

## **THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET: LESSONS AND RELEVANCE FOR MUSLIM MANAGERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study reviews the life of the Prophet from the perspective of management. Throughout his life, the Prophet stressed that Islam combines the rights of Allah and the rights of the people. This was true whatever the context, whether in Mecca or Madinah, at the beginning or at the end of his career as a prophet, even prior to battles. He stressed that any kind of deception in business is completely rejected. With this in mind, the author presents two trends in management and marketing. Both trends show that the tendency to deceive customers and employees is increasing. However, the pressure for managers of publicly-listed companies to meet the expectations of financial markets is much higher than managers in private enterprises. Two hypotheses are derived and future research is needed to test these hypotheses.

**Keywords:** *life of the Prophet, management perspective, deception*

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars have written many books and articles about the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him – this prayer will be implied in the text every time his name is mentioned). However, many of these works focus on the spiritual, ethical, military and political struggles of the Prophet (Ramadan, 2007). Scholars interested in management are looking for insights that would shed more lights on what Muslim managers can learn from the life of the Prophet.

At the heart of this study lies a question: is the life of the Prophet still relevant to Muslim managers? The business environment is so competitive that the notion that Muslim managers can live up to the ethical standards of the Prophet seems quite idealistic to some critics. To address this question, the author relied on lectures of the life of the Prophet by Dr Yasir Qadhi.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Before Being a Prophet*

Prior to Islam, the Meccans loved and respected Muhammad. One incident shows this. A merchant from Yemen had been cheated from a Quraishi and he could not get his money back. He complained publicly. The main leaders of Quraish agreed that they would always side with the oppressed against the oppressor, even if the oppressor came from a powerful tribe. The Prophet was one of the signatories to this pact. In *sahih al-Bukhari*, the prophet said that, even after he became a prophet, he would have participated in this pact again. This shows that it is permissible for Muslims to work with Muslims to establish justice in society, even outside the framework of Islamic law.

Around the age of forty, the Prophet started seeing true dreams. Every night, he would see things that would happen to him the next day. These true dreams lasted for six months before he received revelation. Allah was preparing him for his role as a prophet.

### *The Meccan Phase*

When the Prophet was secluded in the cave of Hira, the angel Jibril came with the first revelation. There was a gap in revelation of about forty days. He started looking forward to the next revelation, which was the first seven *ayat* of *surah al-Muddaththir*.

The Prophet started preaching to his family and his friends. One of the earliest convert was Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr started preaching to his friends and family and four people converted straight away. These converts were noblemen. The next converts were slaves. The story of Amr ibn Abasah is revealing. Amr ibn Abasah explains that the Prophet invited him to keep ties of kinship, breaking idols, and worshipping Allah alone<sup>3</sup>. This means respecting the rights of Allah and the rights of people. This private phase lasted three years. This gave the time for the Muslims to learn their religious and to strengthen themselves spiritually.

After three years, the Prophet was told to preach it publicly to his people. He invited his close relatives to dinner. During the meal, he explained his message. Abu Lahab dismissed it publicly,

saying that their traditions were sufficient. He later made a public declaration to the whole of Mecca (Mecca had about one thousand people at the time).

The leaders of the Quraish were opposed to his public preaching. The nature of Meccan society was that there was no leader for the entire tribe. But every sub-tribe had their own leader. So they appealed to Abu Talib, the leader of Banu Hashim (the sub-tribe to which the Prophet belonged) but Abu Talib protected the Prophet. Qadhi notes that some non-Muslims – like Abu Talib - were kind hearted and ready to work with Muslims. Others – like Abu Lahab – were stubborn and arrogant. The Prophet worked with selected non-Muslims to advance the cause of Islam.

Most of the preaching involved reciting the Qur'an to non-Muslims. The power and beauty was enough to attract people. The leaders of Quraish realised that the Prophet was a prophet but they could not accept him because they wanted to hold on to their political and social power. They instituted a propaganda campaign against the Muslims and the Prophet. They became violent against weaker Muslims. The more violent they became, the harsher the Qur'an became towards them became.

