic situation, participants concurred that programs like Takatof and Public Achievement play a more meaningful role in the lives of young people. Such opportunities open up spaces for respectful engagement and deliberation and promote peer-learning about rights and responsibilities. On a more pragmatic level, participation in these programs enables youth to build their resumes, enhancing their likelihood of finding work.

Youth and bicultural identity – privilege or dissonance?

Christine Assaad shared preliminary findings from a Dubai School of Government study into bicultural identity and the school-to-work transition of young Emiratis. Privileged Emirati youth often find themselves navigating or bridging dual identities – one Emirati, espousing the values of the Emirati culture and the Muslim faith, the other Western, represented by use of the English language in education and in certain social circles, and the selective emulation of western popular culture. While one might expect that youth projecting a bicultural identity may have an easier school-to-work transition, some of the study’s findings surface the authority structures that marginalize youth in UAE in particular and in Arab societies in

general. In negotiating salaries, for instance, Emirati youth felt that asking for higher compensation was embarrassing and disrespectful to elders. Bicultural identity can be both a sign of privilege and a cause for dissonance.

Leadership development programs at the university level, for instance, engender a constant shift between local and global identities among youth, which is seen as helpful by some students, but conflicting by others. University leadership programs seldom address the tensions that arise from using Western models of leadership. In addition, the concept of leadership promoted by universities tends to focus on leader development, emphasizing more intra-personal skills – the qualities possessed by an individual, such as ambition, persistence, etc. rather than inter-personal skills – the qualities that enable teamwork and joint effort, qualities that Emirati youth may be predisposed to given the communal structure of their society.

The accounts presented in this session implicitly challenged public discourse about youth in the Middle East as a burdensome social segment and a nagging pressure on the state. Employment debates in the Gulf, for instance, have been dominated by an understanding of young people as lazy and unqualified, a risky generation to invest in and depend on for social progress. The practical experiences of public engagement and volunteerism and the study of school-to-work transition offered a different view. These accounts surfaced a subtext of identity and expression that permeates social interactions between youth and other generations, which is often overlooked in leadership development programs.

Understanding women's leadership – the need for nuance

Conversations in the women's leadership session revolved around strategic choices, interpretations of gender differences, culture and context. An emergent theme called for more nuance in the study of women's leadership in the Middle East. Asya Al Lamki, Cultural Attaché of the Omani Embassy in DC, shared unexpected findings from her research with Omani women leaders. The study explores executive women's perceptions about their status in society following state-driven measures to promote more gender-inclusive work environments and appointed leadership positions. Despite international rhetoric about the discrimination of women in Arab societies, in this survey women feel empowered by their work environments and the state and believe they have equal opportunity. These findings raise questions about the gender discord between perceptions and reality, the universality of international reports, and research assumptions about coherence among women but difference between men and women.

Research on women's negotiation and leadership in the Gulf also suggests that there is more to women's leadership than meets the eye. May Al Dabbagh of the Dubai School of Government addressed three ideas that enable a more nuanced approach to understanding women's leadership in the region:

- Gender is a relational concept. Gender is not only about women, but about men and the relationships of power that tie them together in a given context. Any understanding of women's leadership in the region must include this contextual lens
- Women's leadership can not be understood in isolation of 'culture' as it is constructed and understood at the intersecting local, regional, and international levels: Middle Eastern countries tend to appear on the bottom of international indices that rank countries according to women's advancement. This is helpful in terms of raising attention for action, but such indices can have disempowering effects, setting up simplistic images of the emancipated Western woman versus the oppressed Arab woman
- Context can not be purely local: globalization has tended to have a hegemonic impact

Al Dabbagh noted that these three themes are pervasive, and shape interactions in multiple work and social settings. For example, as international educational institutions like NYU begin to establish partnerships in the region, the forms of collaborations pursued with local researchers both reflect assumptions about context and have the potential to shape the research context itself.

Soukeina Bouraoui of the Center for Arab Women Training and Development spoke of life history research her center conducted with 83 women in 7 Arab countries. This research names different strategies for how women make decisions and enact leadership: 1) guardianship, in which women's sphere of influence is largely decided by men; 2) collective decision-making; 3) leadership based on demonstrable expertise; 4) underground leadership, where power and authority are masked by gentleness; 5) virtuous decision-making, where women invoke notions of what is virtuous or morally correct to back up their actions. In synthesis, the study shows how women exercise leadership strategically, drawing on a wide repertoire of leadership practices and deploying them based on the situation. An approach to leadership that uses one single definition would miss the finesse of and interconnections among all the different strategies women use. According to Bouraoui's findings, any woman who uses only one type of leadership method across all settings would be challenged to achieve any real gains.

