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# ALTRUISTIC LEADERSHIP FOR THE UMMA IN CRISIS

Jan A. Ali\*

**Abstract:** Leadership can mean many things and this article examines it in some depth. It locates leadership in the context of the crisis in the *umma* or Muslim world. The Muslim world is facing a protected and complex crisis – a condition of social disharmony, cultural turmoil, economic disequilibrium and political instability – with deficiencies in its current leadership at best and an absence of leadership at worst. The article posits that one of the principal solutions to the *umma*'s crisis is effective leadership embodied in “altruistic leadership.” Drawing on published materials on leadership in general, works produced on leadership from an Islamic perspective and extractions from the Qur’ān and *ḥadīths*, the article produces a model of altruistic leadership with four key chief features – trust, knowledge, communication/interaction, and diligence. Altruistic leadership with these key features, the paper postulates, is a universal leadership model applicable to any micro or macro socio-cultural, economic and political context with the capacity to address, alleviate and even eradicate a crisis.

**Keywords:** *altruistic leadership, Muslim leadership, Muslim world, umma, crisis*

## INTRODUCTION

Among the many biological species, we, *homo sapiens*, have exceptional cognitive skills and are highly social. Our tendency is to live in intricate social settings constituted by numerous cooperating and competing human units, such as families, kinship networks, village settings and political orders – the nation-states. Given this, social interactions between humans are inevitable and through which a large range of social norms, languages, values, rituals and practices have emerged, producing what is commonly described as human society.<sup>1</sup>

The society we live in today is modern; meaning we pursue life in it with increased reliance on science and rationality, medical advancements, technological and communication innovations, industrialisation, urbanisation and economic development with mechanised labour leading to larger profits and a tendency toward increased social mobility.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to an agrarian or peasant society, where the group or community was taken to be the basic unit and

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Jenkins, *Foundations of Sociology* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology*, 11th ed. (Boulder: Paradigm, 2009).

the family, for example, was the unit of production, consumption and socialisation, the structures of modern society take the individual as its basic unit with modern institutions assigning the performance of specific and specialised functions in a social system with a vastly developed and complex division of labour.<sup>3</sup> These features have made our society extraordinarily complex and dynamic. The process of modernisation has enabled us in the society to continuously experience many positive benefits of modernity but at the same time, particularly in recent decades, these have also exposed our society to serious complex problems and stimulated threats and uncertainties. This situation has stimulated risky behaviours,<sup>4</sup> plunging the society largely into crisis. By crisis I mean a condition of disequilibrium, high anxiety, instability and danger in social, cultural, economic and political affairs leading to a firm forced transformation hampering the social life of an individual and the community. The crisis is being faced by the developed and underdeveloped nations in the world.

Many socio-economic and political transformations are rapidly taking place in the modern world. These changes are global and causing social disruptions, economic uncertainties and political instabilities, rendering the “crisis of society” a universal condition.<sup>5</sup> The socio-economic and political problems of a society do not affect only one group in the society but have a domino effect impacting many individuals and organisations within that society as well as other societies because we live in a connected globalised world. To avoid the crisis of society descending into a state of largescale chaos, moderating and hopefully eradicating the “crisis” is urgently needed. The first step in this endeavour, I propose, is the development of constructive leadership (where leadership means, in terms of an individual or institution, the capacity or power to convince and lead others to act in a way that will fulfil the leadership vision and achieve a collective valuable goal and purpose) and its universal application.

Leadership is not about “seniority,” “personal attributes” or being “pleasant” or “charming” but a process of individual motivations and social influence to empower individuals and build capacity to maximise efforts towards achieving a valuable goal in an overall endeavour to transform vision into reality. In secular materialism/humanism, the task of transforming vision into reality involves privileging materialism in the patterns of everyday life in order to orient life towards “self,” rendering self the focal point. Everything emanates from humans towards humans for humans. Higher power or other worldly transcendentalism has no place in secular materialism/humanism because humans are at the centre of all that exists. However, in Islam, the focal point is Allah and the process of transforming vision into reality involves uniting with Allah in all aspects of life. This is not only a spiritual journey (*ibada’at*) through which one discovers their Maker and achieves salvation but also a material endeavour, an earthly exchange with one another (*muamalat*) in the constitution of productive social relations and

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<sup>3</sup> Dagmar Waters and Tony Waters, eds., *Weber’s Rationalism and Modern Society: New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications, 1992); Anthony Giddens, “Risk and Responsibility,” *Modern Law Review* 62, no. 1 (1999).

<sup>5</sup> Hyeon-Wook Kim and Zia Qureshi, *Growth in a Time of Change: Global and Country Perspectives on a New Agenda* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2020).

wholesome society. This occurs with the assistance of the institution of leadership and its human head.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Islamic ethos, the best human leader we ever had was Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He was an embodiment of an ideal leader who possessed a powerful vision and a message of unity inspiring and motivating away from self-seeking and self-serving and towards serving Allah through the service of humanity. He embodied the pattern of altruistic leadership, which helped him take the ignorant masses of Arabian Peninsula out of the miserable Arab *jahiliyah* (Age of Ignorance) lifestyle and transformed them into a thriving and reigning supreme new civilisation.<sup>7</sup>

Many factors plague the Muslim world today and one of them is the absence of a productive and useful leadership. This article is a study of the concept of leadership in a crisis of Muslim world context. The purpose of this study is to draw on some modern ideas and theories of leadership, works produced on leadership from an Islamic perspective, and combine them with the concepts and principles connected to leadership discussed in Islamic scriptural sources, namely the Qur'ān and *ḥadīths*, to develop a new leadership model, which I call "altruistic leadership." The aim is to use these resources collaboratively to produce a universal model of leadership that can be applied in all spheres of human living. I posit that, unlike other Western secular and Muslim leadership models, altruistic leadership offers a real possibility of overcoming the crisis of the Muslim world as well as more broadly.

## LEADERSHIP LABYRINTH

Leadership has always played a vital role in human relations and institutional functions since time immemorial. Human collectivities, whether large or small, always require leadership to guide and manage members in them, as Forgeard says "Leadership is a powerful force that shapes society."<sup>8</sup> In small, primary groups, such as families, leadership often tends to be informal and obscure. However, in secondary groups where there are proper institutional structures in place and clearly articulated chains of command such as a university or conglomerate, leadership exists and is practiced in a formal and more overt manner. In such groups there are clearly delineated roles and responsibilities, with a chain of command that flows from the leader to the followers.

In leadership studies, people and scholars alike have glorified protagonists in societies, heroes in battle and saviours in crisis, then assigned great importance to their accomplishments for the emulation of future generations. The role of politicians, statesmen and rulers in guiding the communities, the development of kingdoms and the protection of territories has received

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<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Rafiki, "Islamic Leadership: Comparisons and Qualities," in *Digital Leadership - A New Leadership Style for the 21st Century*, ed. Mario Franco (London: Intechopen, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Brown, *Muhammad: A Very Short Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Valerie Forgeard, "Do Humans Need Leadership, last modified March 25, 2022, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://brilliantio.com/do-humans-need-leadership/>.

significant interest in the study of leadership. The modern world emphasises leadership and searches for leaders with great qualities.

