



## SEVEN NARRATIONS: AN ISLAMIC MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

This study pertains to *Islāmic* management. *Islāmic* management introduces the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* into the practice of management. To date, most of the focus has been on introducing *Qur'anic* concepts. Introducing concepts from the *Sunnah* has been lacking. In some cases, scholars have quoted narrations but not offered any explanations. Using an action research methodology, the author looked at how best to introduce an understanding of the *Sunnah* to undergraduate students of *Islāmic* management. In the first cycle, students were asked to reflect on an-Nawawi's Forty *Hadith*. Although this text is recognized as an excellent summary of the *Sunnah*, it proved to be too comprehensive for the limited time available. The author selected seven very comprehensive narrations and linked them to the management principles of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. A second cycle was initiated and that proved much more successful. Knowing these narrations alone is not enough. Each narration is tied to a key principle in the *Sunnah* so that a detailed explanation must accompany each narration. Such an approach helps practitioners of *Islāmic* management to better apply the Prophetic Leadership Model.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, scholars of *Islāmic* law have explained the *Sunnah* in the form of manuals. For example, the translation in English of al-Hajar al-Asqalani's *Bulugh al-Maram* (Al-Sanani, 2002) has hundreds of narrations organized in different chapters. For example, the chapter on usury (*ribā'*) has 21 narrations of the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) on this matter (Al-Sanani, 2002, 268-274). These manuals are useful up to a point. However, Muslim

scholars of management started writing works on *Islāmic* management in the 1990s and 2000s. The aim of these books of *Islāmic* management was to refute the secular ideology underlying much of conventional management and to present an *Islāmic* alternative. Many books on *Islāmic* management kept the framework of conventional management based on planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (Ahmad and Fontaine, 2011; Ahmad, 2007; Jabnoun 1994) but added insights from the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*.

An example is Jabnoun (1994). However, a careful analysis of Jabnoun (1994) shows that the overwhelming number of references is from the *Qur'ān* only with no real explanations of what the *ayat* are supposed to mean. Very few narrations are presented. When they are presented, it is in a very simplified manner. For example, Jabnoun (1994, 57) quoted the narration that says, “Religion is sincere advice” but does not explain its significance at all. Some narrations are presented in an obscure manner. For example, Jabnoun (1994, 66) quoted a narration that says, “This religion is strong so deal with it delicately and nicely” but gives no further explanations.

The purpose of the above paragraphs is not to criticize past scholars but to recognize that a gap exists in the literature that needs to be filled. Since 2004, the author has been researching and teaching *Islāmic* management. Over the last few years, he shared insights from the *Qur'ān* for the benefit of Muslim managers (Fontaine, 2020; Fontaine, Ahmad, and Oziev, 2017). He is now focused on helping students and *Islāmic* management practitioners to better understand the *Sunnah* and relate it to management principles.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The author uses an action research approach in developing a framework to promote *Islāmic* management (Fontaine, 2016). Action research allows educators to identify a problem and go through various cycles to improve learning outcomes through an inductive process (Stinger, 2008). The aim of his action research is to help management students understand the relevance of the *Sunnah* in the Muslim workplace. A total of 150 students participated in this project.

## 3. FIRST CYCLE

In 2018, the author started the first cycle of the “sharing the *Sunnah*” project. The *Sunnah* encompasses the statements, actions, and approvals of the Prophet (blessing and peace be upon him) (Philips,

1996; Nyazee, 1994). Doi (1984) explains how the *Sunnah* was preserved through narrations (*aḥadīth*). Six collections emerged. They were compiled by *al-Bukhari*, *Muslim*, *Ibn Majah*, *Abu Dawud*, *al-Tirmighi*, and *al-Nasa'i*. Ali (2003) adds two other collections of narrations: The *Muwatta'* of Imam Malik and the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Another collection known as *Musnad ad-Darimi* is also highly regarded (Ali, 2003, 163). A more detailed account is presented by As-Siba'ee (2008). As-Siba'ee deals with the preservation of the *Sunnah*. This includes how scholars deal with fabricated *ḥadīth*, with a variety of *Islāmic* groups, with orientalist, and with contemporary writers who reject it.