The reflections and accounts shared in this session unpacked elements of women's leadership. Key discussants challenged simplistic understandings of women as one homogenous group and context as purely local. Both at the workshop and the public event that followed, participants urged institutions like NYU to contribute to a more finessed understanding of women's leadership, in collaboration with region-based practitioners and scholars.

Leadership, religion, and culture – drawing on and adapting tradition

Several participants addressed the role of Islam and culture. Both are entwined in Middle Eastern society and need to be understood as such in order to arrive at a contextual understanding of leadership. Darwish Al Moharby of Sultan Qaboos University situated leadership in the contexts of Arab culture and Islam as a way of life comprising both faith and politics. He discussed the intricate relationship between Islam and Arab culture where Arab culture. Some tribal norms and the sense of moral identity may predate Islam, hence prohibiting something that may be permitted by religion. Unpacking the “shuratic” (consultative) model of decision-making, practiced in Oman and to a lesser extent in other countries, can bring us closer to an understanding of Islam as a political philosophy, not only a religion. This model is based on a strong belief in the potential of citizens and the relegation of autocracy to a participatory approach. Al Moharby sees the shuratic model as a leadership framework that offers the necessary mechanisms for active participation and is harmonious both culturally and religiously. Nevertheless, a more systematic approach to developing leadership is needed – if Islam is to be embedded in that approach – that transcends the observance of ritual alone and promotes leadership on public issues.

Other contextual elements can be illuminated through the challenge of teaching leadership. Based on teaching experience in business education in Oman and UAE, Mark Neal, now based at the New Zealand Eastern Institute of Technology, shared observations about tensions prevalent in the classroom. Teaching materials are largely based on leadership concepts and theories emanating from the US. Cases used in curricula assume an idealized Western context where principles like challenging authority and freedom of expression are upheld. According to Neal, it is challenging to teach leadership without being critical of established structures or political figures in the Gulf, especially when the case studies highlight prominent risk-takers like Gandhi or Mandela and suggest that leadership is about challenging the status quo. Students find it difficult to resolve the tensions between the Western world and their own world, where challenging authority, and the sources of legitimacy that undergird authority, is difficult. One resolution may be to turn such tensions into a critical pedagogy by naming the kinds of traditional structures and cultural practices that seem at odds with those appearing in the teaching cases, and opening them up for discussion.

Understanding philanthropy also offers a lens into leadership in the Middle Eastern context. The main question raised by Barbara Ibrahim of the Gerhart Center for Philanthropy at the American University in Cairo was: what kinds of leadership are needed to reinvent local traditions of giving in order to build a field of philanthropy? Giving is so embedded in all levels of Arab culture yet tends to be invisible and non-strategic. The gift is thought to be condescending to the poor if touted, undermining the public discussion of giving or the ability of role models to have wide impact. It is

a challenge to build the field of philanthropy when the cultural emphasis is on the responsibility to give and only beginning to be seen as the responsibility to make a difference. In pursuing the mission of revitalizing philanthropy from acts of individual giving to a field of global, institutionalized actors, Ibrahim reflected on the role of tradition:

How can we build on tradition without being trapped by it? Building a field involves re-envisioning traditional practice. Nothing has ever been static. Tradition is always evolving, even if there are those who try to convince a new generation that there is only one right way. Young people in Muslim communities are often at the forefront of remaking the practices of their faith to include more effective and sustained social activism.

Building a more strategic philanthropic field entails measuring capital flows and knowledge flows – therefore building research and education streams – as well as linking local and global support organizations, advocacy groups, and creating an enabling context through legislative frameworks, and a culture of engagement at community and family levels.

The model of ‘shuratic’ leadership and the practical experiences of teaching leadership in the classroom and building the field of philanthropy all point to the centrality yet malleability of traditional structures. Tradition is the raw material from which identity and a sense of belonging can be fostered, and leadership action can be galvanized. Yet in practicing tradition, tradition itself changes. At its best, tradition is invented and reinvented to meet the challenges of our time.