Leadership is not easy to define and what makes certain persons leaders is also not an easy endeavour. Leadership is often seen by people as the important transformative force of organisational or group behaviour. It is viewed as predominantly personal in character as being established on individual excellence or achievement in a particular domain of human behaviour. Thus, exceptional strength, superior strategy, outstanding intelligence, enhanced knowledge, sound communication skills, diligence and refined willpower collectively or individually can be the means to attaining leadership. No doubt these personal qualities play a critical role and have many benefits, but leadership is not made up of these personal qualities alone. It is something more and that is its essence – the capacity to steer the group towards an agreed objective, to set useful and realistic goals, to strive, and to inspire and help the members of the group reach their full potentials.

With the modern world facing numerous challenges in all spheres of life and the prevalence of multifaceted and multidimensional crisis of modernity,<sup>9</sup> ordinary people, scholars and professionals are looking for good leaders. There is an increased captivation by the idea of leadership in the society. Not only intellectuals, academics or professionals are interested in leadership but people from all walks of life and both genders show interest in leadership.<sup>10</sup> There is interest in leadership in commerce, education, military, bureaucracy, business, health, community, politics and religion to mention but a few.

Leadership research is growing markedly worldwide and in academia, particularly, leadership has gained the attention of many researchers and scholars.<sup>11</sup> The research findings highlight a large range of different perspectives and theoretical approaches to examining leadership, for instance, Aritz et al.; Bass; Bryman et al.; Day and Antonakis; Dinh et al.; Hickman; Kets de Vries; Mumford; Northouse; and Rost.<sup>12</sup> These and other works clearly demonstrate that there exists a rich inventory of leadership studies some with synergistic focus on the topic and some non-synergistic.

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<sup>9</sup> Jan Ali, “Modernity, Its Crisis and Islamic Revivalism,” *Religions* 14, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Judge et al., “Personality and Leadership: A Qualitative and Quantitative Review,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 87 (2002).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Jolanta Aritz et al., “Discourse of Leadership: The Power of Questions in Organizational Decision Making,” *International Journal of Business Communication* 54, no. 2 (2017); Bernard Bass, *Stogdill’s Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2008); Alan Bryman et al., eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Leadership* (London, UK: SAGE, 2012); David Day and John Antonakis, eds., *The Nature of Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2012); Jessica Dinh et al., “Leadership Theory and Research in the New Millennium: Current Theoretical Trends and Changing Perspectives,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2014); Gill Hickman, ed., *Leading Organizations: Perspectives for a New Era*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016); Manfred Kets de Vries, “Leadership in Organizations, Sociology of,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., ed. James D. Wright (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015); Michael Mumford, *Pathways to Outstanding Leadership: A Comparative Analysis of Charismatic, Ideological, and Pragmatic Leaders* (Mahwah: Erlbaum, 2006); Peter Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership: Concepts and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012); Joseph Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

Academics and researchers use qualitative and quantitative methodologies and methods in them to study leadership. They investigate leadership in all sorts of contexts, including in small groups as well as large organisations. Collectively, their research findings on leadership from different areas paint a picture of an endeavour that is highly sophisticated, complex and not ordinary or simple, as is often found in some popular works on leadership.

Leadership is many things ranging from a concept, institution and phenomenon to a process and practice. It takes many forms. Due to this and the fact that scholars use different approaches (theoretical, empirical, interdisciplinary and policy-based) or perspectives (psychological, historical, political, cultural and sociological) to study leadership, defining and explaining it is not an easy undertaking. Mariya Fleychuk and her colleagues during their study of leadership found that over 10,000 leadership studies exist in the literature.<sup>13</sup> Kets de Vries says, when we consult the literature on leadership, “we quickly become lost in a labyrinth: there are endless definitions, countless articles, and never ending polemics. Papers, books, and articles claiming to delineate leadership proliferate, yet their conclusions can be confusing and even conflicting.”<sup>14</sup> Rosenbach et al. assert that:

Leadership is widely discussed and studied but continues to remain an elusive and hazy concept. Although the study of leadership has emerged as a legitimate discipline, there is still little agreement about what leadership really is. Indeed, there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are people attempting to define it.<sup>15</sup>

People have been studying leadership for over a century now and there are as many different definitions for it as there are people who expertly study leadership. Thus, when it comes to the definition of leadership, there is no universal consensus. Leadership holds different meanings to different people. In the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Moore explained that leadership is “the ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation.”<sup>16</sup> In the second half of last century, Burns noted that:

Leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers.<sup>17</sup>

In the last several decades, for Yukl, leadership has come to denote when “intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization.”<sup>18</sup> For Rosenbach et al., “Leadership is all about getting people to work together to make things happen that might not otherwise occur or to

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<sup>13</sup> Mariya Fleychuk, Iryna Moysencko and Tatyana Khudyakova, “The Phenomenon of Leadership in the Modern World,” in *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, vol. 318, ed. Wadim Strielkowski (Paris: Atlantis Press, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Kets de Vries, “Leadership in Organizations,” 664.

<sup>15</sup> William Rosenbach, Robert Taylor and Mark Youndt, eds. *Contemporary Issues in Leadership*, 7th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

<sup>16</sup> B. Moore, “The May Conference on Leadership,” *Personnel Journal* 6 (1927): 124.

<sup>17</sup> James Burns, *Leadership* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1978), 425.

<sup>18</sup> Gary Yukl, *Learning in Organizations* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2002), 2.

prevent things from happening that would ordinarily take place.”<sup>19</sup> Despite the variety of ways in which leadership has been conceptualised, in this article, drawing on the vast expanse of the literature, leadership is defined as *a learned capacity to exercise influence over and guide a group of individuals toward a constructive transformation of all spheres of life and the surrounding environment.*

The academics and researchers variously conceptualise leadership using two common variables. The first is the dynamics of traits or behaviours (leadership qualities) where leadership is understood from a personality perspective with the suggestion that it comprises special traits or characteristics that certain individuals possess.<sup>20</sup> The second is an information-processing viewpoint or relational perspective where the situation or context in which the level of endorsement (high, low or average) of the leader forms the basis of analysis.<sup>21</sup> Bass describes this as “group processes,” where the leader is at the centre of group transformation and activity and represents the group’s will.<sup>22</sup> From these two opposite positions, on one side of the continuum is what is often described as “personalists” or “traitists,” who postulate that leadership arises from specific personality variables or inborn personality traits and characteristics that generate uniform behavioural patterns and leadership effectiveness.<sup>23</sup> These personality traits, such as physical make-up, intelligence, deep honesty, moral vision, compassion and care, and charisma enables consistency in leadership effectiveness across a range of group and organisational situations.<sup>24</sup> From the traitist perspective, a group of heritable attributes can be used to differentiate leaders from non-leaders. Some even argue that leadership is unique to only a small group of individuals who possess a set of immutable traits that cannot be cultivated because they are innate.<sup>25</sup> These personality characteristics or leadership traits make it possible for leaders to be successful in their endeavours in any situation. Traitists say that understanding the importance of these primary leadership traits that determine leader effectiveness can assist groups and organisations with their selection of a leader and assist in various training and developmental endeavours.<sup>26</sup>

Those who do not subscribe to this line of thinking criticise traitists for focusing exclusively on personality traits without giving due consideration to other factors such as the environment. Also, they argue that traitists focus solely on the leader and neglect the followers. Some go on to say that traitists shut the door against any possibility of leadership as a learned behaviour

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<sup>19</sup> Rosenbach, Taylor and Youndt, *Contemporary Issues in Leadership*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Bass and Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Fleychuk, Moyseyenko and Khudyakova, “The Phenomenon of Leadership”; Kets de Vries, “Leadership in Organizations”; Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership*.