The incident with Walid al-Mughirah is typical. Walid was the best poet of Mecca. He listened attentively to the Qur'an and came back impressed. He had never heard something so beautiful and so meaningful. He returned to his house praising the Qur'an. The rumour of the incident spread throughout Mecca until Abu Lahab visited Walid. He said to him that he must say something against the Qur'an or he will lose his position as the chief of the tribe. So Walid and Abu Lahab invented a lie.

The Quraish tried to negotiate with the Prophet. They offered him wealth, power, and women. He waited for the negotiator to finish and asked him, “*have you finished?*” When the negotiator said yes, he replied by reciting them *surah al-Fussilat*.

Unsure what to do, the leaders of Quraish sent messengers to the Jews of Yathrib to get difficult questions to trap the Prophet. The Jews advised them to ask questions about the lineage of Banu Israel. Allah sent down *surah Yusuf*. In another attempt, the Jews advised them to ask questions about the young men sleeping in the cave. Allah revealed *surah al-Kahf*.

Among the Quraish, Abu Jahal specialised in inciting people to torture the Muslims who did not have protection. The Prophet himself was threatened multiple times. Qadhi notes that Allah could have made things easy for the Prophet. But Allah wanted Muslims to make effort. Sometimes, they see the results of these efforts, sometimes they see no result. Making effort often leads to experience trouble as they challenge the status quo. Nonetheless, they must persevere.

As soon as the call to Islam became public, the Prophet chose the house of *al-Arqam* to start regular religious classes. However, the oppression was so intense that a group of Muslim immigrated to Abyssinia because Abyssinia was ruled by a just Christian king that would allow the Muslims to practice their religion in peace. The Muslims of Abyssinia stayed in Abyssinia for 14 years. Even when the Muslims had immigrated to Madinah, they stayed in Abyssinia. So the Muslims of Abyssinia were living there while there was already in Islamic state. This fact has huge significance in today's debates among Muslim activists.

Around the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the call, the oppression intensified. Some non-Muslims were nonetheless respectful of family ties and gave protection to some Muslims. Thus Abu Bakr was protected. But the leaders of Quraish insisted that Abu Bakr could only pray inside his house. At night, his recitation of the Qur'an was so beautiful that people would congregate around his house to listen to his recitation.

Around this time, a second batch of 80 Muslims immigrated to Abyssinia. This was perceived as an insult so the Quraish sent ambassadors to persuade the king of Abyssinia to return the Muslims. The king asked the Muslims to explain themselves. Jafar ibn Abi Talib said,

*“O King! we were plunged in the depth of ignorance and barbarism; we adored idols, we lived in unchastity, we ate the dead bodies, and we spoke abominations, we disregarded every feeling of humanity, and the duties of hospitality and neighbourhood were neglected; we knew no law but that of the strong, when Allah raised among us a man, of whose birth, truthfulness, honesty, and purity we were aware; and he called to the Oneness of Allah, and taught us not to associate anything with Him. He forbade us the worship of idols; and he enjoined us to speak the truth, to be faithful to our trusts, to be merciful and to regard the rights of the neighbours and kith and kin; he forbade us to speak evil of women, or to eat the substance of orphans; he ordered us to flee from the vices, and to abstain from evil; to offer prayers, to render alms, and to observe fast. We have believed in him, we have accepted his teachings and his injunctions to worship Allah, and not to associate anything with Him, and we have allowed what He has allowed, and prohibited what He has prohibited. For this reason, our people have risen against us, have persecuted us in order to make us forsake the worship of Allah and return to the worship of idols and other abominations. They have tortured and injured us, until finding no safety among them; we have come to your country, and hope you will protect us from oppression.”*

In this speech, Jafar combined the rights of Allah and the rights of people. Throughout the life of the Prophets, these two issues were never separated. The king was moved by the speech and the ambassadors returned empty-handed.

The next events were the conversion of Hamzah bin ‘Abd al-Mutallib and Umar ibn al-Khattab. These two conversions solidified the position of the Muslims. Every convert was assigned a teacher so that they learned about Islam in a systematic way.

