



THE ROOT CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP IN THE
QUR'AN: AN EXPOSITION OF ITS ESSENCE

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the Western conventional concepts of leadership of Plato and Aristotle. The work also discusses several contemporary theories: traits, great-man, behavioural, situational/contingency, charismatic, visionary, transformational, leader-member exchange, ethical, strategic, authentic, cross-cultural and level 5 leadership, amongst others. It reveals that all concepts remain vulnerable and helpless when it comes to infusing the desired sense of accountability in the leader and hence, no central or foundation knowledge can be identified as the root concept. The work also looks at the concepts of Islamic scholars, namely Al-Mawardi, Al Ghazzali, Ibn Taiymiyyah, Ibn-Khaldun, Afzalur Rahman, Rafiq I Beekun and Jamal Badwi, and Naquib al-Attas, but no concept provides a single trait for becoming a successful leader. A survey on the holy Quran by thematic induction (*al-Istiqrā al –Ma‘nawī*) clearly shows the existence of a pure trait *Dhikrā al-Dār* (Remembrance of the Hereafter), and a vast extent of this trait serves as the root concept of leadership. It reveals that Allah (swt) endowed this trait to Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh) and declared him the leader of mankind and asked Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to follow Ibrahim (pbuh) as the best model. The introduction of this trait brings about universal vision, wisdom, a keen sense of accountability, motivation, courage and justice amongst other things. All these arguably made Muhammad (pbuh) the most influential leader of all times who was supremely successful in both the religious and secular level.

ملخص البحث

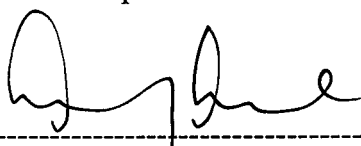
تركز هذه الدراسة على مفهوم القيادة التقليديّ الغربيّ عند إفلاطون وأرسطو، وتناقش عدة نظريّات حديثة عن القيادة؛ بما في ذلك صفات القائد السلوكيّة والموقفية والكاريزميّة، والرؤية البصيرة، و التعامل مع التغيرات، وتبادل الصّفات القياديّة، والأخلاقيّة، والاستراتيجيّة، وتبادل الحقائق عبر الثقافات، والمستوى الخامس في القيادة، وغير ذلك من صفات القيادة. وتشير الدّراسة إلى أنّ تعريفات القيادة تظل ناقصةً عندما لا يتعلق الأمر بغرس الشّعور المطلوب والإحساس بالمسؤوليّة في القائد من حيث تصرفاته، ومواقفه الحقيقيّة، وقدرته على مجابهة المواقف. هذه الدّراسة تنظر أيضًا إلى تعريف علماء الإسلام لمفهوم القيادة ومنهم: الماورديّ، والغزاليّ، وابن تيميّة، وابن خلدون، وأفضل الرّحمن، ورفيق إ. بيكون، وجمال بدوي، ونقيب العطّاس؛ ولكن هذه التعريفات خلت من الإشارة إلى صفةٍ واحدةٍ تجعل القائد قائدًا ناجحًا. قام الباحث بدراسة مسحيّة للقرآن الكريم عبر الاستقراء المعنويّ؛ أثبتت بوضوح وجود صفة نقية: "ذكر الدار"، والمقصود تذكّر الدّار الآخرة التي تنطلق منها كلّ هذه الصّفات، وتمثّل هذه الصّفة المفهوم الأساس لمعنى القيادة. وتشير الدّراسة إلى أنّ الله سبحانه وتعالى منح هذه الصّفة لنبه إبراهيم عليه السلام، مُعلنًا أنه قائد الإنسانيّة، وطلب من محمّد صلّى الله عليه وسلّم اتباع إبراهيم عليه السّلام بوصفه أحسن نموذج. إنّ التعريف بهذه الصّفة يقود إلى نظرة عالميّة، كما يقود إلى الحكمة، والشّعور بالمسؤوليّة، والشّجاعة والدّافعية، والعدل ويقود إلى صفات أخرى. كلّ هذه الصّفات جعلت من الرّسول صلّى الله عليه وسلّم قائدًا أكثر تأثيرًا على مرّ العصور، والذي نجح بتفوق على المستويين القياديّ والدينيّ.