<sup>22</sup> Bass and Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> John Antonakis, Anna Cianciolo and Robert Sternberg, *The Nature of Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Zaccaro, “Trait-based Perspectives of Leadership,” *American Psychologist* 62 (2007); Gerald Matthews, Ian Deary and Martha Whiteman, *Personality Traits*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> David Derue et al., “Trait and Behavioral Theories of Leadership: An Integration and Meta-analytic Test of their Relative Validity,” *Personnel Psychology* 4 (2011).

and that individuals can learn the skills and take part in training and development programs to become an outstanding leader.<sup>27</sup> Although it is acknowledged that great leaders often display certain predictable characteristics, traitists are criticised for assuming that great leaders are born with the innate trait qualities that are used to distinguish them from their subordinates; however, this cannot be empirically validated or backed by science.<sup>28</sup>

On the other side of the continuum is the “situationists,” who argue that the environment or context in which the leader operates has a direct influence on their behaviour, called the “situational behaviour.” The leader has a symbiotic relationship with the environment where one influences the other. The situation produces leadership, a leader influences the situation and the traits in this process are not essential elements but serve only as an aid. Situationists attribute leadership effectiveness to environmental factors and render leaders into figureheads who control the situation or environment for the betterment of all. From the situationist perspective, the most effective leaders are those who can easily and comfortably adapt to the situation and study the cues and other factors carefully to accomplish the task at hand and maintain harmony among people and balance in the overall environment in a context or situation.<sup>29</sup>

The situationist perspective has been criticised for placing excessive emphasis on the situation or general environment. The leadership is the product of the situation and a leader arises from its demands. This, critics argue, over-emphasises the situation dynamics and environmental undercurrents. True, a situation shapes the leadership behaviour and affects the decision-making process but other factors are also involved, such as personal traits that the situationist cannot fully account for, argue the critics.<sup>30</sup>

Another criticism of the situationist perspective is that it completely overlooks the traits and characteristics of leaders. Critics assert that the traits play a significant and obvious role in the production of a particular leader and situationists completely overlook it. They argue that a leader’s specific personality variables play an inevitable and definite role in every situation but the situationists completely ignore this fact.<sup>31</sup>

While generally the understanding about leadership has improved, the explosion of studies has only generated more questions in the minds of many scholars and researchers. In modern society, which is undergoing constant complex transformation, new leaders and leadership models are regularly needed to manage the transformation process and the issues and problems emerging from it. In this context, the scientific observations and analysis of profiles of actual leaders reveal a complex combination of personalities, attributes, strengths and weaknesses,

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practices* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Wen Dong Li et al., “Do Leadership Role Occupancy and Transformational Leadership Share the Same Genetic and Environmental Influences?” *Leadership Quarterly* 23 (2012).

<sup>29</sup> Robert Sternberg and Victor Vroom, “The Person Versus the Situation in Leadership,” *Leadership Quarterly* 13 (2002).

<sup>30</sup> Robert Sternberg, “WICS: A Model of Leadership in Organizations,” *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 2 (2003).

<sup>31</sup> Malcolm Higgs, “How Can We Make Sense of Leadership in the 21st Century?” *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* 24 (2003).



with different settings demanding different leadership models.<sup>32</sup> In the literature, two internally diverse models of leadership are often discussed.<sup>33</sup> An old classic model is based on the idea that one person should have the ultimate authority and power without needing to consult senior members of the group. This is an autocratic or traditional command-and-control style leadership, which is also exclusionary, controlling and self-centred.<sup>34</sup> The newer contemporary model is more collaborative and values-sharing that cultivates better teamwork, productivity, innovation and creativity. In this model, members of a group are given a voice and problems are resolved collaboratively.<sup>35</sup>

There are many old and newer theories from which emerge the leadership models. Some of these are:

- ‘great man’ theories
- trait theories
- charismatic theories
- democratic theories
- situational theories
- psychoanalytic theories
- political theories
- humanistic theories
- cognitive theories
- leader-role theories
- reinforced change theories
- path-goal theories
- contingency theories
- multiple linkage theories
- vertical dyad linkage theories
- exchange theories
- behavioural theories
- servant leadership theories
- attribution theories
- transactional theories
- transformational theories.

As we can see from this list, albeit short, leadership theories abound. The problem is that “Although increased studies and publications help to build up the leadership theory, leadership

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<sup>32</sup> Kets de Vries, “Leadership in Organizations.”

<sup>33</sup> Peter Block, *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest*, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Albert King, “Evolution of Leadership Theory,” *Vikalpa* 15 (1990).

<sup>35</sup> Michael Williams, *Leadership for Leaders* (London: Thorogood, 2005).

theory has not been integrated yet,”<sup>36</sup> and there is a “lack of apparent convergence”<sup>37</sup> between the theories. One point is worth making, however, is that the literature on and theories of leadership identify numerous important qualities and from them I have identified four worth discussing and incorporating in my altruistic leadership model. They are:

1. trust/integrity
2. knowledge
3. communication
4. diligence.

I will discuss these points later in this article in some depth. This discussion will broaden our understanding of altruistic leadership. Now, I want to turn attention to the crisis of the *umma* and build justification for new leadership as a solution to this crisis.

## THE CRISIS OF THE *UMMA* AND NEED FOR LEADERSHIP

In this section, I endeavour to describe the crisis of the *umma* as a basis for the urgency in developing a new Muslim leadership founded on the altruistic leadership model. The *umma* is a collection of people who adhere to the religious beliefs and laws of Islam. Sometimes scholars use the terms Muslim world and *umma* interchangeably,<sup>38</sup> but in this article when I am discussing the “crisis” afflicting Muslims, I am referring to the crisis of the *umma* that is understood to have no geopolitical boundary, is spread throughout the globe and, therefore, is truly transnational.

In the last few hundred years, Islam and Muslims have stagnated and the socio-cultural, economic, political, scientific, medical and technological progress Muslims made in a thousand years in the era commonly known as the “Islamic Golden Age” abruptly came to a halt. Rifai asserts that “A cursory examination of the pathetic conditions of Muslim countries would indicate the degree of backwardness of Muslims in all fields.”<sup>39</sup> The disappearance of Islamicate ideals and institutions and political centralisation has produced a crisis in the contemporary patterns of Muslim everyday living because the Muslim societies, with few exceptions, are internally bleeding with economic backwardness, political turmoil, weak infrastructure, lack of competitiveness and poor education.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Muslim societies have been paralysed by social inequality, injustice, sectarian conflict, violence and terrorism. This is further compounded by the challenges and complexities of modernity,<sup>41</sup> leaving Muslims wandering aimlessly, looking for solutions to the crisis of their societies and hoping leadership would take them out of the prevailing quagmire.

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<sup>36</sup> Osman Uslu, “A General Overview to Leadership Theories from a Critical Perspective,” *Marketing and Management of Innovations* 1 (2019): 161.

<sup>37</sup> Kets de Vries, “Leadership in Organizations,” 665.

<sup>38</sup> John Esposito, ed., *The Islamic World: Past and Present*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Sulaiman Rifai, “Muslim Countries and the Underdevelopment: An Islamic Perspective,” SSRN, May 27, 2021, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3854422>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ali, “Modernity, Its Crisis and Islamic Revivalism.”