The Quraish then boycotted the Muslims. The Muslims were forced to live in a valley near Mecca. During this time, some of non-Muslims would send food into valley from time to time. These non-Muslims worked with one another to break the boycott. Finally, the boycott ended. The end of the boycott was followed by the death of Abu Talib and the death of Khadijah.

It became difficult for the Prophet to live in Mecca because he no longer had any protection. So he preached to the people of Ta'if. That did not work so he returned to Mecca. In order to enter Mecca, he got the protection of sympathetic non-Muslims. Later, after the battle of Badr, he would praise them publicly for their help. The Prophet demonstrated time and again that it was necessary for him to work with non-Muslims. He knew them well and appealed to those whom he thought

would make a positive contribution. He would praise these non-Muslims publicly and privately for the good they did, without agreeing to their religious beliefs<sup>4</sup>.

### ***Al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj***

The events of *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj* are well known. The compulsory prayers were instituted during this *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*. The Prophet was then shown Paradise and Hell. He described some of the punishments that some people in Hell suffered – for eating the wealth of orphans, for backbiting, for fornicating, and for eating *riba*. These punishments are due to them ignoring the rights of the people.

After *al-Isra's wa al-Mi'raj*, the Prophet's position in Mecca was precarious. The Prophet took the initiative and visited the leaders of other tribes. He asked them whether they could sponsor him and protect him from the Quraish. He met the leaders of the tribe of Kindah. They were interested but they wanted the Prophet to give them political power. He refused because that right belongs exclusively to Allah. Political pragmatism is not part of the Sunnah.

### ***The Pledges of Aqabah***

These efforts at finding a sponsor succeeded when the Prophet preached to people from Yathrib. The next year, they came back as converts and they pledged their loyalty at Aqabah. The first pledge of Aqabah was, “*We will not worship any but Allah; we will not steal; we will not commit adultery, nor kill our children; we will not slander, intentionally forge falsehood, and we will not disobey you in any just matter.*”

This pledge combines the rights of Allah with the rights of the people. The first group asked for the Prophet to send a teacher and someone who could lead the prayer. Mus'ab ibn Umayr was sent to Yathrib to teach the people and spread Islam. Within a few weeks, many people had converted. The next year, a larger group came. The oath was different because everyone understood that the Meccans might fight a war with Yathrib to kill the Prophet. The second oath was, “*To listen and obey whether in times of ease or difficult, to spend in plenty as well as in scarcity, to always speak the truth, to enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and to defend the Prophet as they would defend one of their own*<sup>5</sup>.”

This oath stresses the rights of Allah and the rights of people. The context – whether things are easy or difficult – does not matter.

The Prophet has been receiving revelation for 13 years and almost nothing about Islamic law had been revealed. The Qur'an encouraged Muslims to first become ethical individuals because they should be afraid of the Day of Judgment. They understood that the way you deal with people will determine the way Allah will deal with you. Everything good starts with a solid religious education. As people accepted Islam, they were automatically assigned a teacher so that Muslims learned the Qur'an and reflected on it to become better people.

### ***The Madinan Phase***

The emigration of the Prophet is well known. However, some stories surrounding the emigration do not have any chains of narration. The most reliable story is told by Aishah who witnessed the Prophet arriving at Abu Bakr's house to inform him that Allah had given them permission to emigrate. Qadhi discusses the meticulous preparations during the journey – from preparing the camels for three months, hiding in the cave, appointing someone to guide them, appointing someone to bring food to the cave every day, appointing a shepherd to graze near the cave to eliminate the footprints and so forth. Meticulous planning is part of relying on Allah.

The success of the Prophet with the people of Madinah can be explained for several reasons. The Jew of Madinah had told the Arabs of Yathrib that a Prophet was coming. The people of Yathrib had experienced a long and bloody civil war. The majority of the old leaders were killed. The rest of the population was young, eager for peace, and they had witnessed some of the stupidities of tribal practices. They wanted change and they were ready to accept the Prophet wholeheartedly. The Prophet did not impose himself on the people of Madinah. They were the ones who persuaded him to come to Madinah.