APPROVAL PAGE

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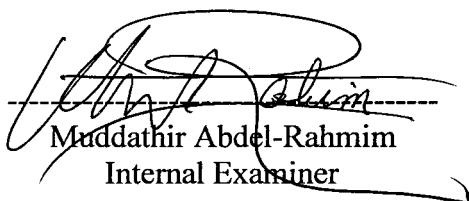


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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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**THE ROOT CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP IN THE QUR'AN: AN
EXPOSITION OF ITS ESSENCE**

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Arabic Transliteration Scheme (According to IIUM Thesis Manual)

Consonant

Arabic term	Transliteration	Arabic term	Transliteration	Arabic term	Transliteration
ء	‘	ز	z	ق	q
ب	b	س	s	ك	k
ت	t	ش	sh	ل	l
ث	th	ص	ṣ	م	m
ج	j	ض	ḍ	ن	n
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ه	h
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	w
د	d	ع	‘	ي	y
ذ	dh	غ	gh		
ر	r	ف	f		

Vowel

Arabic term	Transliteration	Arabic term	Transliteration
أ	a	آ	ā
إ	i	إي	ī
أ	u	أو	ū
أى	ay	أو	aw

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the sixth century of the Christian era the plight of the Romans and Persians sunk 'to a state of complete moral depravity'. The Arabs – like all other peoples at that time, not only buried the female infants alive but also pushed those who were spared to unspeakable misery and dejection. Wine and women went together, and as a result of licentious drinking, fornication was very rampant. Their common features were: idol worship, lust for sensuous pleasure, tribal pride, clan warfare, arrogant, disregard and lack of respect for women.

However, it was observed that in a short span of close to twenty years, a movement that had started under the leadership of just one man, was able to bring about a revolution of peace and justice in almost all the Arabs and non-Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula and bound them together into a brotherhood of faith by the grace of Allah and the miraculous effect of the holy Qur'an. A Non-Muslim researcher's words¹ can be put as an evidence of it where he says,

These Bedouin tribesmen, inspired by the word of the Prophet, had carved out an empire stretching from the border of India to the Atlantic Ocean-the largest empire that world had yet seen.

They were clearly a people who were taken from darkness into light and to the straight path of Allah under the Leadership of Prophet (pbuh). A study ranking the

¹ Michel H. Hart, *The 100*, (New York: Hart Publishing Co. Inc., 1989), 35.

most influential persons of human history ranging from 3500 B.C. until the year 1970 concluded with the remark² as

He(Muhammad) was the only man in the history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels. He may well rank as the most influential political leader of all times.

Along with high value leadership quality, the four functions of modern management were also glaring in his system. He formulated prudent plan and displayed the finest organizing capability to lead and control a state organization most successfully. The prophet (pbuh) said³

I have certainly left among something after which you will never go astray as long as you adhere to it: It is the book of Allah-Al Qur'an.⁴

It is a matter of research to go deep into the Qur'an which was the sole guidance of Prophet (pbuh) and explore how an unlettered Prophet (pbuh) having no sign of any academic knowledge equipped himself with such a high value leadership concept and management system. There is no question that Prophet's (pbuh) presence had a great influence on his followers. However, that does not necessarily imply that his actual presence among the people is required for the Qur'an to have its intended effect. The holy Qur'an can have a similar effect on any later generation even in the absence of the Prophet (pbuh). Allah reveals in the Qur'an,⁵

Allah guides all those who seek His pleasure to way of peace, and brings them out of darkness by His will unto light(5:16)

The verse clearly states that the virtue of the holy Qur'an can perfectly guide mankind and bring out people from darkness to light. In absence of Prophet (pbuh) it was proved true in case of Caliph Umar (ra). He displayed excellent leadership and

² Michel H. Hart, *The 100.*, 33, 39.

³ Shahi al-Muslim, Volume:2,Hadith No. 2950, year of edition. 1999.

⁴ Jamaal al-Din M. Zarabozo, *How to Approach and Understand the Qur'an* (USA: Al Basher Company, 1999), 45.

⁵ Muhammad Taqi-ud-din al-Hilali, Muhammad Mushin khan *The Noble Qur'an* (Saudi Arabia: King Fahad complex printing, 2003), verse 5:16.

management quality and conquered a state stretching from the borders of India to the Atlantic Ocean—the largest empire that world had yet seen. The great virtue of the holy Qur'an has influenced and changed a generation from non-existence. No one could have imagined that those people of Arabia would once lead the world and initiate a new cornerstone of civilization. So it is immensely important to have a magnifying look into the Qur'an with a view to find out the root concept which was the core driving factor of Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers to set an example before the humanity.

Luminous effects of Quranic leadership were observed even by some Non-Muslim leaders. For example, Willam Ewart Gladstone, four times Prime Minister of Great Britain said “As long as this Qur'an exists, Europe will never be able to conquer the Islamic East.”⁶ Quran still exists unchangingly, but Muslims have failed to lead because, most of the Muslims are not taking lessons from the Qur'an; they believe and apply Qur'an as book of worship to perform their prayers only. In addition to that most of them do not have adequate understanding of the true spirits of such a best guidance which should be utilized to set an example before the humanity. Prophet (pbuh) said⁷

By this book (the Holy Qur'an) Allah will raise certain people to the (Pinnacle of) glory and cast other down into (the abyss of) disgrace.⁸

This can be clearly understood from the miserable state of Muslims today. The only community that possesses Allah's pure guidance –the Holy Qur'an is seriously lacking in its application especially: in standing as witness before mankind.