There is no Muslim country and Muslim community in the world, regardless of the size, that is free from crisis.<sup>42</sup> Crisis plagues not only the Arab sphere but also in its grips are countries of Africa such as Nigeria and Tunisia, West Asia such as Azerbaijan and Turkey, South Asia such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, and Southeast Asia such as Indonesia and Malaysia. This may sound like gross exaggeration or overgeneralisation, but can we point to a particular case and say there is an example of a “crisis-free” Muslim country or a Muslim community that all Muslims can emulate? In my view, the answer is no. Not just me but there are scholars who take a similar position. Take AbuSulayman, for example, who states:

No one studying the Umma will have difficulty in discerning the present backwardness of its culture, its political degradation, and its human suffering, regardless of its human and material resources and in spite of its values and principles. Such is the very heart of the Umma’s crisis...In truth, the Umma’s present infirmity and backwardness have become so pronounced that its very existence is threatened by the challenge of Western civilization to its way of life, thought, and institutions...The Umma has been in decline for several centuries. All of it, save a few remote geographical regions, came under the sway of European imperial power. Perhaps even more painful is the fact that, even today, the Umma continues to represent spheres of influence. The entire world vies for supremacy over its strategically valuable territory, important markets for foreign industry, raw materials, and cheap unskilled labor. And this is happening at a time when the Umma is unable to feed itself and remains in dire need of industry as well as a scientific and technological base, technical experience, advanced institutions of technology, and all the elements of independent power.<sup>43</sup>

Another example is Kalin, who notes:

The Muslim world is in a state of crisis. The crisis is not so much political or economic, though both have their share in the current state of affairs, as existential and intellectual... Many Muslim countries suffer from political crises, economic backwardness, weak infrastructure, bad education, lack of competitiveness in science and technology, polluted and badly managed cities and environmental hazards. They are paralyzed by social inequality, injustice toward women, sectarian conflict, extremism, violence and terrorism ...Political leaders, religious scholars and intellectuals have mostly failed to stop the internal bleeding in the Muslim world.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, Allawi notes that:

There is little doubt that the civilization of Islam is undergoing a monumental crisis. In one form or another, this crisis has been going on for well over two hundred years. It still has not worked itself out...For centuries, the civilization of Islam has been buffeted by powerful adverse currents which have succeeded in draining its vitality and have gradually whittled it down to a shadow of its former self. The most disturbing, far-reaching, and possibly fatal of these currents have been the panoply of disruptive forces associated with the imperial

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Dekmejian, “The Anatomy of Islamic Revival: Legitimacy Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Islamic Alternatives,” *Middle East Journal* 34 (1980).

<sup>43</sup> AbdulḤamid AbuSulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, “Crisis in the Muslim World,” *Daily Sabah*, July 7, 2015, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/ibrahim-kalin/2015/07/07/crisis-in-the-muslim-world>.

expansion of the West into Muslim lands and with the blast of modernity that accompanied it.<sup>45</sup>

Robinson also says the Muslim world is in crisis:

It is a crisis which has been felt through all aspects of Muslim societies: their modes of wielding power, their sense of justice, their culture, their values, their literature, their forms of art, in some cases their especial forms of medicine, but in all cases, in the area of religious authority.<sup>46</sup>

The trials and tribulations of the *umma* have been in perpetual motion for some time now. Since the colonial era, Muslims as a collection of people have not made progress in any of the key spheres of life – social, cultural, economic or political. Anjum proclaims that:

No one would, probably, doubt that Muslim civilization is facing a serious crisis since the 18th century. It first resulted in political chaos and ultimately colonization of Muslim lands by Western powers. Later, Muslim civilization faced serious cultural and intellectual onslaught from the West which intensified and deepened the crisis. Though the period of Western colonization ostensibly came to an end in the middle of the 20th century, Muslim lands did not come out of the crisis.<sup>47</sup>

A cursory assessment of the dismal conditions of Muslim countries easily reveals the degree of backwardness of Muslims in every field of life. While some Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates are undergoing some positive transformation and many other Muslim countries are attempting to transform themselves positively, the road to meaningful transformation and success remains long. In Japan, China, Russia and the West, a dramatic transformation has occurred, for instance, in the field of education in the digital world and many countries around the world such as India have made significant advancements in it; however, the Muslim world is grossly lagging. Muslim countries are not as innovative, progressive and inventive as many developing and developed countries and there is almost an absence of direction in them with creeping nihilism and instrumentalisation of values. There is a stagnation of Muslim minds with Muslims hardly making any progress in sciences and technology. This is further compounded by instances of injustice (e.g. Iraq), perpetration of violence and terrorism (e.g. Syria), abuse of basic human rights (e.g. Afghanistan) and oppression of women (e.g. Iran) in the Muslim world.

Compared to world averages, socio-economic development in Muslim-majority states is low. The Muslim world lags behind the West in job creation, education, science, technology and overall socio-economic productivity.<sup>48</sup> There is the presence of ineffective institutions in Muslim-majority states, high levels of violence, corruption, authoritarianism,

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<sup>45</sup> Ali Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 1, 249.

<sup>46</sup> Francis Robinson, "Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam?" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19 (2009): 339.

<sup>47</sup> Faraz Anjum, "Crisis of Muslim Civilization in Modern Times: Some Insights from Ibn-e-Khaldun's Thoughts and Ideas," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 1 (2011): 151.

<sup>48</sup> Tyler Waywell, "A Failure to Modernize: The Origins of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Islamic Fundamentalism," *Concord Review* 16 (2006).

underdevelopment, an absence of well-trained labour force and poorly thought through directions from clerics or the *ulema* (scholars) class.<sup>49</sup>

The protection of property rights been misunderstood and misinterpreted by the *ulema*, leading to a failure in establishing institutions that protect these rights and as a consequence there is hinderance to advancement in financial development of the society.<sup>50</sup> The “democratic deficit”<sup>51</sup> and a variety of internal systemic problems, including the failure by Muslim states to develop robust civil institutions with the capacity to monitor the power of the ruling classes and pave the path for economic growth, cultural enhancement, social development and political progress,<sup>52</sup> are some factors that are holding back the Muslim world from capital accumulation and innovations that are crucial to its long-term progress and prosperity.<sup>53</sup>

At the most general level of analysis, the *umma* crisis manifests in the continuous pathological experiences that have battered Muslim societies in the contemporary period. This prolonged crisis includes the puzzling social, cultural, economic and political impact of Western and Soviet imperialism, the essentials of the Western capitalist form of economic development, numerous battles for independence, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the emergence of Western and Marxist secularist ideologies, and the protracted political conflicts within the Arab world and in the larger Muslim setting.

Many variables need to be considered in discerning the crisis of the *umma*, some of which I have discussed briefly here. Due to limitations in space, detailed discussion of individual variables or factors responsible for the crisis is not possible; however, the explanations for the crisis of the *umma* are manifold. It is worthwhile to note that some explanations focus on a single variable, while others focus on a combination. Generally speaking, these explanations can be divided into two separate categories. In the first category, the explanations concentrate on social, economic and political variables and the second category’s focus is on historical, cultural and religious variables. All these variables either independently or in combination with one another plague the *umma* today.

In this article, I want to posit that these complex variables or problems either independently or in combination collectively constitute the crisis of the *umma* and in one way or another is the result of a much larger crisis of authority or perhaps more aptly the crisis of Muslim leadership. In other words, what I am suggesting is, indeed, there are many causal factors behind the crisis of the *umma* but the crisis of Muslim leadership ranks highest among the crises. This is echoed by Al-Ghazali who says, “The leaders of the Muslims, their men in

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<sup>49</sup> Ahmet Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>50</sup> Frederic Pryor, “The Economic Impact of Islam on Developing Countries,” *World Development* 35, no. 11 (2007): 1818.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Haber, *Climate, Technology, and the Evolution of Economic and Political Institutions*, PERC Research Paper no. 12/2 (Stanford: Stanford University, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Timur Kuran, “Why the Middle East is Economically Underdeveloped: Historical Mechanisms of Institutional Stagnation,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18 (2004).

