

Leadership: An Islamic Perspective

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This book is dedicated to our parents and to a leader who has inspired many: Khurram Murad.

وَمَا كُنَّا بِمُرْسِلِيْنَ
الْحَقِّ اِلَّا بِوَحْيٍ مِّنْ
رَّبِّنَا ۚ وَمَا كُنَّا
بِمُرْسِلِيْنَ الْحَقِّ اِلَّا
بِاِذْنِ رَبِّنَا ۚ وَمَا
كُنَّا بِمُرْسِلِيْنَ الْحَقِّ
اِلَّا بِوَحْيٍ مِّنْ رَبِّنَا ۚ
وَمَا كُنَّا بِمُرْسِلِيْنَ
الْحَقِّ اِلَّا بِوَحْيٍ مِّنْ
رَّبِّنَا ۚ وَمَا كُنَّا
بِمُرْسِلِيْنَ الْحَقِّ اِلَّا
بِاِذْنِ رَبِّنَا ۚ وَمَا
كُنَّا بِمُرْسِلِيْنَ الْحَقِّ
اِلَّا بِوَحْيٍ مِّنْ رَبِّنَا ۚ

And We made them leaders guiding (men) by Our Command and We sent them inspiration to do good deeds, to establish regular prayers and to practice regular charity; and they constantly served Us (and Us only). (Qur'an¹, Anbiyaa, 21: 73).

¹ The Qur'an is the last of the Divine Book revealed by God (Allah) to His Last Messenger and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

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Preface

In the Name of God², The Beneficent, The Merciful

Leadership in Islam is a trust (*amanah*). It represents a psychological contract between a leader and his followers that he will try his best to guide them, to protect them and to treat them fairly and with justice. Hence, the focus of leadership in Islam is on doing good.

According to Islam, every person is the “shepherd” of a flock, and occupies a position of leadership.³ *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective* is about how Muslims⁴ enact their leadership role. This book is directed both at Non-Muslims seeking to understand the leadership paradigm of 1 billion Muslims globally and at Muslims wishing to understand leadership better.

Why should you be interested in leadership from an Islamic perspective? Here are some new global facts that relate specifically to the renaissance that Muslims are currently experiencing:

Muslims are waking up. Look around you. Muslims are coming back together. They are re-uniting. They are standing up for their rights—political and otherwise. And they are succeeding. Recently, global corporations such as Nike and American Airlines have backed down in the face of the justified indignation of Muslims in America, and have removed offensive labels or rehired Muslims. Law enforcement agencies, public institutions as well corporations in North America are now engaged in diversity training; in addition to other issues related to minorities, such programs attempt to educate employees about interaction with Muslims. These changes have happened because of the work of one Muslim organization, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). With the help of the Muslim community in North America, CAIR has succeeded in turning back the tide of anti-Islamic coverage in the popular media. In Britain, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) has just recently been set up to coordinate the voices of all Muslims and Muslim organizations in Great Britain.

Muslims are becoming Ummah⁵ aware. The rise of regional, and even global, Muslim-led or Muslim-owned Multinational Corporations (MNCs) such as Hi-

² God or Allah. Allah is the essential personal name of God. In this book, we will use both terms interchangeably.

³ Reported by Abd Allah Ibn Umar, Sahih Bukhari, hadith 3.733. The term *Hadith* refers to the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (*saw*).

⁴ The term *Muslim* is used throughout the book in its generic meaning to include both males and females who submit their will to Allah, namely God. All Islamic and/or Arabic terms are explained in the glossary on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

⁵ *Ummah* is an Islamic concept, referring to a community of believers, regardless of racial, ethnic, geographic or other boundaries.

com (Malaysia), Savola (Saudi Arabia) or Infocom (USA) indicates that they can succeed at the global community or *Ummah* level. The Information Revolution has also helped Muslims become aware of their common destiny. When they wake up and see the faces of their raped sisters in Bosnia or the repression of a whole Muslim people in China, there is immediate empathy and anguish. In spite of the lukewarm efforts of their own governments, Muslims from many countries joined up the Bosnians in their efforts to defend themselves against “ethnic cleansing”.