⁶ Jamaal al-Din , *How to approach Qur'an*, 47.

⁷ Shahi al-Muslim, vol.1, Hahith no.1987, edition 1999. (Ibn Majah: chapter: 16. Hadith no. 216).

⁸ Muhammad Fazl-ur-Rahman Ansari, *The Qur'anic foundation and structure of Muslim society* (Pakistan: Elite publishers ltd Karachi, 1989), VII(foreword).

Truly, the West and her allies have traveled a long way and gained a gigantic momentum in scientific and technological development. On seeing such glaring success of the West, most of the Muslim scholars have not researched for any better Quranic alternative of leadership concept and its function in management. Till today we have not found any research exclusively done to explore Quranic leadership concepts.

No matter how better leadership concepts evolved by Non-Muslim researchers are those may not be exactly perfect for Muslims. Yet most of the Muslim scholars have followed the western pattern and tried to compare and measure both the leadership phenomenon in the same yardstick though they are not running in the same direction. Due to industrial development of the West, the entire management system that we see today was born in the lap of the West, so it is assumed as their baby. Industrially back-footed Muslim nations could not even imagine to bring any change in the literature of western ideology in their research.

Leadership is commonly termed as a raw material. It takes different shapes in different fields in different names. The role that meets the leadership in the military field is called *Command*; in the ecclesiastical field it is known as *ministry*; and in public life it is called *governance*. In the field of industry and commerce the leadership role is named *management*. The term management has drawn the attention of all due to the industrial revolution and its influence on economy. Industry is one of the most dominant sectors of present world and management is the part of its ideology. It is true that clock cannot be put back. But now leadership is seen to be a very important part of management. Especially in this age of high achievements, the balance of investments between management and leadership may be re-examined.

Higher concept of management takes the role of a leader as its core. Leadership and management may be blended into a composite concept. This process has taken place subconsciously over the period of last three decades.⁹ The paths of management development and leadership development run together for most of the career journeys especially in the middle stages¹⁰ but the concept of leadership development has to be retained due to it is arguably wider and deeper than the concept of management. Though someone wants to separate the concepts, but neither of the concepts can push the other out of the existence.¹¹

In fact management is an overlapping concept of leadership. Management in conjunction with leadership can produce orderly change and leadership in conjunction with management can keep the organization properly aligned with its environment. Indeed, perhaps is the reason why today's world has become so much concerned about the composite concept on leadership and management. The balance of management and leadership skills reflects a critical but a rare combination that can lead to a greater success.

Many theories of leadership have come and gone. Some looked at the leader. Some looked at the situation. None has stood the test of time. With such a fluctuating track record, it is understandable why leadership research and theory have been so frustrating. Due to such ambiguity, a scholar has compared leadership with 'love' and said, "Like love, Leadership continued to be some thing everyone knew existed but nobody could define."¹² Similarly, management is also termed as "varied and

⁹ John Adair, *Developing leadership*, (England: Talbot Adair Press, 1988), 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p14.

¹² Warren Bennis, Burt Nanus, *Leaders* (United State: Harper Collins Publishes, 2nd edn., 1997), 5.

complex”¹³ and there is no best management formula which can guarantee success. Thus, both concepts have ‘blind spots.’ So, a clear understanding on leadership concept and its functions in management is necessary. But Allah has mentioned in the holy Qur’an:

No example or similitude do they bring but we reveal to you the truth and the better explanation thereof.¹⁴ A (Qur’an) detail explanation of everything and a guide and a mercy for the people who believe.¹⁵

These verses are clear indications that, there is a definite guidance in the Holy Qur’an on leadership and management.

Many glittering qualities of leaders have been exhaustively researched and people have every time been amazed by those luminous qualities of successful leaders. But the root concept as main driving factor for example of any leader has often been missed out in the researches. To bring the point at home, a qualitative theoretical approach with comprehensive interpretation of text analysis on the verses (of the holy Qur’an) will be done to determine a root concept of leadership and its function as management.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The world famous New York Public Library¹⁶ has tens of thousands of biographies, monographs and newspaper clippings on different leaders. The topic of Leadership has been heavily researched. A famous¹⁷ political scientist (James MacGregor Burns) once said that leadership is among the most highly studied subjects and yet remains among the least understood. His remark bears a big truth. Leadership is a complicated

¹³ Stephen P. Robbin, Mary Coulter, *International Edition Management* (United state: Prentice hall, 8th edn., 2005), 423.

¹⁴ Muhammad Taqi-ud-din al-Hilali, Muhammad Mushin khan *The Noble Qur’an* verse 25:33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, verse 12:112.

¹⁶ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Happer Torchbooks, , 1979), 2.