<sup>53</sup> Robert King and Ross Levine, “Finance, Entrepreneurship and Growth,” *Journal of Monetary Economics* 32 (1993).

authority in particular, have deviated from their supreme moral duty as leaders of the Muslim Umma. The present ills befalling the Umma are consequences of this deviation.”<sup>54</sup> By Muslim leadership, I mean the actual individual as the leader who renders actions and exercises influence over others in their organisation or group to achieve agreed goals as well as an institution with a human head with established structures of rules and norms designed to fashion ethico-moral individual behaviour.

Thus, to understand the crisis of the *umma*, we need to understand the crisis of authority or crisis of Muslim leadership.<sup>55</sup> We have already gained sufficient understanding of the crisis of the *umma* above but have not delved into the crisis of Muslim leadership, noting that good Muslim leadership is urgently needed for the *umma* to emerge from its current predicament. Thus, we now turn our attention to a discussion of altruistic leadership.

Altruistic leadership<sup>56</sup> can be the most important means of driving a social group or political order towards success and prosperity. Altruistic leadership embodies moral courage, ethical conduct, sincerity, trustworthiness, diligence, communication, knowledge, kindness, generosity and compassion, among other qualities. It has an immense responsibility in ensuring the governance of a social group or state structure fulfils and preserves the rights of civil society in full light of society’s rules and regulations. Trust from the public is essential and requires serious attention so progress and development can be achieved for the benefit of the entire society and the leader must always pay heed to this.

An Islamic leadership approach embodies political and moral authority. It is based on trust and responsibility. According to Islamic teaching, a leader has to account for these in this life and the hereafter. A *hadīth* says “Surely! Everyone of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges ...”<sup>57</sup> The Qur’ān assigns the leadership role to humans as God’s representative stating, “It is He Who hath made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: He hath raised you in ranks, some above others.”<sup>58</sup> In Islam, leadership is a two-fold process – obeying the rules of Allah embodied in the Qur’ān and fulfilling the rights and interests of the society. From an Islamic worldview, leadership is a responsibility and not a privilege. It is a unifying and driving force for spiritual and worldly success. Whether a person is a leader in a political or any other context, they are dutybound to serve (servant leadership) and be altruistic (altruistic leadership) and their authority is sanctioned by the followers. In Sunni Islam, in contrast to Shi’a Islam, leadership is not inherited but merit- and competence-based.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Muhammad Al-Ghazali, “The Intellectual Crisis of the Ummah–i,” *The Milli Gazette*, May 29, 2015, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.milligazette.com/news/islamic-perspectives/12497-the-intellectual-crisis-of-the-ummah-i/>.

<sup>55</sup> I use authority and leadership interchangeably in this paper.

<sup>56</sup> I will discuss altruistic leadership in the next section.

<sup>57</sup> Sahih Bukhari, vol. 9, book 89, *hadīth* no. 252.

<sup>58</sup> Qur’ān 6:165.

<sup>59</sup> Adam Zeidan, “Imam,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 5, 2022, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/imam>.

To carry out leadership responsibilities, Islam has set out some guiding principles, some of which are “universal.”<sup>60</sup> For example, accountability, integrity, fairness, knowledge, compassion, communication, consultation, transparency, diligence and unity are some of the universal principles. Leadership “labels” are not as important in Islam as its processes and virtues. Also, Islam does not care much for a particular form of government; what is important is the principles of good governance and their implementation.

Islam instructs the faithful to build a good society characterised by formality and informality of ties between individuals within groups and between groups. The ethico-moral world in which such ties can exist and be renewed needs loyalty, obligation and, above all, effective leadership. Effective leadership serves as a mechanism for preserving the ethico-moral integrity of the society as well as for guidance and direction for the public and a complete way of life – Islam.

This is the leadership role Prophet Muhammad implemented when he took charge of the *umma* during his prophetic career. Under his leadership, the moral vision of Islam had political implications and Islam was a religion in which public life was a collective responsibility of the *umma* and the Qur’ān was the source of regulation covering the spiritual and worldly dimensions of life.<sup>61</sup>

However, if we look around in the Muslim world, the leadership hardly resembles this and there is dysfunction at best (e.g. Pakistan) and chaos at worst (e.g. Yemen). On the surface, there is a puzzling variety of leaderships such as autocrats, military dictators, kings, mullahs, democrats and young, uninspiring and inexperienced tribesmen such as the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan running the country. Such leaders profess faith in Islam but do not reflect it in their leadership practice and are often detached from the interests and dreams of the *umma*.

Leadership in the contemporary Muslim world and within individual Muslim communities is often decentralised with various religious and political figures holding crucial and powerful positions. Instances abound where such figures do not effectively address the needs and concerns of their followers and discharge their responsibilities diligently. They make poor decisions, revealing a lack of correlation between power and competency. One of the biggest problems of the Muslim world is disunity. The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and their quest for power and influence, has for decades thwarted the prospects of a powerful and unified Muslim world. Under the current Muslim leadership, if it can be called leadership, for example, tens of thousands of Kashmiris have been killed and scores of women raped by the Indian Army. In Palestine, countless civilians have been killed and many forced out of their homes because they have been destroyed or bombed by the Israeli Army without consequences. No one knows who represents and speaks for Islam. Referring to the conditions of the Muslim world, Robinson asserts that “No one knows any longer, as the saying goes, ‘who speaks for Islam.’ There is in fact, a crisis of authority [or leadership].”<sup>62</sup> Other scholars link social,

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<sup>60</sup> Yusuf Sidani, “Ibn Khaldun of North Africa: An AD 1377 Theory of Leadership,” *Journal of Management History* 14 (2008).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Robinson, “Crisis of Authority,” 340.

economic and political problems, including corruption and pseudo-democracy, with poor leadership in the Muslim world.<sup>63</sup>

The crisis of Muslim leadership is the result of the ethico-moral failure of the leaders. They have not put the concerns and interests of the *umma* before self-interest and self-satisfaction and have failed to critically assess the new developments occurring in the modern world in any depth. There is clear failure on their part to align current knowledge and experience to the ethico-moral standards and priorities of Islam. There is also an evident lack of sufficient and appropriate Islamic knowledge among the current Muslim leadership. For instance, Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia – the birthplace of Islam, does not have a formal qualification in Islam. He holds not a *shari'ah* qualification but a law degree. Similarly, another example is Joko Widodo, president of the world's most populous Muslim-majority country – Indonesia, who is a forestry engineering graduate from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Contemporary Muslim leadership suffers from ethico-moral decline and intellectual deficiencies with no vision for the future for the *umma*. We will see in the next section that this is the case due to the absence of an altruistic leadership model embodied in a leader or in a leading institution. I posit that the altruistic model, which I will discuss in detail below, if properly and fully implemented in any context and not just in the Muslim setting, will help ameliorate or even avert a crisis. I argue that the constituent elements of altruistic leadership model, which are often lacking either in part or completely, that cause the crisis in Muslim leadership today and thus the crisis of the *umma*. The *umma* needs a leadership to overcome its crisis and I point to altruistic leadership for such a role.