Transcending Context: the Fluid Nature of Leadership for Public Wellbeing

Multiple identities and embedded contexts

Participants felt adamantly that leadership needs to be understood in context and that Middle Eastern societies need to draw on their own historical wells of leadership and cultural practices. Meanwhile, another stream of the conversation challenged the notions of context *proper* and cultural relativism. Leadership practitioners and scholars in the region operate in nested contexts where are at once located in institutions, communities, countries, and the world. As seen from many of the vignettes about leadership for public wellbeing in the region, there are no stark lines demarcating the ‘community’ from an ‘outside’ world. In many of the cases discussed the confluence of local and global factors was pronounced. People in the Arab world are more cosmopolitan than subscribing to one identity and are as much part of a global community as they are of a local community. The Middle East region itself has varied geo-political designations – Arab, Middle East, North Africa, Muslim-majority, Mediterranean and so on. For both those engaging in leadership and those

supporting leadership on the ground, the multiple frames defining the region mean that multiple identities are claimed and negotiated.

Cross-sector and mixed-method approaches

Not only is globalization becoming more momentous, but the public issues addressed by workshop participants – from youth and women empowerment to community organizing in conflict-ridden spaces – are precisely the kind of complex problems that transcend the interests of a small group or the boundaries of a narrow locale. Effectively addressing these issues requires not only the projection of multiple identities but the use of mixed methodologies and cross-sector approaches. Although the government perspective was not represented at the workshop, many of the cases discussed were examples of public-private and government-nonprofit collaborations. Leadership as bridging, connecting and convening emerged as a prominent theme.

Boundary crossing and adapting tradition

The practice of “boundary crossing” was a common thread in the conversations. Boundary crossing does not only apply across sectors or methodologies, but also to blending traditional structures and modern ways. Participants stressed that enabling leadership for public wellbeing in the region should not stop at reviving or leveraging traditional mechanisms for giving, decision-making, or volunteering, to name a few. It also entails reinterpreting and reinventing traditions to offer solutions that match contemporary challenges. This effectively requires building on tradition, without being stifled by it, and remembering that tradition is constantly evolving. Different metrics would be required to assess the effectiveness of such a fluid form of leadership for public wellbeing where some outcomes may be amorphous.

III. Advancing Leadership for Public Wellbeing

While the first half of the convening was dedicated to understanding how, why and where leadership for public wellbeing happens, the remaining sessions were dedicated to exploring opportunities for supporting leadership for public wellbeing through participants’ collective work and spheres of influence. Given participants’ various institutional locations three main realms were conceived for advancing the field: leadership development, teaching and research.

Leadership Development

Examples of leadership development in the region – innovations amidst a field concerned primarily with individual leadership

Participants shared several examples of leadership development happening in the region. Nadereh Chamlou of the World Bank discussed her experience with a networked approach to leadership. This approach was experimented with and adapted over the life of a multi-year program which had the mission of building a multidisciplinary community of practice on gender issues in Persian-speaking countries. This was established as a sister network to the Arab gender network led by the Center for Arab Women's Training and Research (CAWTAR). Chamlou discussed some of the challenges-turned-opportunities. For example, one challenge related to housing the network at an institution without having that institution or its leader hijack the network. This opened up opportunities for experimenting with flat pluralistic structures. At another critical juncture in the life of this network it was impacted by the imposition of UN sanctions on Iran. As a result, the Network had to discontinue its work in Iran, which transformed into an opportunity to own the agenda independent of government changes and to build virtual networks regardless of location. One of the important growth phases of this network was team building in creating a joint public narrative. As per Harvard professor Marshall Ganz's work, public narratives co-construct three elements: 1) Me – why am I (network member) here and what do I hope to achieve? 2) Us – what do we have in common and what vision can we build together? 3) Why now – what is the urgency of acting at this time?

This new structure has already led to a range of collaborations among network members that goes beyond the specific activities and the work program of the network. People want to belong to a bigger group with shared values, and this facet ensures the sustainability of the network in the long run.

Jennifer Bremer of the American University in Cairo shared experiences from the NILE project, a pilot community leadership program in Egypt. This program drew on US community leadership models where leaders come together from business, civil society and government to agree on and take action on a community issue. These programs typically have a community foundation that channels resources to the community, a community leadership group that facilitates the process and provides skills and connections, and a community business partnership that mobilizes business to promote economic development. The process was successful in new industrial cities on the outskirts of Cairo, a context where community members come from disparate parts of the country and bonds of trust and solidarity may not have yet formed. Among the achievements was a micro-credit program that supported 50 impoverished families in business start-ups and had a 97 percent repayment rate.

