Social Consensus Regarding Leadership Succession at the Al-Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren in Central Java Province

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Abstract: This research explored the process of leadership succession in a pesantren community and the associated organizational framework which is based on achieving an internal consensus to prevent a chaotic succession process. The research location was Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren, Central Java Province which is an important center of education for the pesantren community. Primary and secondary data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations and secondary data analysis was performed. This research covered the entire pesantren community including caretakers, religious teachers and alumni. Spokespeople for the pesantren community in various locations were the data sources. The research was based on both etic and emic approaches. The research's result showed that succession in the pesantren community is usually a natural process; however, given the prestige associated with the top "PPP4" leadership position, several vying parties/factions emerged. There tended to be more internal support for hereditary successors to the top leadership position compared to their competitors. Personal charisma was key to securing internal support. Conflict tends to remain latent, any conflict that did occur was reduced by internal consolidation and social consensus, achieved through key figures in the community. This research indicates the importance of shared solidarity to address and solve internal community problems. The Pesantren's leadership can be used in educational institutions in which based on traditional Islamic religion and needs to be supportive of The Religious Educational Management. The Pesantren's leadership can enhance the significant commitment of students and teachers as well as to reduce stress and any other conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is critical in society including pesantren communities. Leadership in both modern and traditional pesantren communities is usually managed based on the family structure; this can be seen at Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren in Central Java Province. The leadership in pesantren communities is hereditary. For example, Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren, the largest Pesantren community in Southern Central Java is currently led by a third-generation ruler. Pesantren communities raise younger generations to appreciate academic achievement and be of good moral standing. Pesantren community leaders go to great lengths to develop future leaders among the younger generation. Leaders and teachers are recruited between the elementary and university levels based on family ties and religious upbringing.

Leadership succession has the potential to cause internal family conflicts. Bashori stated that conflict can be caused by the absence of agreement among individuals and groups; moreover, leadership succession in an organization can trigger other conflicts, depending on the prevailing social sentiment[1].

Normally, leadership is passed from the community founder to his children; the next in line is the son-in-law, followed by the grandchildren and finally a "senior student". If the heir is male, he will be considered a future religious teacher or community leader based on his degree of wisdom and depth of religious knowledge. If the founder does not have a son, succession proceeds according to the above order.

Researchers have long been interested in the role of social consensus in overcoming leadership succession conflicts at the Al-Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren in Central Java. The current leader is a third-generation ruler. As described by Ashabiyah, communities with a third-generation leader are more vulnerable to conflict and disunity which could bring chaos to the community. In pesantren communities, the smoothness of succession largely determines the progress of community educational organizations. Much research has been conducted on the dynamics, conflicts and resolutions thereof in pesantren communities Hamidah and Aijuddin[2] for an overview. Their study showed that collapse of pesantren communities can occur due to internal conflicts, mostly related to leadership succession. This can potentially be avoided by the actions of pesantren community members skilled in conflict resolution.

Pesantren communities have a unique social system but are not immune to conflict. In this research, for the first time we investigated the potential for achieving social consensus to facilitate leadership succession at the Al-Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren Central Java. Despite the necessity of transparency and democracy, pesantren communities are not willing to allow outsiders to participate in the leadership succession process. Although, the use of technology in pesantren communities has changed, their decision-making processes have not. Despite the research on pesantren community conflicts mentioned above, the succession process has yet to be studied in detail. The Al-Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren is the largest educational institution in Central Java and thus serves as a model for similar, smaller institutions. We addressed the following questions: What are the characteristics of the leadership succession process in pesantren communities? and How can internal consensus be achieved, so that, the succession process does not cause widespread conflict?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research target (Al-Achalakul Karimah Pesantren in Central Java Province) was selected based on the importance of education to the local community. Primary and secondary data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations and secondary data analysis was performed. The research covered the entire pesantren community including caretakers, religious teachers and alumni. A purposive sampling technique and an etc approach were used. Qualitative data were categorized for analysis and the potential for resolving conflict and facilitating the leadership succession process was assessed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the pesantren community: The Al-Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren is located in a village in Cilacap Regency, Central Java Province, which was established in 1925 on an area of 4 hectares. The founder, Pondok Pesantren was raised to be a religious teacher. Against a background of Dutch colonialism, the religious center, originally a small hut, stood on the grounds of the Musholla Muslim worship site. Over time, this site has grown to the point where it now includes 10 kindergartens, 11 junior high schools, 10 senior high schools and 2 universities. The pesantren community has also become more complex and increasingly populous over the years with many titles and leadership roles being awarded to community members. The community has also attempted to absorb surrounding communities that depend on the nearby land and sea for farming and fishing.