## ALTRUISTIC LEADERSHIP: THE MODEL

Four elements constitute my altruistic leadership model: trust/integrity, knowledge, diligence and communication/interaction. These elements are derived from the literature on leadership generally, works on leadership carried out by scholars from various Islamic perspectives and extractions from the Qur'ān and *hadīths*. These elements are universal and many leadership models or theories use them selectively in their abstractions. Although I have nominated only four leadership features in this model, it does not mean that other elements such as wisdom and justice are not important or useful. Far from it, they are all useful and play a critical role in discharging the leadership responsibilities. However, in an altruistic leadership model I consider these four elements to be paramount and essential.

In Islam, *ithar* (altruism) is a concept denoting “preferring others to oneself.” It involves complete devotion to the service of others; a complete focus on others without any self-regard for the sake of Allah. The Qur'ān describes altruism as, “By no means shall ye attain righteousness unless ye give (freely) of that which ye love; and whatever ye give, of a truth

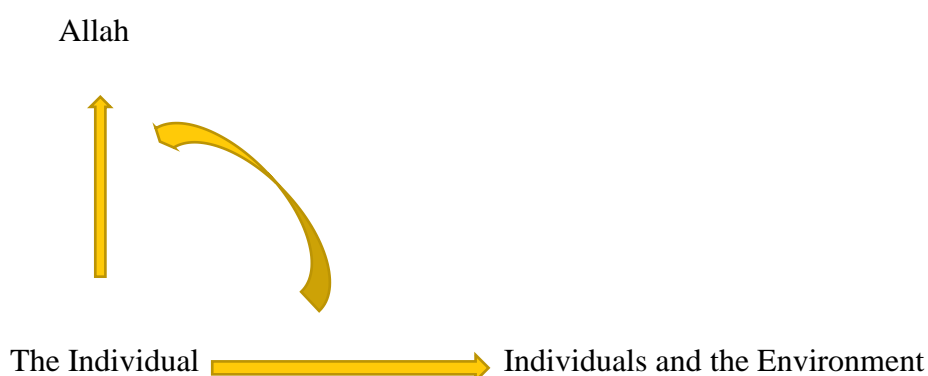
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<sup>63</sup> Mahfuzur Rahman et al., “Analysis of Quality Leadership in Reviving Economies and Politics in Muslim Countries,” *Business and Economic Research* 4 (2014).



God knoweth it well.”<sup>64</sup> It is a sacrifice for the sake of Allah and for the greater good where greater good is everything that exists. Service to God through service to humankind is living the faith, which is *ibada’at* (worship). A constant concern for Allah naturally leads to developing a caring attitude towards people, animals and all other living beings, including the environment.

*Tawhid*, belief in one single universal God, is fundamental to altruism. It comprises two complementary levels of functionality. Two-dimensionally, it can be described as a regulated pair of Cartesian coordinates.<sup>65</sup> The *y* axis signifies the personal relation between the faithful and Allah (*ibada’at* – faithful-to-Allah worship) and the *x* axis represents the relations between individuals and between them and the environment (*muamala’at* – person-to-person and person-to-environment interaction). This can be understood diagrammatically below.



**Figure 1: *Ibada’at* and *muamala’at***

Both axes are co-dependent because, while Islam does not inhibit fulfilling personal purpose, it needs to be realised within the framework of the *umma*. The monastic mode of existence is prohibited in Islam<sup>66</sup> and the only way of life worthy of pursuing is one with active social life involving constant struggle towards self-improvement (spiritual development) and society building (worldly activity).

At a social level, Islam is interested in building a good and just society. It encourages Muslims to structure a strong society with individuals exhibiting charity, philanthropy, compassion and other good social conducts, and altruistic actions for the common good and human welfare. All Muslims are encouraged to band together to construct a “good society” motivated by altruism in this endeavour.

People imitate observed generosity of others and, in altruistic leadership, building a good society is made possible if a leader applies the leadership lessons learned from what Muslims call the greatest leader of all time – Prophet Muhammad. The essence of the Prophet’s leadership style was “altruistic giving.” Thus, Muslim leaders must be “givers” and not

<sup>64</sup> Qur’ān 3:92.

<sup>65</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology*, revised ed., trans. Paul Oscamp (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001).

<sup>66</sup> Saba Ali, “Psychology and Sunni Muslims,” in *The Psychologies in Religion: Working with the Religious Client*, ed. Edmund Dowd and Stevan Nielsen (Berlin: Springer, 2006).

“takers.” Putting the needs of their followers above their own is critical and, for this, the leader must acquire specific qualities, such as those four I mentioned above. Prophet Muhammad possessed these qualities and they were exemplified in his pattern of everyday living and his career as the Prophet of Islam. His altruistic leadership was a comprehensive leadership style covering the sacred and profane dimensions of life and he provided guidance to his followers in spiritual and worldly matters and guided them toward the “good” and away from wickedness.

I now turn to the four pre-requisites of altruistic leadership and discuss them in some detail:

1. **Trust** – The leader must show trust, which is uncompromised by doubt, in their intentions, capabilities and actions. Trust is earned currency through being open, reliable, protective and providing the foundation for stability. It is a verbal or written statement upon which one can rely. Savolainen and Häkkinen say that “Trust is a basic element of functioning relationships.”<sup>67</sup> Trust is the basis for functioning relationships and co-operation; therefore, trustworthiness in leadership behaviour matters the most, which is achieved by exhibiting trustworthiness by competence, integrity, benevolence and credibility. Prophet Muhammad was well-known among his people for his honesty. He was called “Al-Ameen” (the trustworthy) even before his prophethood. Such a name and reverence attached to it was not easily bestowed to people in the Arabian Peninsula at the time and reserved for only those who were worthy of it. Even his enemies, such as Abu Jahl who was known to have a strong hatred towards the Prophet, regarded Prophet Muhammad to be truthful and not a liar.

When Prophet Muhammad returned home trembling and saying to his wife Khadijah “wrap me up” after experiencing the first revelation in the cave of Hira, she consoled him saying, “Good tidings! No, by Allah, Allah will never humiliate you. For you keep ties with relatives and you speak the truth...”<sup>68</sup>

2. **Knowledge** – The leader must possess superior knowledge to use it appropriately and effectively in making independent decisions. Knowledge is acquired through education, special training and experience. When used properly and effectively, it becomes power – power to influence, guide and direct followers towards a set goal. Knowledge is essential capital for the leader to possess as it enables them to make meaningful decisions on important issues and it is shared with the followers to transform them into productive individuals. Hansen and colleagues note, in an organisational setting, knowledge constitutes an essential part of the capital<sup>69</sup> and for Ndlela it is superior knowledge that can help a leader make meaningful decisions promptly in critical times

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<sup>67</sup> Taina Savolainen and Sari Häkkinen, “Trusted to Lead: Trustworthiness and its Impact on Leadership,” *Technology Innovation Management Review*, March 2011, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://timreview.ca/article/429>.

<sup>68</sup> Abu Abdallah Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari: Arabic-English*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1979), vol. 8, 74, 260.

<sup>69</sup> Morten Hansen, Nitin Nohria and Thomas Tierney, “What’s Your Strategy for Managing Knowledge,” *Harvard Business Review* 2 (1999).

and on critical issues and improve knowledge-based practices.<sup>70</sup> Knowledge is light that shows the way, provides guidance and helps innovate and improve practice. It is only with the possession of knowledge that a leader can promote creativity, productivity and efficiency in a social group and secure group solidarity and success.

From an Islamic viewpoint, the leader must possess knowledge of the Qur'ān, *ḥadīths* and divine law. In Islam, acquiring or learning knowledge (*ilm*) has a lofty status and all are encouraged in the Qur'ān and by the *ulema* to possess it. Allah introduces Himself using the adjective 'All-knowing' (*'alim*) 122 times in the Qur'ān. The glorification of those with knowledge, such as scholars (*'alims*) and teachers (*mu'allim*), occurs on multiple occasions in the Qur'ān.