May Al Dabbagh shared findings from a scan of leadership development programs in the region that considered university, private sector, NGO, commercial center and international organization-led programs. Her brief survey found that these programs tend to focus on *leader* rather than *leadership* development. There are myriad experiences with leadership development in the region but the context for

collaboration needs to be developed. One of the challenges is that individuals really represent their institutions and hardly transcend them, which hampers the public orientation of these programs. On the flip side, much of organizational sustainability in the region relies on the individual at the apex.

The general trend is that leadership development programs follow an “import” model where expertise and material are brought to the region with little genuine engagement with region-specific realities and needs. Al Dabbagh made recommendation for organizations to transcend the “East-West” divide and foster long term genuine collaborations between scholars and practitioners that result in knowledge production in the region.

Examples from RCLA’s work – addressing the individual, organizational and systems level

The RCLA team shared examples from their own work of programs that target individual, organizational and systems-level leadership capacity. Bethany Godose presented reflections about how to develop collective capacity when the focus of leadership programs has traditionally been on the individual level, based on the assumption that the challenges of our day require collective responses. The collective nature of the work now requires us to create interventions at multiple levels:

- Individual – increasing people’s capacity to engage with others in the work of leadership
- Organizational – creating structures that support collective work and ongoing development and participation of leaders at all levels within an organization
- Systems – creating space for dialogue, sense-making and collective action among actors across a system

The notion of multiple levels of intervention complicates how we understand the success of our leadership development efforts as well. In the traditional heroic paradigm such questions are asked to assess the impact of leadership interventions: Is the leader gaining more positional authority or is he/she able to influence others? When gauging whether collective capacity for leadership is developed we can use criteria that stem from Bill Drath’s definition of leadership as a meaning-making process for communities of practice. We would know that collective leadership is happening if 1) direction is being set, 2) individual actions are being aligned around that direction, and 3) commitment to the direction is continuously mobilized. When developing leadership for public wellbeing it is also important to include a fourth indicator: that action that enhances the greater good has been taken in demonstrable ways, including that the mission is being accomplished and that there is increased capacity to take up the next challenge.

Future directions for leadership development

A small working group convened to generate ideas and explore future directions for advancing leadership for public wellbeing through development programs. The group discussed serious shortcomings and gaps despite the plethora of leadership offerings for/in the region. For instance, the programs mainly promote individuals as leaders rather than advance group leadership, and, when groups are brought together and teams are built, the life of the group is relatively short-lived, not capitalizing on the synergy gained. The example of the World Economic Forum was used, which routinely brings together diverse individuals of very high caliber from across the Middle East to deal with specific issues. Yet, the groups disband after their work is finished. Another example mentioned was the Forum's Young Global Leaders, where cross-country synergy is perhaps not fully exploited.

Such existing groups could be used as cores for building new communities of leaders, which can be brought together at NYU workshops at certain intervals. The workshops could develop leadership skills and tackle specific substantive problems whereby participants are exposed to experts and gurus in the field, while developing a joint agenda to make a difference as a group. The working group also proposed the possibility of surveying existing leadership programs, evaluating their relative successes and scaling up the effective ones in the region, hence lifting up and adapting good practices. By leveraging and/or continuing other leadership development programs, rather than re-inventing new ones, some of the concerns about sustainability, results and impact on the ground can be better assessed upfront and measured ex-post.

Leadership Teaching

Innovations in teaching models and curricula

Leadership education is often challenging at the undergraduate and graduate level without resorting solely to theoretical models of leadership. Many leadership courses end up teaching students about leadership rather than facilitating a process for students to locate themselves as leaders or to reflect on their experiences of leadership in action. Barbara Harold and Lauren Stephenson of Zayed University's College of Education started with a strategic plan that would expand the role of collaborative research in undergraduate courses, drawing explicitly on the concepts and practices that students bring from their everyday lived experience, to not only develop students' research skills but also their leadership identities. Based on action research, the process devised by Harold and Stephenson enables the exploration of identities of self in a collective pursuit, engages students in exercising leadership, and fosters critical reflection and reflective practice. Some of the assumptions and concepts explored were about leadership as positional or legitimate authority; femininity; and the role of culture, religion and family. Students

were asked to document their own leadership philosophy and reflect and revisit at the end of the program. Echoing the prominent role of faith in understandings of leadership, many of the statements made by students about their leadership identities stemmed from Muslim teachings where leadership and faith are closely aligned.

