

# **CHAPTER 4**

## **An Islamic Model for Leadership**



In this chapter we propose an Islamic model of leadership based on the principles of Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (pbuh). This model is also guided by the efforts of previous authors who described the Islamic leadership experience and provided original thought of the attributes and behavior of the effective leader.

The model consists of four dimensions and five operating principles. The dimensions are fundamental constructs that embody conceptual components of the model. They provide a philosophical background for leadership. They can be satisfied using a range of actions and tools. The operating principles guide the behavior of the leader to stay within the confine of Islamic law. They involve specific actions that can be exercised by the leader.

## **Dimensions of Leadership**

We will call the proposed Islamic leadership model the 4C model. It has four dimensions. These are Consciousness of God, Competency, Consideration, and Consultation.

### **Consciousness of God**

Consciousness of God is a translation of the Arabic word "Taqwa." This translation does not convey the full meaning

of the Arabic word, so we will try to explain what it means. The root of the word is “waqa” which means protected. Thus, consciousness of the God means to be continuously aware of God to protect oneself from transgressing the limits that identify the straight path. It involves fortifying oneself against the temptation of the Satan as well as the weaknesses of the self. It also involves taking due diligence to make sure that each action made satisfies the criteria of Islam. To be conscious of God, one has to dedicate all of his/her deeds to God. These deeds do not only include acts of worship but they encompass all human activities. Some of the characteristics of those who are conscious of God which are relevant to leadership are generosity, ability to control anger, ability to pardon people, fulfillment of promise, and perseverance (Abdel-Haleem, 2005, 2:177; 3:134). Acquiring and practicing these characteristics requires continuous training, a training which raises the level of the spirituality of the leader.

Consciousness of God is a fundamental construct of Islamic leadership. It provides the framework and the context for Islamic leadership. The framework brings together the traits, the behavior, and the operating principles of leadership. It provides a context for the use of the different styles of leadership. It relates the other dimensions of the model to Islamic values. So competency, consideration, and consultation will not be performed only because they are tools for effective leadership but also and more importantly because they lead to the realization of a bigger goal: gaining the pleasure of God.

Consciousness of God induces the leader to be continuously aware of the presence of God at all times. This provides an internal safeguard against transgression and tyranny and enhances the leader's sense of accountability. It promotes excellence, the sense of justice, and the sensitivity to the needs of followers.

## **Competency**

Competency is the ability of the leader to perform his/her duties as a leader. It involves knowledge, training, and the ability to motivate people. Branches of knowledge which are essential for an effective leader are history, political science, psychology, and sociology. Organizational skills and strategic planning are a must. An effective leader should be well versed in the art and science of management. The effective leader should be an excellent communicator and should know his/her audience. Knowledge acquired through a process of learning should result in a change of the leader's behavior. This change will be accelerated and enhanced through training.

Effective leaders should be capable of articulating their views. The Quran says: "*We have not sent a messenger who did not use his own people's language to make things clear for them.*" (Abdel-Haleem, 14:4). God's messengers were sent to lead their people to the right path. They were given the ability to speak their people's tongue, know how to explain things to them, and are able to motivate them. A tradition of the prophet (pbuh) urges leaders to speak to people in a language they understand (Muslim, 2000).

The Prophet (pbuh) gave the best example in this regard. Whenever he answered a question, explained a situation, gave an advice, or a command he would speak in a clear and audible voice. He often repeated the answer, explanation, advice, or command whenever he felt that the person did not hear or understand well what was being communicated. He used a language that the people would easily understand (Ibn Hesham, 820).