According to the Qur'ān, Prophet Muhammad possessed the best knowledge because he was divinely inspired and it was from him, who integrated learning with practice, that people are encouraged to learn. The Qur'ān states, "As We sent to you an Apostle from among yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, and purifies you, and teaches you the Book and wisdom, and teaches you what you did not know."<sup>71</sup> The Qur'ān also invites people to acquire knowledge as it says, "Say: Oh my Lord, increase me in knowledge."<sup>72</sup> Such knowledge is light that shines over the individual's journey of life and gives salvation and empowers them.

In Islam, knowledge is only valuable if its acquisition is for the purpose of reaching faith; that is, becoming close to Allah and benefiting others and achieving honourable goals. Knowledge that is geared towards pure materialism and that which has no collective benefit to humans is frowned upon in Islam. The fourth Caliph of Islam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, warned people not to seek any knowledge because "certain kinds of knowledge can lead one astray" or "Any knowledge that cannot be legitimized with reasoning is misleading."<sup>73</sup>

3. **Communication/interaction** – A leader's role is to clearly define the group's goals and facilitate their understanding among the members, solve grievances and increase productivity and efficiency for which effective communication skills are necessary. Effective communication skills are also needed to foster open and solid rapport between the leader and team members. With the benefit of effective communication, a leader can rally the group around a shared vision, empower members, build trust and successfully achieve group's set goals. Surendra Singh notes that effective communication can help organise scattered information, simplify complications and

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<sup>70</sup> Martin Ndlela, "Knowledge Management in the Public Sector: Communication Issues and Challenges at Local Government Level," in *Proceedings of the 11th European Conference on Knowledge Management*, ed. Eduardo Tomé (Famalicão: Academic Publishing, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Qur'ān 2:151.

<sup>72</sup> Qur'ān 20:114.

<sup>73</sup> Abdal Wahid Al-Tamimi al-Amudi, *Ghurar Al-Hikam Wa Durar Al-Kalim, Exalted Aphorisms and Pearls of Speech: A Collection of Aphorisms of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib*, trans. Tahir Ridha Jaffer (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2012), 53, 95.

predict outcomes or reveal new facts, so its power and role should not be diminished.<sup>74</sup> Baxter and Braithwaite suggest that communication is the bedrock of strong relationships and through which individuals improve self-esteem and build confidence, share their feelings and thoughts with others, navigate social situations, and build valuable social networks.<sup>75</sup>

Effective communication is essential in building trust, aligning efforts in pursuit of goals, inspiring to thrive and bringing about positive change in members and the group. When a leader is unable to do this, important information can be left out or misconstrued, causing relationship problems and ultimately hindering achievement of group goals and realising the vision.

Some of the effective communication skills are:

- active listening – the leader must know when to talk and when to listen with empathy
- clarity – the leader must speak or write clearly, conceptualise the message simply and provide clear and concise instructions
- empathy – the leader must always acknowledge the member or members, show understanding and compassion, and treat members humanely and value their feelings
- feedback – the leader must always give the members feedback on their performance and contribution and at the same time welcome member feedback on which the leader must act.

In Islam, a high premium is placed on communication. Allah communicates with humans directly in the Qur’ān through the provision of clear rules and instructions. Whatever humans need to know is clearly articulated by Allah in His revelation. Allah also teaches humans how to communicate in the Qur’ān. Regarding communication in the normal day-to-day context, for instance, He says, “O you who believe! Guard your duty to Allah, and speak words straight to the point”<sup>76</sup> and when preaching and inviting people to Islam, He says “And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allah].”<sup>77</sup>

We learn from the tradition of Prophet Muhammad that he was an eloquent communicator and proficient in dealing with people who were able to understand the social psychology and social situations of the people who made up the society; therefore, he used different communication methods to connect with people.<sup>78</sup> With his exceptional communication skills and admirable manners, he was always warm and gentle and attracted the attention of men and women, young and old, and rich and

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<sup>74</sup> Surendra Singh, “Models of Communication: An Overview,” *The Eastern Anthropologist* 37 (1984): 16.

<sup>75</sup> Leslie Baxter and Dawn Braithwaite, *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008).

<sup>76</sup> Qur’ān 33:70.

<sup>77</sup> Qur’ān 20:44.

<sup>78</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (London: Gollancz, 1991).

poor.<sup>79</sup> Prophet Muhammad brought about monumental global change and built a noble civilisation with his great ability to lead and competence in communication.<sup>80</sup>

It has been said about Prophet Muhammad that:

The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) displayed the best of interpersonal as well as mass communication skills, which were evident from the gatherings he held with his companions. His message would be loud and clear, individuals asked questions without any hesitation, thus, ensuring the message is correctly perceived and retained.<sup>81</sup>

4. **Diligence** – The leader must be diligent. Diligence or industriousness is an attitude and behavioural characteristic that can be refined and transformed into a strength then used to achieve set outcomes. It is a willingness to exert consistent and inexhaustible effort to execute more than just the given duties and achieve all set goals, including those normally considered unsurpassable. Diligence is also the effort applied towards steady and rounded growth in physical, mental, spiritual and social dimensions<sup>82</sup> underpinned by factors such as motivation, discipline, concentration, concern, responsibility, obligation, accountability, devotedness and steadfastness.<sup>83</sup>

An industrious leader works tirelessly, energetically and devotedly to bring about positive change in their followers and the group they lead. Diligence is persevering determination and helps the leader to develop a positive attitude as well as confidence and patience. A diligent leader explores new and creative ways to combine the guidance in the group's purposes and vision with experience and skills gained to overcome obstacles of unique situations and lead effectively. Diligence makes the leader resourceful, stay on top of their task, and is what separates them from others.

It is not any leader but a diligent leader who is called to excellence in all aspects of life and activity, not least in character, and must be committed to a life of virtue lived out in excellence. With this, the leader is then able to exercise thoughtfulness and tenderness and show benevolence, compassion and understanding towards others and all living beings, including the environment, and produce great outcomes.

The Qur'ān says,

That no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another. That man can have nothing except what he strives for. That (the fruit) of his striving will soon come to sight. Then will he be rewarded with a reward complete.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002).

<sup>80</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for our Time* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Afifa Jabeen, "The Prophet: A Communication Role Model," *Arab News*, June 14, 2012, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.arabnews.com/islam-perspective/prophet-communication-role-model>.

<sup>82</sup> Hinsdale Bernard et al., "Student-Centered Educational Reform: The Impact of Parental and Educator Support of Student Diligence," *The School Community Journal* 6 (1996).

<sup>83</sup> Andreas Kštenberger, *Excellence: The Character of God and the Pursuit of Scholarly Virtue* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> Qur'ān 53:38-41.