Education and knowledge management are key. Muslims are beginning to invest heavily in education and knowledge management, and the results are tangible. The Pentium chip that powers millions of computers around the world had several Muslims on the development team. Professor Abdul Wahab El Messiri is one of the leading authorities in paradigm shifts. Safi Quraishi was one of the founders of AST, a globally known personal computer manufacturer. The 1998 Noble Prize Winner for Medicine was Dr. Ferid Murad. Muslims are realizing that the true source of wealth is not exhaustible oil resources, but intellectual pre-eminence. This realization is leading Muslim countries around the world to invest in themselves and in the education of future generations on a massive scale. Malaysia, for example, is investing \$40 billion dollars in developing a Multimedia Service Corridor to compete with America’s Silicon Valley.

The leadership paradigm is changing, and ethics is making a comeback. The best sellers in the area of leadership now emphasize sincerity and integrity. The Machiavellian and other self-serving models of leadership which have long dominated contemporary thinking in this area are being dethroned. The House and Senate Committees on Ethics in the United States have been scrutinizing many lawmakers’ business transactions and fundraising activities. The superiority of a leadership model centered on ethical principles is finally emerging—a position that Islam has embraced since its beginning.

Democracy is on the rise, providing more people with the ability to investigate and practice Islam. Whenever Muslims or Non-Muslims are allowed more democracy, they are consistently choosing Islam. Decades of experimentation with alternate systems of government have been fruitless, and core Islamic values are re-asserting themselves. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States, and is now the second largest religion in France.

We assume complete responsibility for all views expressed in the book. We apologize for any mistake that may have gone unnoticed. We would appreciate it if the copyrights to this book are not violated by either unauthorized reprinting or translation. Please contact us first for written permission.

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October 30, 1998

Introduction

Leadership: An Islamic Perspective

مَا لِي رَأَيْتُمْ أُصْغِرُ كَيْفَ يَكُونُ لِأَنْبِيَاءٍ
 لَوْ كُنُوا عِبَادًا لِحُكْمِ اللَّهِ فَخُلِقَ الْإِنْسَانُ
 فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ لِيُخْبِرَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ
 قُلُوبَهُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ مَتَابِعَهُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ

Is it they who would portion out the Mercy of your Lord? It is We Who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world: and We raise some of them above others in ranks so that some may command work from others. But the Mercy of your Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass (Qur'an, Zukhruf, 43: 32).

Abd Allah Ibn Umar (God be pleased with them) reported that the Messenger of God (saw)⁶ said: "Behold! Each of you is a guardian, and each of you will be asked about his subjects. [...]"⁷

Objectives of this Book:

After reading this book and doing the leadership exercises included therein, you should, *in sha' Allah*⁸, be able to:

- Understand the nature and process of leadership from an Islamic perspective.
- Describe the characteristics of effective leaders in general, and of Islamic leaders in particular.
- Analyze your leadership and followership styles.
- Learn how you can mobilize, organize and develop your followers Islamically.
- Learn how you, as a leader, can build commitment by acting as a coach and mentor.
- Learn how to delegate effectively.

⁶ *saw*: May the peace and mercy of God be upon him. This is a common phrases used by Muslims whenever the name of a prophet is mentioned.

⁷ Sahih Bukhari, hadith 3.733.

⁸ God willing, or Allah willing.

- Understand the steps that will enable you to become a more effective leader (or follower).

The subject of leadership is crucial in Islam. In most circumstances in life, Muslims are urged to appoint a leader and follow him. For example, the Prophet Muhammad⁹ (*saw*) said, “When three are on a journey, they should appoint one of them as their commander.”¹⁰ According to the Prophet (*saw*), Muslims must appoint a leader during a trip, select a leader (*imam*) to lead the prayer, and choose a leader for other group activities. The husband is the leader of his family. In the absence of her husband, the wife assumes the role of leader of the house.

In this book, we will examine what leadership is from an Islamic perspective. We will identify the characteristics of successful leaders. Islamic role models both from the *Seerah*¹¹ of the Prophet (*saw*) as well as from current history will be described in order to provide examples that we can learn from.

Why have these leaders been so effective? A first answer is an emphasis on the locus of leadership—matching the characteristics of the leader, the follower and the situation. A second answer relates to one of the most important roles of leaders, but one that is often neglected in Islamic organizations: the role of the leader as coach. Leaders of Islamic organizations often forget that the success of their organizations depend partly on how they recruit, train and motivate volunteers. This topic will be discussed in detail in the coaching and delegation chapters. Another reason why some Islamic leaders are more effective than others relates to their ability to use multiple frames or perspectives across different situations. Using the same scenario, four different frames will be presented, including an integrative, Islamic frame. Finally, we will describe an integrative model of leadership effectiveness in an Islamic context.