When the Prophet arrived in Madinah, he gave his first Friday sermon. He encouraged people to give charity, to remember death and prepare for the Day of Judgment. In the second sermon, the Prophet said, *“Love what Allah loves; love Allah with all of your hearts. Do not become tired of Allah’s Speech, nor of mentioning His Name and do not make your hearts hard towards it (...) So worship Allah and do not associate anything with Him and fear Him as He should be feared and be sincere to Allah in the righteous words which pass your lips and love one another with Allah’s Spirit between you<sup>6</sup>.”*

The first sermon encourages actions while the second sermon encourages spirituality. These two dimensions reflect the balance of Islam. The Prophet's message – give charity, remember death, prepare for the Day of Judgment, love Allah and love one another – summarises beautifully Islam.

Abdullah bin Salam said, *“When the Messenger of Allah came to Al-Madinah, the people rushed towards him and it was said: ‘The Messenger of Allah has come!’ I came along with the people to see him, and when I looked at the face of the Messenger of Allah, I realized that his face was not the face of a liar. The first thing he said was: ‘O people, spread Salam, offer food to people and pray at night when people are sleeping, you will enter Paradise in peace.’”* Once again, the Prophet combined the rights of people and the rights of Allah.

Apart from building the mosque, one of the first things that the Prophet did was pair Muslim immigrants with the Muslims of Madinah in order to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood. The people of Madinah proposed to the Prophet that they give half of their wealth to the immigrants. The Prophet refused. Rather, the Prophet suggested that the immigrants be allowed to work the land so that they could earn an income without burdening the people of Madinah. The pairing of the Prophet was not random. It was done according to personality, status, and previous occupation. Immigrants who used to be businessmen were paired with *ansar* who were businessmen. The practice of pairing people continued throughout the life of the Prophet, even after the liberation of Mecca.

The Prophet organized the Muslim community. He established a treaty with all the tribes guaranteeing justice and freedom of religion for all. Qadhi discussed the philosophical implications of this treaty. He argued that religious identity is a much stronger social bond than national, ethnic or tribal affiliation as religious identity creates a shared belief system and a shared code of ethics. As more and more emigrants arrived and the people of Madinah could no longer accommodate them, the Prophet turned a section of the Mosque into a shelter for the people of the Suffah.

The first major battle was the battle of Badr. The Muslims had to walk to Badr and the Prophet shared a camel with two others companions. They took turns sitting on the camel. The Prophet insisted on being treated like any other Muslim, saying, “*like you, I am in need of the reward of Allah*”. Initially, the Muslims were expecting to capture a large caravan. They were not prepared to meet an army. When the news spread that the Quraish were sending an army, some of the Muslims started questioning the Prophet’s strategy. In *surah al-Anfal*, Allah describes these Muslims as “believers”. This shows that being reluctant to do some good deeds is not a sign of hypocrisy. On the Quraish side, ‘Utbah ibn Rabi‘ah was trying to prevent the battle because, in the Arab culture, it was unthinkable that relatives kill one another. The Prophet praised ‘Utbah’s attempt at stopping the war. Similarly, the Prophet forbade the Muslims from hurting non-Muslims that had helped break the boycott.

There are many lessons to learn from the battle of Badr. One lesson is that the Prophet asked the permission of the Ansar to fight in this battle. In their initial oath, they were asked to protect the Prophet. However, Badr was not a defensive war. It was an offensive war. So the Prophet wanted them to agree to this new development. Second, Qadhi discussed the benefits of the story of ‘Utbah. The fact that the Prophet praised him indicates that Muslims should work with non-Muslims who are doing something good, even if they are doing it for reasons that are outside of Islam. Third, Qadhi discussed the concept of relying on Allah. The Muslims were aided by 1,000 angels. But they still had to fight and use the strategies of war. The angels helped them to complete their job. The angels did not fight on behalf of the Muslims.