Roles in the pesantren community: The largest group in the pesantren community are the Santri; these students have studied at the Al-Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren for a long time with the goal of becoming experts in the Islamic religion. In addition, to students and religious teachers,
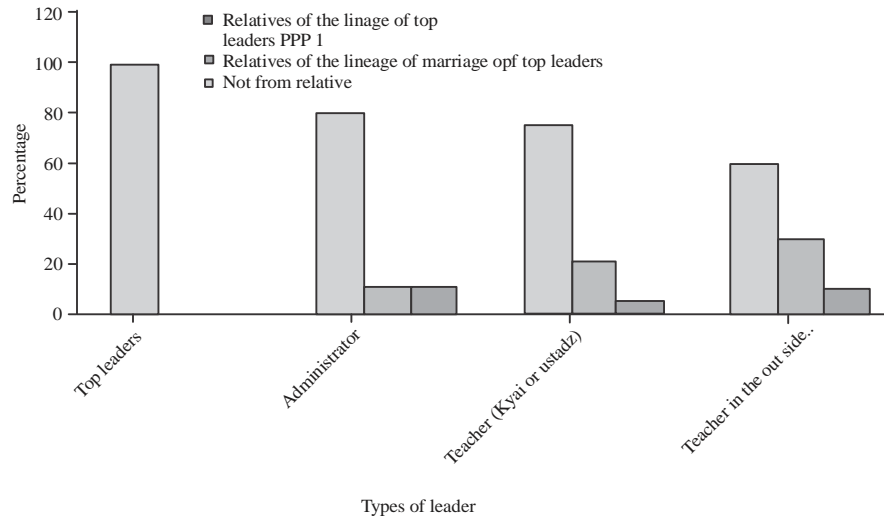
Fig. 1: Leadership positions in the Al-Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren

Table 1: Criteria by which leadership roles are filled in islamic boarding schools

Leadership criterion	Leadership style				
	Top leaders	Administrators	Caregivers	Kyai/Ustadz	Mubaligh
Relative of top leaders	√	√	√	√	√
Related to top leaders by marriage		√	√	√	√
Based on deliberation and consensus		√			
Based on the results of a vote					
Based on academic achievement and devoutness					

Primary data in 2020

there are also preachers (who teach outside of the boarding school), administrators and caregivers in the community (Fig. 1).

There are a variety of leaders at the Al-Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren. Caregivers are at the top of the hierarchy. Generally, the "primary caregiver" is related to the founder of the boarding school. The caregiver at Al Ihya'Ulumaddin Pesantren is the child of the primary caregiver. Caregivers are followed by administrators and religious teachers in the leadership hierarchy. To become a caretaker, one does not have to be related to the primary caregiver; being related by marriage to the child or niece of the primary caregiver is sufficient. Religious teachers can be relatives of PPP1 (top leader from the first generation) caregivers including by marriage or non-relatives. However, they are usually descendants of primary PPP1 caregivers. For outstanding and devout students, the profession of preacher represents the best career opportunity. Descendants of caretakers dominate this profession where "preacher" refers to a teacher of the Qur'an (ustadz; specifically da'wah) operating outside the boarding school. Sociologically, it can be said that recruitment in pesantren organization tends to be patterned in nepotism because the appointment of people tends to have inheritance or marital ties.

The process by which community leaders emerge: Community leaders usually emerge from PPP1 (generation 1) and PPP4 (generation 4). Despite demands for progress, the purpose of pesantren communities remains to develop individuals of high moral caliber (Table 1).