To facilitate the reader’s understanding of Islamic terms, a glossary of all special terms used in this book has been added at the end of the book. These terms will be indicated in *italics*.

⁹ Henceforth, in this book, we will refer to the Prophet Muhammad (*saw*) as the Prophet (*saw*).

¹⁰ Reported by Abu Said al Khudri in Abu Daud, 2:721, Chapter 933, hadith #2602.

¹¹ Biography of the Prophet Muhammad (*saw*).

Chapter 1

Defining Leadership

Exercise: The well-known nine-dot problem (Figure 1-1) illustrates some of the attributes of the leadership process. Connect the nine dots with four straight lines without lifting your pen or pencil from the paper, in one uninterrupted stroke, and without going back over the same line. However, the lines may cross each other. What does the solution reveal about the nature of leadership?

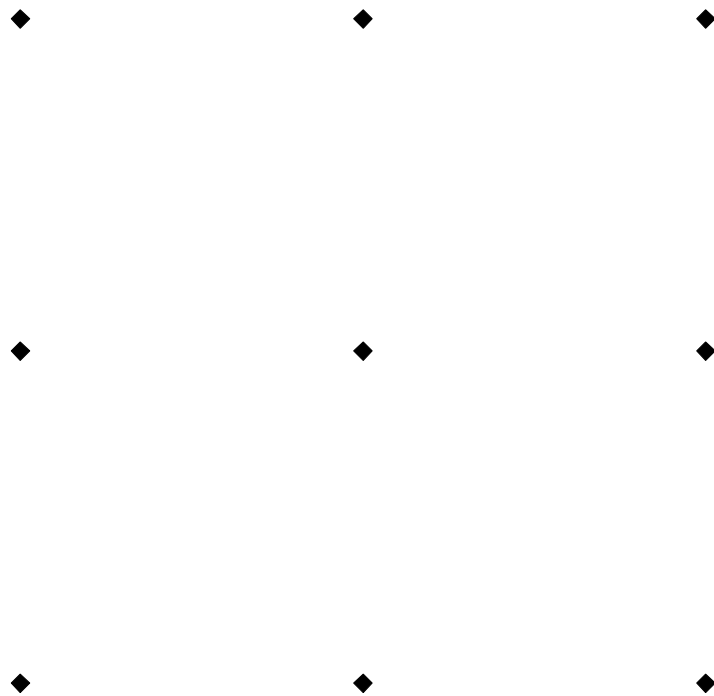


Figure 1-1: The nine-dot problem

There are several solutions to this problem, but we have listed only one potential solution at the end of this chapter. The nine dots do not, by themselves, suggest the solution space for the problem. However, almost every person trying to solve this problem will allow himself to be mentally confined by the boundaries apparently suggested by the nine dots. What does the solution

suggest about what leadership is? As Murad indicates¹², leadership is the ability to see beyond assumed boundaries, and to come up with solutions or paths that few can visualize. The leader must then project this vision for everyone to see and pursue.

An anecdote from the *Seerah* of the Prophet Muhammad (*saw*) indicates his ability to envision what his companions could not. During one of the darkest times faced by Muslims, the prelude to the Battle of the Trench, he was blessed by God with a vision of the *Ummah's* future:

After many vain attempts to split or dislodge a rock he struck, 'Umar went to the Prophet (saw) who took the pickaxe from him, and gave the rock a blow at which a flare as of lightning flashed back over the city and towards the south. He gave it another blow and again there was a flash but in the direction of Uhud and beyond it towards the north. A third blow split the rock into fragments, and this time the light flashed eastwards. Salman saw the three flashes and knew they must have some significance, so he asked for an interpretation from the Prophet (saw) who said: "Did you see them, Salman? By the light of the first, I saw the castles of Yemen; by the light of the second, I saw the castles of Syria; by the light of the third, I saw the white palace of Kisra at Mada'in. Through the first has God opened up to me the Yemen; through the second has He opened up to me Syria and the West, and through the third, the East."¹³

This vision of the Prophet (*saw*) has motivated Muslims for more than a millenium. At one point, the Muslim *Ummah* had to wait 700 years for Constantinople to be liberated. The vision still energizes Muslims.

Although a leader's vision is not typically divinely inspired, it can act like a magnet as it energizes, focuses and directs the efforts of followers. For example, Delta Airlines' vision of becoming "the world's airline of choice" typifies the galvanizing effect that a leader can reap through a shared vision. Although Delta is not yet the best airline in the world, its employees are among the most motivated and quality-oriented in the services they provide to their customers.¹⁴

Vision is but one component which researchers have examined in defining leadership.¹⁵ In this book, we will rely on two primary definitions. First,

¹² Murad, Khurram (1996). *Islamic Movement Theory and Practice: A Course for those Striving for Islamic Change in the West*. Young Muslims, UK., Talk 9.