Two companions were on their way to join up with the army of the Prophet. They were intercepted by the Meccans. After some negotiation, the Meccans let them go on condition that they did not fight alongside the Prophet. The two companions agreed. They continued their journey and told their story to the Prophet. The Prophet ordered them to keep their promise so that they did not fight alongside the Muslims in Badr. Keeping promises is sacred in Islam<sup>7</sup>.

Qadhi concludes that Islam requires Muslims to be forgiving, when appropriate, and harsh, when appropriate. If one is always forgiving, people take advantage of that extreme and unwise kindness. If one is always harsh, one ends up with a very harsh version of Islam, which is contrary to the Prophet’s example.

The next battle was the battle of Uhud. After consulting with his companions, the Prophet made the decision to meet the enemy at Uhud. Taking the proper precaution, the Prophet wore two suits of armour. Qadhi explains that he did this so that Muslims understood that relying on Allah requires taking the best precautions possible. At the beginning of the battle, the Muslims were winning. This led a number of archers to assume that they battle was over. Despite the order of

their commander, they left their position to pick up spoils of war and this allowed the Quraish to counter-attack. The Prophet was wounded.

There is much wisdom in what happened at *Uhud*. In particular, Allah wanted to expose the hypocrites among the Muslims. Furthermore, Muslims need to learn to persevere in times of difficulty and disaster. The Prophet was told to lovingly forgive the archers. This sincere forgiveness was to be accompanied for *du'a* when the Prophet was in private.

The next event was the slander against the Prophet's wife. Faced with this problem, the Prophet asked for advice from his companions, even though some of them were much younger – in some cases with a teenager. Seeking advice is not just with one's peers or more knowledgeable people. It is with anyone that has relevant knowledge on a matter, even a teenager.

The next battle was the battle of *al-Ahzab*. The Quraish had persuaded the other tribes to join them. The other tribes were attracted by the promises that the Quraish had made. The Muslims built a trench. The Prophet himself worked with them and they would recite poetry out loud whose lines included, "*O Allah, if it was not for you, we would not be guided nor would we give charity and we would not pray so send your peace upon us and make our feet firm.*" Even in their poetry, the message was always the rights of Allah combined with the rights of the people<sup>8</sup>.

At the same time, there were rumours of possible treachery from inside Madinah. The Prophet, throughout his life, never made decisions based on rumours. But he sent qualified individuals to check out the accuracy of the information. Another important point is that this battle tells about what it means to get the help of Allah. The Muslims had to plan, sweat, experience fear, and work hard for almost six weeks before Allah sent miraculous winds. Allah could have sent winds on the first day of the siege. These winds forced the Quraish and their allies to return empty handed, having lost all of their credibility.

The next year, the Prophet and the Muslims went to do Umrah in Mecca. This sent shockwaves in Mecca. After trying to attack the Muslims before they arrived on sacred territory, the Quraish negotiated a peace treaty at Hudaibiyah. The negotiation strategy of the Prophet was summarised in one statement. He said, "*I will give them what they want as long as I do not have to do anything haram.*"

Allah declared that this peace treaty was the great victory. Scholars agree that Islam spreads in times of peace. Times of war are sometimes necessary but Islam cannot spread in times of war. This treaty reinforced the credibility of the Muslims and many people converted once the peace had been negotiated.

A number of small incidents happened. In one incident, the Prophet appointed Amr Ibn al-'As as the leader of an expedition. The Prophet told him that the expedition would be profitable. Amr ibn al-'As felt that thinking about money was inappropriate. The Prophet said, "*Money is a blessing as long as the money is pure and the person is pure*"<sup>9</sup>

Another incident concerns the companion Hatib Abi Balta'ah. He made a major mistake and he was brought to the Prophet for questioning. The Prophet listened to him politely and then forgave



him because he took part in the battle of Badr. This incident shows that a Muslim is not simply judged for his mistake but for his overall character. A righteous believer who makes a mistake is not the same as a habitual sinner who makes the same mistake.