The pesantren leadership recruitment system is shown in Table 1. Almost all roles including religious teachers, caregivers and administrators for caregivers at the top management level are generally filled by relatives (including by marriage) of those in the top leadership and management positions in particular, very few immigrant students are nominated. Students who become kiyai or ustadz after graduating, due to their devoutness, usually operate outside of the pesantren.

As shown schematically in Fig. 2, leaders in the Al-Akhlakul Karimah Pesantren always emerge from the family of the founder. The sons of the founder are considered most capable of leadership, due to their high-level religious education. Third-generation leaders are in fact the younger siblings of second-generation leaders because the children of the second-generation leaders are not deemed sufficiently mature to lead. Fourth-generation leaders are the children of second-generation leaders, however. Notably, competition
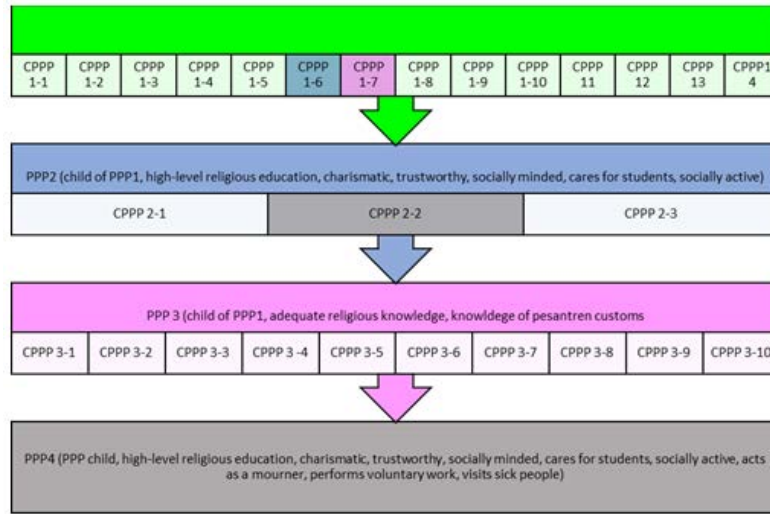
Fig. 2: Leadership candidates in generations I-IV; CPP: candidate leader; PPP1: first-generation leader; PPP2: second-generation leader; PPP3: third-generation leader; PPP4: fourth-generation leader
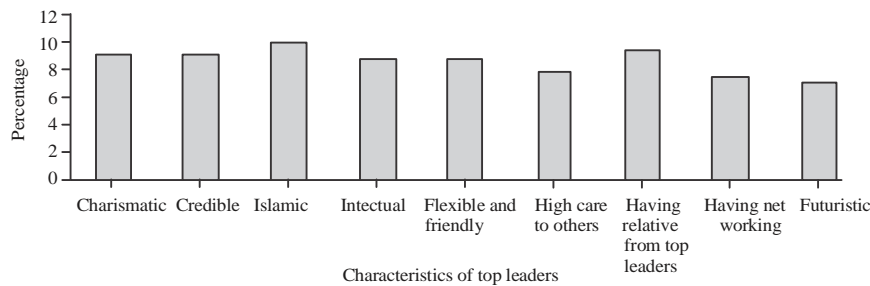

Fig. 3: Characteristics of top leaders in pesantren communities

between the children of second-generation leaders and their younger siblings has tended to make the succession process more robust (Fig. 3).

The most desirable characteristics of pesantren community leaders are shown in Fig. 3. Holding public office requires the following characteristics: Islamic descent, related to top leaders, trustworthy, charismatic, friendly and flexible, concerned with the wider community, extensive network of relationships and forward thinking. Charisma plays a major role in the ability to lead in pesantren communities and may be more important than being progressive or forward thinking as reported by Lee *et al*.[3]. Asgari *et al*.[4] reported on a succession process in a relatively large pesantren community in Western Central Java, involving two factions related to top leaders; they demonstrated that several factors are involved in choosing leaders. Leaders must be inspirational, motivational and charismatic where transformational leadership

requires active exchange between leaders and followers. As stated by Clark *et al*.[5], the willingness to serve others is an equally important trait in leaders.