## **Consideration**

Consideration is not only important for rallying people around a cause, but is also vital for showing compassion and understanding of the needs of people. Compassion and mercy are two characteristics that are essential for effective leadership. However, consideration has to be real and genuine, not a tool for buying people's loyalty. The Quran reminded the Prophet (pbuh) that mercy is an important characteristics of effective leaders "*By an act of mercy from God, you [Prophet] were gentle in your dealings with them- had you been harsh, or hard-hearted, they would have dispersed and left you-*" (Abdel-Haleem, 3:159). The Prophet (pbuh) gave the highest example in showing consideration to his followers. The Prophet (pbuh) used to dress and behave just like any of his companions. People who did not know him could not distinguish him from his companions. At one time he was inspecting the army, companions were lined up. One of the soldiers stood out of line and the Prophet (pbuh) poked him so that he would line up as everyone else. The man screamed and complained that this had hurt him. The Prophet (pbuh) asked the man

to take his revenge by poking the Prophet (pbuh) exactly as the Prophet (pbuh) did to him. The man kissed the Prophet (pbuh) and apologized. The Prophet (pbuh) wanted to show that everyone should be treated the same and that he was a member of the team.

## Consultation

Quran showed that the difference between the wisdom of the Queen of Sheba and the tyranny of the Egyptian Pharaoh is the practice of real consultation. True consultation is a major dimension for effective leadership. Consultation is encouraged at all levels, whether professional or social. The Seerah<sup>(1)</sup> of the Prophet (pbuh) shows how he used to consult his wives as well as his companions in all matters.

The Prophet (pbuh) was commanded by the Quran to consult his companions whenever a decision is to be made "*and consult with them about matters*" (Abdel-Haleem, 3:159). To highlight consultation as an important characteristic of the believers, the Quran named Chapter 42 "consultations." Verse 38 praises the believers who conduct consultations: "*Far better and more lasting what God will give to those who believe...respond to their Lord; keep up prayer, conduct their affairs by mutual consultation; give others out of what We have provided for them.*" (Abdel-Haleem, 42:36-38). The fact that mutual consultation is mentioned in the middle between prayers and paying the compulsory poor dues is an indication of its importance.

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(1) Seerah is an Arabic word which means biography.

Mutual consultation should be a formal part of the decision making process. This will strengthen the team spirit and allows the team members to be part of the decision making process. It is more likely that, a team who participates in making a decision will work harder to achieve the objectives of the organization.

## **Operating Principles**

The operating principles of the proposed model are Ihsan, justice, honoring the pledge, resoluteness, and acceptance.

### **Ihsan**

Ihsan is an Arabic word which means excellence. The root verb for Ihsan is Hasona (past tense) which means became good. Ihsan in Quran conveys the meaning of doing one's best. Quran commends people who endeavor to excel in what they do "*God commands justice, excellence, and generosity towards relatives*" (Abdel-Haleem, 2005, 16:90). The Prophet (pbuh) commanded Muslims to do their best when they attempt to carry out a task. The Prophet (pbuh) has been quoted to have said: "God likes those who excel in doing their tasks." (Muslim, 2000) Ihsan is a higher level of being conscious of God. It is defined in Islamic legal terms as "behaving as if one sees God, because if one is unable to see God, God certainly sees everyone" (Muslim, 2000). Ihsan is an essential operating principle for effective leadership. In addition to being aware of the presence of God and that He is overseeing all what we do,

Ihsan requires a leader to endeavor to do his/her best. Ihsan mandates excellent performance in all aspects of life.

## Justice

Justice is an essential operating principle for effective leadership. Justice is not only a fundamental construct in Islam, but it also provides a safeguard that consideration turns into special favors to those who belong to the inner circle of a leader. Everyone should be treated equally. Islam emphasizes the principle of justice when there is a need for making a judgment. Judges, of any kind, should be impartial to the best of their ability in passing judgments. Impartiality is commanded whether the person involved is a friend or foe, a kin or stranger *“You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially: do not let the hatred of others lead you away from justice, adhere to justice, for that is closer to being conscious of God.”* ([Abdel-Haleem, 2005, 5:8).

A story is told about Omar ibn Al-Khattab, the second Muslim Caliph. An emissary from a foreign country came to deliver a message from his king to Omar. This was the first time this emissary was in Medina. So, he asked for directions to the palace of the Caliph. People pointed to a tree and said to him, you will find Omar lying down under that tree. The emissary came to the tree and found Omar sleeping on the ground under the tree. The emissary addressed Omar saying: “your fairness provided you security, so you were able to sleep under the tree.” Justice is not only a cause of security for the leader but it is also a source of security

for the people. Justice means that people's needs are met without a need for bribing someone or having to network with another. All are equal under the law.