The next year, the Prophet liberated Mecca without spilling blood. After destroying the idols in the *Haram*, the Prophet gave a short speech in which he said, “*Allah has abolished all of the arrogances of Jahaliyah*<sup>10</sup>”

He then quoted the Qur’an in which Allah destroys the principles of racism, stating that every human being is a child of Adam. The only thing that differentiates people is their level of *taqwa*. The Prophet then tells Bilal, a black man and a non-Quraishi, to give the call for prayer on top of the Kaabah. Once again, the Prophet upholds the rights of Allah and the rights of the people, not just in speech but in action as well. Virtually everyone in Mecca accepted Islam. The surrounding tribes accepted Islam as well.

One of the last expeditions was the battle of Tabuk. During this expedition, the Prophet gave a sermon. He started by praising Allah. He then said that the best speech is from Allah’s Book and the firmest handholds are the words of *taqwa*. The best path is that of Ibrahim (AS) and the best Sunnah is the Prophet’s Sunnah. The best thing to say is to remember Allah. The best stories are those in the Qur’an. The best of deeds are done with the most sincerity and dedication and the worst deeds are innovations. The best guidance is the guidance of the Prophets. The best death is the death of a martyr. The best deed is that which benefits you. The best knowledge is that which is followed. The worst blindness is the blindness of the heart. The higher hand is better than the lower hand. Money wise, what is little and suffices you is better than that what is a lot and distracts you. The worst excuse is the excuse that you give at the time of death. The most evil of regrets is the regret on the Day of Judgment. There are some people who only come to the Friday prayers on rare occasions. There are some people who do not remember Allah except on rare occasions. Of the worst sins is a lying tongue. The best richness is the richness of the heart. The best baggage is *at-taqwa*. The pinnacle of wisdom is to fear Allah. The best thing that settles in the heart is *yaqin* (certainty). Alcohol is the mother of all evil. The worst of all income is the income of *riba*. The worst thing to eat is the property of an orphan. The fortunate one is the one who learns from the mistakes of others. To curse a believer is a sin and to fight him is disbelief. Backbiting is a major sin. The sanctity of a believer’s money is like the sanctity of his blood. Whoever wants forgiveness, Allah will forgive. Whoever wants to show off, Allah will punish him<sup>11</sup>.

In this sermon, the Prophet combined spiritual matters and worldly matters. He stressed the rights of Allah and the rights of the people. Even in a state of *jihad*, after one month of travel, on the battlefield, the sermon was not simply about fighting. It was about upholding the honour of people, respecting the rights of orphans, and avoiding social and economic injustices. If one ponders about it, one realises that the main message never changes – whether in Mecca or in Madinah, at the beginning of his mission when he was alone or when he has absolute political control.

Allah describes the legacy of the Prophet in *surah al-Fath*. More than any political or economic achievement, he built a community of believers who were sincere in worshipping Allah and dealt

with one another sincerely and justly. They would spread Islam throughout the rest of the world. His legacy was his companions.

By and large, Muslim children learn about the Prophet's life at school. But children become teenagers and they then become adults. They have to face the difficulties and the realities of modern life. They may become sceptical about the practicality and the relevance of the Prophet's life in light of the highly competitive environment. This might be especially true for Muslim managers who have to deal with the internal politics inside many organizations.

## **THE CURRENT BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT**

Since the 1970s and the 1980s, scholars have observed that the business environment has become increasingly competitive. At the same time, psychologists have shown that people behave more unethically in a competitive environment (Pierce, Kilduff, Galinsky, & Sinavathan, 2013)). Thus, the fundamental premise of this section is that as competitiveness in the marketplace increases, the ethical standards deteriorate. The author will focus on two trends in the business world (one in marketing and the other in management) in order to support this premise.