Internal social consensus can reduce conflict arising during the succession process: Conflict is inherent in society and pesantren communities are no exception. In particular, there is potential for conflict regarding fourth-generation boarding school leaders. As shown in Fig. 2, competition for the PPP4 primary caregiver position occurred between PPP2 and PPP3-2 (son-in-law; husband of PPP2).

Traditionally, competing factions for leadership roles are summoned by respected community figures. Failing that the parties attend a council of religious teachers where "soft diplomacy" serves to mitigate more significant conflict. The council seeks to identify key factors preventing conflict resolution and arrive at a
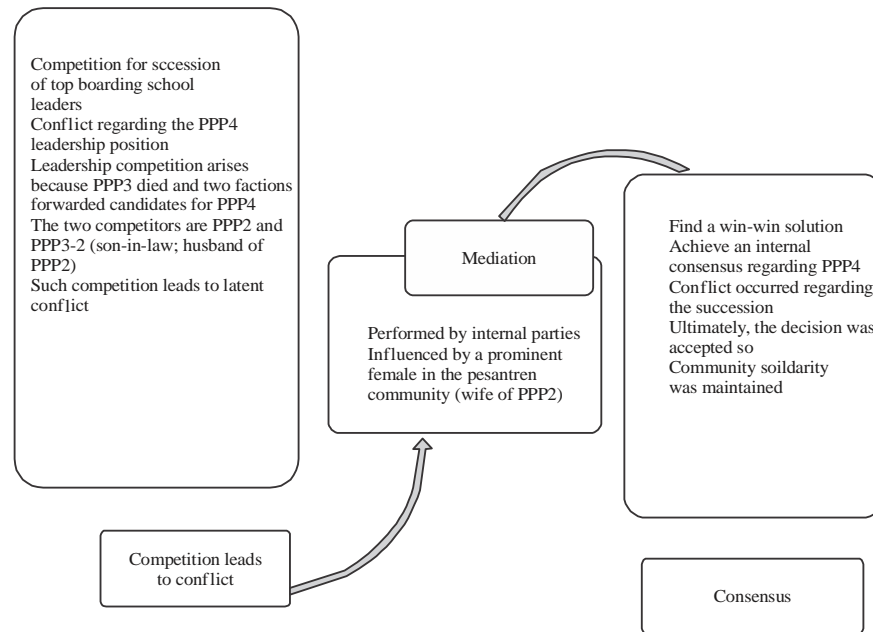
Fig. 4: Dynamics of leadership succession in a pesantren community

solution through deliberation (i.e., a dialogue between boarding school officials). The final decision is made by the incumbent caregiver; however, the legitimacy of the decision is ensured by a council (fatwa)comprising other caregivers. Before the decision is made public, an internal consolidation process designed to achieve consensus takes place; this is usually in the form of a meeting between core community figures to find common ground on a particular issue such as succession).

Internal consolidation is a practical step that can be taken by managers in organizations to reduce conflict and risk[6]. Small, informal meetings can lead to essential organizational changes if the decisions of the group are binding and thus have broad legitimacy. This is important for internal and external recognition of the legitimacy of any decisions made[7]. Internal consolidation usually leads to consensus in organizational decisions; thus leading to a smoother succession process based on thoughtful deliberation (Fig. 4).

Internal consolidation is designed to find win-win solutions which may involve "give and take" among the parties involved. Internal consolidation is considered successful when an internal consensus emerges in an extended family. Succession can be complicated when many candidates are forwarded for consideration as PPP4. However, succession is important in the interests of unity and solidarity in the pesantren community.

CONCLUSION

Succession is usually hereditary in Pesantren communities but because the position of PPP4 is prestigious, other parties may express interest. A candidate's charm, experience, degree of internal support and overall quality influence the likelihood of succession. Any conflicts that occur are generally latent and the community is not directly impacted by differences in opinion. Thus, the community life of the Pesantren should remain healthy and any conflicts can be resolved by discussion and internal consolidation. This study implies that similar organizations could benefit from understanding the importance of solidarity when seeking to resolve internal problems.

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