## **Honoring the Pledge**

A pledge or a promise is a trust. Honoring the pledge is a measure of the integrity of the person. The Quran commands the believers to honor their pledges "*Honor your pledges: you will be questioned about your pledges.*" [Abdel-Haleem, 2005, 17:34]. A Prophet's tradition declares that one of the signs of a hypocrite is dishonoring a pledge (Muslim, 2000). The first pledge that a leader undertakes is to serve people the best he/she can. This fundamental pledge as well as all other pledges a leader makes should be honored. Honoring the pledge provides a source of security for the people. When the leader is to be trusted, people will be motivated.

## **Resoluteness**

Quran encourages consultation and treating the followers gently, however, once a leader has decided on a course of action he/she should be resolute. A leader should persevere and stay the course until the goals have been achieved. A leader should be decisive and should not vacillate "*Consult with them about matters, then, when you have decided on a course of action, put your trust in God.*" (Abdel-Haleem, 2005, 3:159). Putting the trust in God means two things. First, to persevere and be resolute on the course of action that has been chosen after careful consultation and deliberation. The second is to realize that the end result is in the hands of

God. One has to do his/her best in planning, consulting, and implementing the plan but not to worry about the end result. Putting the trust in God does not mean one can be negligent or careless and say I trust in God. Trusting in God means that one should do his/her best (Ihsan). It does not imply that one should be fatalistic. Believers are commanded to believe in causality.

The biography of the Prophet (pbuh) is a lesson in resoluteness and perseverance. The Prophet (pbuh) had a mission and he persevered until the mission was accomplished in spite of all the difficulties, the fights, the persecution, and the adverse conditions that he and his companions faced. Other specific examples can also be cited. In the third year Hijri, the pagans of Mecca wanted to launch an attack against the Muslims in Medina. The news of the impending military campaign reached the Muslims in Medina. The Prophet (pbuh) held an open meeting to discuss the strategy of defending Medina. Two main approaches emerged in the meeting. The first approach was to stay within the confines of Medina, fortify the city, and rebuff the attack. The second approach was to march forward and meet the enemy outside the boundaries of Medina. The Prophet (pbuh) was inclined to adopt the first approach. However, the proponents of the second approach were insistent in their opinion and ultimately won the debate. The Prophet (pbuh) agreed with the opinion of the majority. He went into his house to prepare himself for the counter attack. In the mean time, the proponents of the second approach had second thoughts. They were worried that they

may have coerced the Prophet (pbuh) in yielding to their opinion. When the Prophet (pbuh) came out of his house dressed for the battle, they told him that they would like to change the plan and stay within the confines of Medina to defend the city. However, the Prophet (pbuh) decided that since they have agreed on a course of action, they have to stay the course until the objective has been achieved.

## **Acceptance**

One of the fundamental concepts of leadership in Islam is the importance of people's approval of a leader. Traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) stress this rule. One tradition warns against assuming a leadership position against the will of people. The tradition warns that a leader who assumes a leadership position against the will of the people will not be admitted to paradise. This is only valid when the rejection of a leader by people is based on objective reasons e.g. lack of competency or integrity. Islam also urges people to take active role in choosing a leader. The pledge of allegiance was a way to show people's acceptance of a leader. All citizens should participate in the process. The Prophet (pbuh) accepted the pledge of allegiance from both men and women.

## **Summary**

An Islamic leadership model has been suggested. The model which we call the 4Cs model is based on concepts defining leadership in Islamic literature as well as the

practice of the Prophet (pbuh) and the early Muslim leaders. The model has four dimensions and five operating principles. The dimensions are Consciousness of God, Competency, Consideration, and Consultation. The operating principles are Ihsan (excellence), Justice, honoring the pledge, resoluteness, and acceptance by the followers. The consciousness of God provides a framework and a context for the other dimensions.