¹⁷ Robert B. Woyach, *Preparing leadership* (London: Green wood Press, 1993), 1.

issue. It exists in every society. Every one of us has experienced it. Yet most of us have only the vaguest idea¹⁸ of what it is all about. Even scholars have a hard time defining leadership in exact terms. Decades of academic analysis have given us more than 850 different definitions¹⁹ of leadership. Literary thousands of empirical investigations of leadership have been conducted in last 75 years alone, but no clear and unequivocal understanding exists till today.

This confusion started in the ancient time when Aristotle disagreed with Plato's leadership theory. In assessing and developing leadership, researchers have listed 18,000 probable qualities²⁰ of human behaviour from Webster's dictionary. Out of these qualities two researchers Allport and Odbert selected 4,500 possible relevant traits²¹ of a leader. The extensive research on this subject has even failed to find out a few traits which could be common to all leaders. In fact, more common observation in this regard is, each leader has a unique personality. Thus, no two leaders were alike; each had their own strengths and weaknesses.

This asymmetric, unsynchronized and widely diversified phenomenon has seriously confused all, in coming to an appropriate relevant root concept of developing leadership. Most of the researchers have gone in the detail deliberation of how leaders behaved and what all were the impressive qualities, traits, principles, motivations and values etc. displayed by different leaders. Every leader had a core driving factor that may be his vision, mission, belief or any other elements. This core driving factor was the root concept as a deep inner conviction and motivation which gave birth to all his excellent attributes.

¹⁸ Robert B. Woyach, *Preparing leadership*, 2.

¹⁹ Warren Bennis, Burt Nanus, *Leaders* (United State: Harper Collins Publishes, 2nd edn.,1997), 4.

²⁰ Defense Services Command and Staff College, *Command and leadership precis* (Bangladesh: Mirpur, Dhaka,2003), 4A1.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Most of the researches on leadership are devoid of detecting this core driving factor. The exhaustive researches in leadership were primarily devoted to locate very lucrative attributes in different leaders which attracted people; thereby the study on leadership was always very popular and demanding. Someone may assume that a leader 'can be made' by nurturing those excellent qualities in a man. Surprisingly, it was found that those qualities were missing in another most successful leader. Then the cloud of confusion became deeper which leads to conclude without any direction as leaders are neither 'born' nor 'made.'²²

In order to outline this uncovered phenomenon researchers choose different attractive words like charismatic, visionary and strategic leadership, level 5 leadership etc. and more other words which might appear in the future. But there is hardly any endeavour to dig deep into and bring out the root concept or core driving factor of acquiring such excellent qualities.

Similarly, if we take a cursory glance on the research in the Islamic arena, we will find that most of the researchers have followed the western pattern in highlighting different magnanimous and highly impressive qualities of our great Prophet(pbuh) and also some successful Islamic leaders. We find nothing remarkably different from those researches, except replacing with the Islamic words. In this context of so diversified phenomenon, an effort was taken by the 'ICLIF Leadership Competency Model (LCM)' to centralize the leadership theory into 'four cardinal virtues.'²³ According to this model, four cardinal virtues are the "mothers of good character-traits" or the "roots of character-traits" and all other good traits being their branches. However, it is found that these cardinal virtues have very close similarity with the cardinal virtue of Greek philosophy.

²² James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*, 4.

²³ Wisdom, Courage, Temperance and Justice.

But we have observed that the great virtue of the holy Qur'an has influenced and changed a generation from non-existence. No one could have imagined that those people of Arabia under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) would once lead the world and initiate a new cornerstone of civilization. So, it is immensely important to have a magnifying look into the Qur'an with a view to find out the root concept which was the core driving factor of Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers to set an example before the humanity. Similarly, the root concept is likely to reveal the functions of a leader in management because leadership is an overlapping concept of management.

Exhaustive research on highlighting luminous attributes of leader may seem to be done enough of the leadership research; still there are gaps of study. The study in this regard missed the phenomenon of determining the root concept which drives the leader to behave so impressively. It indicates that the root concept or core driving factor is yet to be unveiled. Moreover, a famous social scientist has already detected a serious failure²⁴ in the study of leadership. According to him, till today no central concept or foundation knowledge has yet emerged to develop leadership and almost all the researchers have agreed with his remarks:

An immense reservoir of data and analysis and theories has been developed. But **no central concept** of leadership has yet emerged. We lack very **foundations for knowledge** of a phenomenon –leadership.²⁵

The researchers on this issue have accepted that they have not been able to grasp the foundation knowledge of leadership. Hence, a distilled, well defined, and vivid root concept of leadership and its function as management seems to be highly significant.

²⁴ "One of the most serious failure in the study of leadership has been the bifurcation between the literature on leadership and the literature on follower ship."-(James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* .. 3).

²⁵ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* 2,3.