They then presented Zayed University's year long "Conversation on Leadership" project. Its aim is to elicit university-wide discussion on ways to further infuse the university experience with academic and experiential opportunities for student leadership. The conversation will enable the University to make deliberate adjustments in the curriculum and create a unique, culturally specific, student-centered leadership education program for all students. This conversation was timely because some students stated they had become 'numbed' by the term leadership – they were immersed in references to leadership on campus and in their programs but were not always fully clear what was really meant by the term. The project has had the following effects: 1) the involvement of alumni in sharing their leadership successes and providing feedback to students, faculty and staff about the impact of Zayed University's program on their work and careers, 2) student initiation of events, clubs and societies related to leadership, 3) the university establishment of a new web portal for communicating events and activities and providing a platform for public commentary, and 4) an ongoing guest speaker series where "local" leadership practitioners from the wider community have addressed faculty, staff and students about leadership practice. The structure of college and academic unit representation in the project has provided opportunities for cross-disciplinary discussion and interaction that build a stronger sense of a learning community.

Diane Yu of New York University shared the experience of NYU Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Scholars program. A video relayed some of the fundamentals of this program, which started its inaugural cohort of 16 Scholars in the academic year 2008-09. These Scholars represent a pool of the most outstanding students at the three national UAE universities: Zayed University, the United Arab Emirates University and Higher Colleges of Technology. The program offers this select group unique access to specially designed courses, lectures, leadership experiences, networking, and graduate school opportunities and scholarships.

Future directions in leadership teaching

As with the leadership development group, another small group convened to brainstorm ways to advance leadership for public wellbeing through teaching. The group felt that some the first steps needed include a mapping of existing leadership curricula and teaching efforts in the region and the development of a network of peers on this work. It is important to bring students into the design of programs since it is important to surface their assumptions and frameworks for thinking about

leadership from their own experiences and repertoires. Teaching leadership should be offered at multiple education and career levels, not only the university one. It would be helpful to offer a continuum of offerings delivered through secondary schools, undergraduate and graduate programs, early career, mid-career and senior executive programs. The value proposition of this continuum would need to be established and might include a focus on moral leadership, experiential learning, and up-and-down mentoring. Ideally, partners from government, civil society and business would team up with faculty to offer real life examples and experiences of leadership happening on the ground.

Leadership Research

Many of the insights shared by participants and covered above in this report are based on research, so they will not be recounted in this section. Here we present examples from RCLA's own research work and summarize some of the future directions discussed by the group for leadership research.

Example from RCLA research, situated in new trends in Western understandings of leadership

RCLA developed a social change leadership framework based on seven years of participatory research that illuminates the elements of the “work” of leadership at US social change organizations (SCOs). Leadership for a Changing World is a multi-year, multi-method research program compelled initially by rising discourse about the absence of leadership in the US in the early 2000s despite an abundance of leadership action at the community level. In this project leadership is conceived as a process in which people come together to pursue change. In doing so, they form a community of practice by developing a shared vision of what the world (or some corner of it) should look like, developing assumptions about what is needed to advance that vision, and making sense of the experience along the way. This lens does not negate the role of the individual leader but points attention to the other less visible negotiations that can only develop within the group. So in entering the research work, leadership is understood as a collective achievement and not solely the property of individuals. Since the research is interested in how leadership happens, it was designed in a way that made these organizations' social change work, rather than the leaders, the focus of attention. This demanded a qualitative approach that brought out rich narratives and provided a space for social change leaders to grapple with their own questions.

This research found that at the core of social change leadership are three types of leadership practices that organizations enact both internally and externally to support meaning making that moves collective efforts forward. “Reframing” practices serve to alter dominant conceptions and mental models that perpetuate injustice, while advancing new frames that are congruent with the vision SCOs and

their communities seek. “Bridging” practices bring diverse actors together and facilitate their joint work, breaking the isolation and fragmentation that many individuals experience as a consequence of poverty and marginalization. “Unleashing” practices help unleash human energies, creating the supportive environment that helps every member of the group reclaim their full humanity and recognize their inherent power to direct their lives.