¹³ Lings, Martin. (1983). *Muhammad: His Life Based On The Earliest Sources*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, p. 218.

¹⁴ Peters, T. & Waterman, R. (1982). *In Search of Excellence*. New York, NY: Warner Books.

¹⁵ Stogdill, R. M. (1974). *Handbook Of Leadership: A Survey Of Theory And Research*. New York: Free Press.

leadership is depicted as the “process by which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of followers in an effort to reach organizational objectives.”¹⁶

What does the above definition imply? It suggests that leadership is essentially a social exchange process. There can be no leader without followers, and no followers without a leader. The leader, as the organization’s visionary, must communicate the vision with clarity and conviction. He must articulate it in terms that they can understand and relate to. The followers must share the vision and be willing to climb aboard. During this whole process, a leader will be a catalyst and a coach, a mentor and a role model. At all times, however, a leader must remember that he cannot force others to change. They must want to change.

لَا يُكْرَهُ عَلَى الْمَرْءِ الْإِسْلَامُ
 وَالْإِسْلَامُ هُوَ الْإِيمَانُ
 وَالْإِيمَانُ هُوَ الْإِسْلَامُ
 وَالْإِسْلَامُ هُوَ الْإِيمَانُ

Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error; whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things. (Qur’an, Baqarah, 2: 256)

God considers the voluntary dimension of individual behavior to be so important that He emphasizes it in another verse:

لَوْ شَاءَ رَبِّي لَمَا كَانُوا
 فِي الْآرْضِ إِلَّا أُمَّةً
 وَاحِدَةً لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

If it had been the Lord's Will they would all have believed all who are on earth! Will you then compel mankind against their will to believe! (Qur’an, Yunus, 10: 99)

A second definition of leadership distinguishes it from the more routine processes associated with management:

Leadership is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically. It is the human factor which binds a group together and

¹⁶ Schriesheim, C. A., Tolliver, J. M. and Behling, O. C. (1978). Leadership theory: Some implications for Managers. *MSU Topics*, Summer (26): 35.

*motivates it toward goals. Management activities such as planning, organizing, decision making are dormant cocoons until the leader triggers the power of motivation in people and guides them toward their goals.*¹⁷

The above definition of leadership stresses that a leader is more than just a manager. Leading and managing are not the same thing. Warren Bennis, a leadership expert, summarizes the distinction between leadership and management as follows: “The difference between managers and leaders is fundamental. The manager administers, the leader innovates. The manager maintains, the leader develops. The manager relies on systems, the leader relies on people. The manager counts on control, the leader counts on trust. The manager does things right, the leader does the right thing.”¹⁸

An organization with good management, but poor leadership will preserve the status quo, but may not be able to advance to a higher level of performance. An organization that has an excellent leader, but nobody with good management skills may aspire to great heights, but crash precipitously because there is no one to follow through. In modern Islamic organizations, both leaders and managers are needed. Leaders can reframe experience to open new possibilities; managers can provide a sense of perspective and order so that the new possibilities become reality.

Distinguishing between leadership, power and authority

Since leadership involves interpersonal influence, it is often confused with two other concepts: authority and power. Power is “the ability to marshal the human, informational, and material resources to get something done,”¹⁹ and encompasses both leadership and authority. To clarify the relationship among these concepts, we need to refer to the two primary types of power: personal and position power. These two types of power can be derived from several sources or bases of a leader’s power.²⁰ Table 1-1 summarizes these types and bases of power. As we will see below, the Islamic perspective of leadership incorporates all seven bases of power.

¹⁷ Davis, K. (1967). *Human Relations At Work: The Dynamics Of Organizational Behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 96.

¹⁸ Bennis, Warren. (1988) *Fortune*. January.

¹⁹ McCall, Jr., M. (1978). Power, influence, and authority: The hazards of carrying a sword. *Technical Report*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 10.

²⁰ French, J. R. P. and Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In Dorwin Cartwright, ed. *Studies In Social Power*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, pp. 150-167. Hinkin, Timothy R. and Schriesheim, Chester. (1988). Power and influence: The view from below. *Personnel*, May, pp. 47-50.

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Jazak Allah khair.