

DEVELOPING MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

Given the specificity of objectives, some leaders of Islamic organizations avoid them to dodge accountability, are reluctant to terminate old (and failed) projects, or engage in activities that are not directly tied to their mission (e.g., traveling, giving speeches, cultivating a rock star image). If you want to avoid organizational decline and decay, set and implement SMART objectives.

SMART Criteria

Objectives which meet SMART criteria will facilitate gap analysis and performance assessment.

Objectives, the specific action steps that have to be taken to achieve goals, must meet SMART (viz., specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic, time-bound) criteria. They must be:

- **Specific:** What (part of the goal) are you focusing on? Some goals may be immense, such as wishing to raise the ethical level of your nation's business community. But to achieve this desirable goal, you may need to break it into smaller, more manageable segments and attach a specific objective to each segment. As Kouzes and Posner indicate, the most effective leader is one who plans small wins.¹ This approach makes the goal and its associated objectives appear much less daunting, and earlier successful implementations of small objectives tend to have a multiplier, motivational effect.

If current performance is not measured against the intended objective in a systematic manner, the motivation and accountability of those entrusted with implementation will be weak.

- **Measurable:** How much is to be achieved? Your organization's objectives must be quantitative, because this is how progress toward their achievement can be measured. Later, as your organization implements these measurable objectives, any gap between the intended and the realized target should be scrutinized. Do not leave the numbers attached to an objective vague or "something to be agreed upon at a later date," for this is no more than passing the buck. Being "nice" or diplomatic here can actually hurt your organization's long-term performance and its effort to serve Allah.
- **Acceptable:** Is the objective acceptable to those who will implement it? This criterion is critical, for no amount of sophisticated planning matters if the plan is not implemented. Unless the implementers wholeheartedly accept the plan as well as the objectives assigned to them, the plan is as good as dead from the start. The team leader entrusted with meeting an objective must be passionate about it and take ownership of it. The objective is now theirs; they will champion it and see it through. You will not have to goad or remind them.
- **Realistic:** What is the outcome? Is it challenging yet achievable? Your organization's objectives must be flexible, because this is how it will move from where it is now to where it ideally wants to be. At the same time, the objective must not be so difficult as to discourage its implementers. Do not set the bar too high or too low.
- **Time bound:** What is the deadline for meeting the objective? The implementers must have a clear idea of this date. Otherwise, they will get in each other's way and may even come into conflict with each other as key elements of the objectives or the necessary resources do not come online at the appropriate time.

To reiterate, goals and objectives are not the same. Goals focus on long-term priorities, rarely have a specific time component attached to them, and are usually implemented in order of priority. In contrast, objectives are attached to a specific goal and entity (e.g., a division, department, functional area, committee) in order to maintain accountability. In addition, they are to be quantified as much as possible. The basic rule here is: *If it is not measured, it will not be accomplished.*

Your vision statement is usually rather idealistic, but your objectives must be realistic. Tie your objectives to a budget based on a realistic income stream.

Illustration Capsule 6a
Examples of Organization Objectives

IMRC:

Goal: To provide health care to Indians in general, and to Indian Muslims in particular.

Strategies:

- To educate people about health and health care.
- To emphasize preventive medicine.

Objective:

- To establish 3 mobile clinics by end of 1992.

ISNA:

Goal: To produce well-rounded and capable Imams and leaders for the North American Muslim community.

Strategies:

- To offer various types and levels of training programs that combine knowledge of Islam and leadership skills.
- To identify and/or publish material relevant to the goal.
- To offer mentorship opportunities for Imams and leaders.
- To reactivate the Islamic Teaching Center to create an Imam and Leadership Training Center (ILTC).

Objective:

- To establish the Center by hiring a director and executive assistant before the end of 2003.

The EDHI Foundation:

Objectives:

- The establishment / extension of additional Edhi homes for the destitute during the next three years is planned for all major cities. These cities include Peshawar, Quetta,

Muzaffarabad, Chitral, Gujranwala, and Lahore. The estimated cost of the above facilities is over Rs. 100 million.

- The number of ambulances will be increased from an existing 400 ambulances to 650 ambulances over the next two years. The total cost of ambulance centers and associated ambulances will be approximately Rs. 56 million.
- In order to run EDHI services and meet recurrent expenditures on long-term footing, the foundation hopes to raise Rs. 400 million within the next 5 years as a reserve fund which will act as a fixed deposit base.

When SMART objectives are defined appropriately, your Islamic organization can easily evaluate its own performance (see chapter 10). The strategic plan's objectives establish benchmarks to gauge whether the organization is on track or drifting away. Given the dynamic nature of an Islamic organization's work, its objectives should be revisited periodically to make sure that they fit in with the remainder of the strategic plan and are eliciting the intended level of performance. Doing this once or twice a year is sufficient, unless the external environment is turbulent. As Migliore et al. indicate, objectives also represent a performance contract between the leader and his/her followers and should be written down accordingly.²

Examples of Poor vs. Good Objectives

Writing your objectives down makes it easy to spot those that are poorly expressed or do not meet SMART criteria. Consider these objectives:

Illustration Capsule 6b

How To Write a Good Objective

Example 1

Poor objective: To maximize membership within two years.

Issues: What does "maximize" mean? Are we going to open our doors to anyone who knocks on them? Are there any filters that should be applied to potential members (e.g., level of education, area of specialization)?

Improved Objective: Our objective is to increase membership among professional sisters by 10% each year for the next 5 years.	
Example 2	
Poor Objective:	To maximize the sales revenue and profit of our Islamic books.
Issues:	One cannot maximize sales revenue and profits at the same time. If I want to maximize profits, I could sell each book at a high price. This would maximize the profit per book, but the total sales revenue would decrease as a result.
Improved Objective: Our objective is to increase sales revenue by 50% and profits by 10% by the end of next year.	
Example 3	
Poor Objective:	To become the most effective Islamic organization.
Issues:	In which geographical area? "Effective" according to whose criteria? Different stakeholders use different criteria to assess organizational effectiveness, and very often the criteria used by different parties contradict each other.
Improved Objective: Our objective is to become the leading <i>da'wah</i> -oriented organization for Muslim converts in the U.K. and Ireland by 2007.	