Erica Foldy of NYU Wagner provided an overview of new trends in Western understandings of leadership by focusing on one strand of the literature – collective leadership, an area where there is enormous academic and popular interest. Such interest is partly driven by the increasing understanding that the intractable problems facing the world today will require combined ideas and action from many individuals, often working together across lines of difference, in order to solve them. Despite this expanding thinking, research and practice are generally out of sync with these conceptual understandings. There is little, though growing, research based in this perspective. More importantly, we don’t often see actual examples of such leadership being touted or made visible. When we try to understand how great achievements came about, almost always the narrative is that of a lone, extraordinary individual – the person who saw an opportunity where others did not, developed a new vision and created the means to achieve that vision. Some of the reasons for the existence of this gap include the power of individual egos and the proliferation of already visible leaders in narrating their own success. Another reason is that enacting collective leadership requires empathetic, communal and relational behaviors that, rightly or wrongly, are stereotypically labeled as feminine.

Research about collective leadership: challenges and suggestions

The gap between collective leadership as an ideal, and actual research and practice, partly stems from the difficulty of documenting a collective entity. Foldy posed the following questions: How can research be done without focusing on individuals? What entity is studied, the organization, group or network? And more generally, how does one describe actions or behaviors without attributing them to individuals? Foldy offered the following ideas for rendering collective leadership more visible and valued:

- We need a deeper understanding of what ties us to more traditional, hierarchical models about leadership and why we are invested in them. Only once we are able to surface the assumptions we take for granted can we reflect on them and potentially change them.
- Paradoxically, we need more individuals to enact the leadership required to acknowledge the collective achievement that they may represent or has been ascribed to them.
- We also need an understanding the dynamic between individual agency or initiative and the collective – recognizing that both are inherent in leadership.

Future directions for leadership research

A break-out group of participants reflected on the various research experiences presented throughout the workshop and the possible future directions to advance research on public wellbeing in the Middle East. Some topics for existing and/or proposed research include:

- How do traditions get re-imagined in the practice of leadership?
- How do leadership and new leadership strategies emerge from the collective management of resources that are critical to the community? The example of water was suggested, as were other forms of resources, such as education, political access etc.
- Shuratic leadership: historical roots, current practice and possibilities for adaptation
- Alternative spaces for excluded groups
- Civic engagement modalities created by youth
- Successful, non-positional leadership

Some of the research proposed would need to take new approaches that include a radically broader definition of leadership, owing to the fact that people taking action on the ground may not see what they do as leadership. In order to generate contextual cases about leadership, much needed in development and teaching programs, a large-scale project might take a comparative approach to leadership across the Middle East, working with students trained in oral history or other qualitative methods.

Participants stressed the need for a network of researchers, perhaps hosted by NYU, where leadership scholars and researchers come together at regular intervals to share and cross-fertilize their research findings and collaborate on research projects. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience existing within this group, and rich research material that can be organized into an edited volume or an academic special issue on leadership. Some researchers in the group would be interested in contributing their time in organizing such a volume, a process that would be greatly facilitated by the provision of convening space or resources to hold a writing workshop for this purpose.

Concluding Remarks

Workshop conversations were immensely helpful in learning about the processes and practices of leadership – how leadership happens – and in reminding and inspiring ourselves about the importance of engaging in a public-mission model of leadership – why leadership happens. Although rich in discussions, the group merely scratched the surface over these three days. Yet it became increasingly clear that leadership for public wellbeing happens in fluid ways, traversing divisions of sectors, formal training and dictations of tradition. It also became clear that this

form of leadership happens in order to meet the needs of communities that have fallen off of society's radar and in the process, open up new spaces for deliberation and engagement. A generative, more collective approach to fostering leadership was recognized by the group as the way forward.

Supporting leadership for public wellbeing entails advancing the very discipline that has largely failed to recognize it. It entails working on a discursive level to advance a more inclusive and enabling model of leadership, while building capacity for more groups to engage in leadership. This is an ambitious endeavor, one that honors leadership that acts for public good in some of the most challenging contexts.

Yet a smaller scale and manageable starting point might be to capitalize on the existing network by continuing to convene this group, while working to expand this community of learning. Participants found it invaluable to come together in peer-learning mode, sharing their conceptual frameworks and theories derived from their research, but also the very practical experiences of research, teaching and leadership development for the advancement of public wellbeing.