Marketing is the process of providing customers with a product that they need at a price and a location that they want. Although such an approach to marketing is still valid, there is a darker side to marketing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One has to briefly look at the life of Edward Bernays (1891-1995). He pioneered many of the concepts that became associated with public relations and propaganda. He was also the nephew of Sigmund Freud. Legend has it that Bernays visited his famous uncle in Austria and found out about his work on the unconscious. Bernays then spent the rest of his life using deceptive means to unconsciously shape people's opinions. He most famously worked for the American tobacco company (Tye, 1998). Research on deceptive marketing shows that many companies use fear to sell their products (Gardner, 2008). Many marketers, when developing a marketing campaign, will put volunteers in MRI scans to observe which parts of the brain "light-up" when they are exposed to different marketing messages (Gardner, 2008). Since then, scholars have exposed a variety of deceptive marketing tactics that marketers routinely use (Boush, Friestad, & Wright, 2015). In particular, it is recognised that certain groups of consumers are more vulnerable than others and that some goods and services are addictive (Fortin & Uncles, 2011). Some experts argue that "marketing to the unconscious" is not unethical but does lead to more satisfied consumers (Van Praet, 2012)

Along the same lines, management is, in theory, a process in which leaders fulfil the expectations of all stakeholders. Thus, leaders should take care of the needs and expectations of customers, shareholders, employees, and other stakeholders. In practice, there is a darker side to management. Research shows how leaders use deception to control their subordinates. Coutu (2002) interviewed Edgar Schein, one of the pioneers in study organisational culture. Schein explains how, as a young doctorate student, he interviewed American soldiers that had been brainwashed in Chinese prisoner of war camps during the Korean War. In the 1960s, when he started working on organizational culture, he observed that many companies were using similar brainwashing strategies to indoctrinate their employees. This has led to a vast area of research that is known as the "*dark side of organizational life*".

A search on Google Scholar reveals papers with titles like “*the Dark Side of Organizational Paradoxes: The Dynamics of Disempowerment*” (Berti & Simpson, 2021); “*defining conflict and making choices about its management: Lighting the dark side of organizational life*” (Tjosvold, 2006), or “*The Dark Side of Organizational Life: Aggressive Expression in the Workplace*” (Avtgis & Chory, 2010).

At the same time, business leaders are under enormous pressure to meet the expectations of shareholders. These expectations often lead to short-termism to meet the expectations of shareholders (Keum, 2021). Short-termism is when investors push managers to invest in short-term projects in order to keep earnings high. This creates an environment in which managers abandoned the real market in which goods and services are traded for the “*expectations markets where speculation rules*” (Fusso, 2013). For obvious reasons, short-termism is a problem that leaders who manage companies listed on stock exchange face. Business leaders whose companies are not listed can focus on long-term strategies that reflect the ethical values of the main shareholders.

To complicate the problem, new technology has multiplied the opportunities for organisations to deceive their customers and employees. Although legislators are trying to put in place laws that protect the privacy of consumers and employees, the technology moves so rapidly that legislators are always several steps behind tech giants. One scholar called this new era the era of “*surveillance capitalism*” (Zuboff, 2019).

Due to space constraints, it is not possible to present the literature in more detail. However, the broad trends and the pressure on managers in companies listed on the stock exchange has been presented.

## **HYPOTHESES**

In short, Muslim managers are caught between two very powerful forces. On the one hand, there is the Islamic tradition. This tradition is very explicit. One cannot separate the rights of Allah from the rights of people. One cannot say, for example, “*I believe in Allah and I pray. That is enough. How I treat my employees and my customers is my own problem.*” Any kind of deception in business is not permissible. This was a message that the Prophet repeated all the time – whether when preaching to Muslims, non-Muslims, whether in Mecca or in Madinah. Even when he was fighting *jihad*, he reminded the Muslims of the rights of the people. In Islam, a promise is sacred (thus, the two Muslims who promised not to fight alongside the Prophet were indeed forbidden to fight) and every business transaction is a series of promises.

On the other hand, it seems that deception has become normalized in the current business climate. The obvious problems of cheating, lying, corruption and bribery are not even the issues. It goes much deeper than that. As has been argued, many marketing campaigns involve manipulation of unconscious emotions and deception. With regards to management, the literature on the dark side of organizational life is vast, well researched, and frightening.

The short-term pressures facing managers of publicly-listed companies have been stated. Obviously, managers of private enterprises do not have the same pressures that managers of publicly listed companies have. This allows two hypotheses to be derived:

***H<sub>1</sub>: Muslim managers of private enterprises are able, if they wish, to live up to the ethical standards displayed by the Prophet during his lifetime.***

***H<sub>2</sub>: Muslim managers of publicly-listed company are not able to live up to the ethical standards displayed by the Prophet due to short-term pressures from shareholders.***

Further research needs to test these hypotheses.