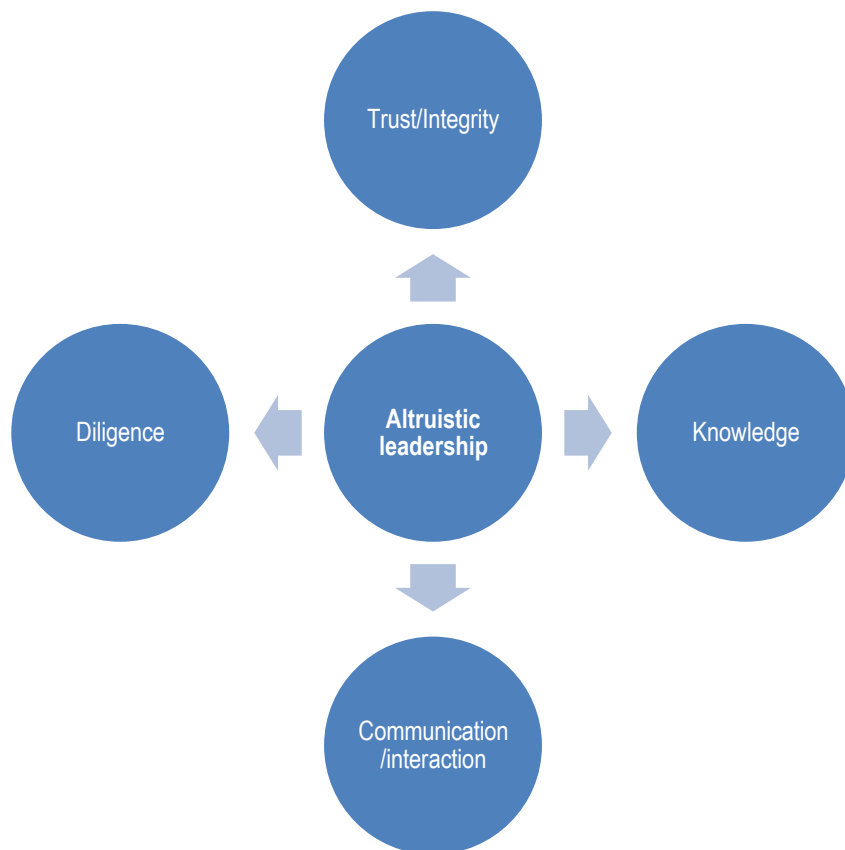
This means an individual such as a leader has nothing except what they strive for. In other words, just as they will not carry the burden of anyone else, similarly, they will not receive any reward except what has earned for themselves; therefore, working hard is the best option.

The Qur’ān exhorts everyone, including the Prophet, to strive in the path of Allah, which is the virtuous path. It says:

And say (unto them): Act! Allah will behold your actions, and (so will) His messenger and the believers, and ye will be brought back to the Knower of the Invisible and the Visible, and He will tell you what ye used to do.<sup>85</sup>

Prophet Muhammad was a great leader because he strived for excellence in each area of life and produced from his unwavering efforts profound change in individuals such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali (the four pious Caliphs) and the society of Arabian Peninsula.

Altruistic leadership can be understood diagrammatically, as shown below.



**Figure 2: Altruistic Leadership Model**

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<sup>85</sup> Qur’ān. 9:10.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is important to understand that, despite all the scientific, medical and technological innovations and progress made in modernity, the Muslim world is still catching up to the West where modernity's advancements and successes are most ostensible and pervasive. Although various socio-economic, cultural and political factors are responsible for the *umma*'s woes and backwardness, it is the absence of altruistic leadership, I argue, that is the principal cause behind it.

Wherever Muslim leadership exists, the four leadership qualities I discussed above, either are partially or totally missing. The current Muslim leadership is not modelled on a particular leadership style and is practiced in a confused mixture of manners, yielding undesirable outcomes for the *umma*. Apparently, the current Muslim leadership has proven to be a weary relationship based on unshared influence and uncommon purpose between the leader and followers in which both are not moved to higher levels of motivation and moral development to effect change and progress.

A leader's role is to induce their followers to work towards certain goals that represent the group's values and motivations and strive to meet the expectations and needs of all involved. The stress is on the transformational dimension of leadership where the leader and followers enrich each other. However, this is not the case in the Muslim world because there is clear non-alignment between Muslim leadership practices and community needs and higher purpose and the greater good based on scriptural teachings. Contemporary Muslim leadership continues to exhibit the distinctive features of moral decadence, knowledge deficit, exhaustion and exclusionariness, which undermines public trust, and is not engaged in systematic removal of impediments to social, cultural, economic and political transformation.

To demonstrate my point, let me share, in the form of an example, a real-life case in Australia. In 2018, the Australian National Imams Council, purportedly the national body constituted by imams across Australia and responsible for electing Australia's Grand Mufti, elected Sheikh Abdel Aziem Al-Afifi as Australia's Grand Mufti. Sheikh Al-Afifi was an Egyptian-born Sunni Islamic cleric and scholar who was a fluent speaker of Arabic but not English – Australia's national language. At the time of his election, Sheikh Al-Afifi was diagnosed with a terminal illness and, within four months of his tenure, he passed away on 11 July 2018 in Melbourne.

Here is an example of a flawed leadership and leadership selection process from the altruistic leadership perspective. Sheikh Al-Afifi was a decent individual, Islamically knowledgeable and had the interests of his community at heart. However, due to his expertise in Arabic and not in English, he was unable to effectively communicate with Australian born Muslims whose primary language of communication is English and those from non-Arabic speaking background who generally communicate in English in Australia. One of the criteria for altruistic leadership is communication and the Sheikh failed to meet this pre-requisite; therefore, he was not suitable for a leadership role. Another problem was that the Sheikh was not the most Islamically knowledgeable Muslim scholar in Australia and terminally ill at the

time of his selection. Thus, he naturally could not diligently perform his tasks or execute the duties of his office, another pre-requisite he failed to meet in altruistic leadership. In Sheikh Al-Afifi's case, he failed to fulfil three out of four pre-requisites in altruistic leadership.

Importantly, the Australian National Imams Council, constituted by around 200 imams from across Australia, as a leadership institution also failed in its operational function in this instance by electing a Grand Mufti who did not meet all four criteria for altruistic leadership. As a leading body in Australia, as it claims, the Australian National Imams Council, on this occasion, can be described as a good example of a leadership in crisis from an altruistic leadership perspective. That is because, for a leadership to function diligently and produce results in the best interest of the public, it cannot deviate or ignore the leadership principles – in this case, trust/integrity, knowledge, communication and diligence, which the Australian National Imams Council clearly did.

Generally speaking, the problem with Muslim leadership and Muslim community and society is two-fold. On the one hand, an individual is quick to self-nominate for a leadership role without giving much thought as to what is required of them and the role. Instead of prioritising the interests of the public and focusing on the greater good, the individual easily lapses into self-interestedness and covetousness. Without altruism, qualifications, experience and a skillset, how can a leader execute the responsibilities of their office? Is this not plain absurdity?

On the other hand, the community or public is quick to endorse an inappropriate person for a leadership role. Leadership is a practice and not a position of authority; therefore, an appropriate person for the role is vitally important. Without qualifications, experience and willingness to serve others selflessly, openly and freely, leadership will be rendered weak and will fail to help the members grow and flourish and will not be able to develop effective strategies to produce good outcomes.

Altruistic leadership is a role for one who is prepared to acquire the four essential qualities, make continuous sacrifice and discharge their responsibilities according to the altruistic leadership principles for the purpose of community wellbeing and the greater good. Unless the Muslim leadership morphs into this form at micro and macro levels, the *umma* will remain in crisis.

The *umma* potentially can be delivered from its crisis if altruistic leadership is properly and fully implemented with its four elements intact and co-ordinately applied existentially. The leader must exercise integrity in all their endeavours, acquire sacred and profane knowledge for the purpose of serving God through the service of humanity and share it generously with those being serviced, communicate the acquired knowledge clearly and effectively, and be unreservedly diligent in all matters of life privately as well as publicly.



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