## **KEY CONCEPTS**

Throughout this study, two terms will be used regularly: the rights of Allah and the rights of the people. The rights of Allah refer to acts of worship (like believing in Allah, praying, fasting, and so forth). The rights of the people refer to social interactions such as speaking the truth, keeping promises, earning lawful income and so forth. The problem is that the Islamic expectations are very high. In practice, many managers find that in order to “push” their subordinates to be productive, they sometimes need to be pushy, and even manipulative. Muslim managers may justify this kind of behaviour arguing that the limited harm of pushing individual employees can be justified because of the collective good of having a successful organization<sup>2</sup>.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Dr Yasir Qadhi is a Muslim scholar. He recorded 104 lectures on the life of the Prophet and uploaded them to YouTube<sup>1</sup>. He referred to classical books such as Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham. Additionally, to many of narrations and to the explanation of the Qur’an to better explain each episode of the Prophet’s life.

Qadhi notes that many events in the Meccan period were not recorded because the Muslims were being persecuted. They had no time to document what was going on. The events in the Madinan period were better documented. Proportionally, the events narrated from the Madinan period are three times more voluminous than the events narrated from the Meccan period. As the centuries went by, people added legends to the life of the Prophet. The first book from Ibn Ishaq is one volume. Ibn Ishaq included the chains of narrators. Several centuries later, scholars were writing books in five volumes, containing stories without chains of narration. Qadhi only highlighted events with a reasonably strong chain of narrators.

The author will summarize Qadhi’s lectures while analysing the speeches and sermons. At the end of this summary, the author will reflect on the environment that Muslim managers need to operate in and address the issue of relevance.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study started by reviewing the life of the Prophet. This was necessary because Muslims often have a superficial understanding of the Prophet’s life. The author found that the message of Islam

always combines the rights of Allah and the rights of the people. Any attempts at separating these two – for example, by arguing that Islam is only about religious activities and that managers have discretion over business transactions – is a complete rejection of fundamental Islamic principles.

At the same time, there is no denying that managers face a very competitive environment and the pressure to meet the market's expectations is very high. However, this seems to be mostly true for publicly listed companies. In private enterprises, managers are better able to manage their businesses according to ethical principles and focus on the long-term.

These points lead the author to two main conclusions.

First, the life of the Prophet is still very much relevant to Muslim managers in the 21st century. The Muslims surrounding the Prophet were human. They made mistakes from time to time (the battle of Uhud). They experienced doubts and fear from time to time (battle of Ahzab). They sometimes were puzzled by the Prophet's strategy (the treaty of Hudaibiyah). In the end, they trusted Allah and His Messenger. Muslim managers must do the same.

Second, the reality of the 21st century is that the business environment is extremely competitive. However, it seems that it is easier to live up to one's ethical standards in private enterprises. This means that Muslim managers wishing to please Allah and His Messenger might consider avoiding publicly-listed companies and working for smaller organizations whose corporate values better reflect the values displayed by the Prophet throughout his lifetime.

#### **END NOTES:**

1. His lectures can be found by keying in "Yasir Qadhi seerah". His first lecture is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOUp3ZZ9t3A&list=PLAEA99D24CA2F9A8F>.
2. The issue of "individual harm versus public good" is a contentious issue in Islamic law. For a good discussion on this principle, see Zarabozo (1999, pp. 1135-1161).
3. Yasir Qadhi, Seerah, part 11
4. Yasir Qadhi, Seerah, part 20
5. Yasir Qadhi, Seerah, part 24
6. Yasir Qadhi, Seerah, part 30
7. Yasir Qadhi, Seerah, part 47
8. Yasir Qadhi, Seerah, part 56
9. Yasir Qadhi, Seerah, part 74
10. Yasir Qadhi, Seerah, part 78
11. Yasir Qadhi, Seerah, part 91

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