The *Sunnah* is a very technical science that many ordinary Muslims do not really understand. Although many Muslims are familiar with *al-Bukhari* and *Muslim*, a popular source for understanding the *Sunnah* remains Imam an-Nawawi's Forty *Ḥadīth*. These are found in Appendix 1. Zarabozo (1999) presents a good commentary in English. Indeed, merely reading a translation of a narration is not enough. Zarabozo (1999, 6) argues that a narration can only be properly understood in the light of the *Qur'ān* and other narrations. Each narration requires a detailed commentary. An-Nawawi's contribution is that he sifted through all the collections of narrations and selected 42 narrations. Each narration provides an essential teaching of Islam. Together, they encompass "*all of Islam*" (Zarabozo, 1999, 104). At the end of this stage, the author decided that he wanted his students to have an overview of the Forty *Ḥadīth* and a basic understanding of selected narrations.

In September 2018, the author taught a course in which he gave an assignment where the students had to reflect on the Forty *Ḥadīth*. Online resources were identified and a number of classroom sessions were dedicated to explaining some of the narrations. After each class, he wrote down his reflections. Summarizing the semester, he wrote,

"Sem 1, 2018/2019. We started discussing the 40 *ḥadīth* in class. We did the first four *ḥadīth* on the first day. The slow pace was because the class spent time on the first *ḥadīth* – the discussion was whether intention was related to belief or action. The fourth *ḥadīth* dealt with *al-qadr* so a long discussion about *al-qadr* followed. In the next class, six *ḥadīth* were covered. A long time was spent analyzing "the religion is the nasehah". In the next class, the following narrations were discussed: there is no harming, speak well or

keep silent, and whoever relieves his brother of a burden, *Allāh* will relieve his burden on the Day of Judgment. After discussing these narrations, students worked in pairs to reflect on the rest of the 40 *ḥadīth*. The problem is that each narration is so comprehensive that a one-hour session to explain one narration is barely sufficient. If I try to cover everything superficially, I will do a bad job. If I cover these 40 *ḥadīth* in detail, I cannot complete the rest of the syllabus. I don't know what to do.”

This was the dilemma. If students simply read the narrations without any explanations, they gain little real knowledge about the *Sunnah*. The benefit of each narration emerges when one is familiar with the discussion tied to each narration. If too much time was spent discussing them, the rest of the syllabus would have to be sacrificed. In short, trying to teach all forty two narrations is not feasible. One would have to pick and choose some narrations that seem more relevant to management. This was the end of the first cycle of the action research project.

#### 4. INTERLUDE

After the end of the first cycle, the author spent about 18 months thinking about the problem. His reflections focused on *Sūrah al-Fatihah*. Its logic is compelling. It is:

1. Premise 1: *Allāh* is the Master of all the worlds
2. Premise 2; He is *ar-Rahman, ar-Raheem*
3. Premise 3: He is the Owner of the Day of Judgment
4. Conclusion: No one else can help you on the Day of Judgment so you should worship Him alone and seek help from Him alone
5. The last part of the *sūrah* explains the characteristics of those who obey Him and those who disobey Him
6. The beginning of the *sūrah* describes the greatness of *Allāh*.

The implication is that once someone has internalized *Allāh's* greatness, then one is ready to worship Him. If one disobeys *Allāh*, one has to reflect on *Allāh's* greatness. Apart from having a compelling logic, it is a summary of the whole *Qur'ān* yet it is very short – only seven *āyat*. Neuroscience shows that individuals have a limited cognitive capacity. They are generally able to keep between five and seven items in their short-term memory (Gardner, 2008). By April 2020, the author had identified seven narrations using an inductive process. He was inspired by the structure of *Sūrah al-Fatihah* which starts by describing *Allāh's* names and attributes

before exploring appropriate and inappropriate behavior. This inductive process was facilitated by conversations with Muslim scholars of *Islāmic* economics. One of them noted that, “In the old days, Muslim would start businesses that were permissible. Today, people start a business first and then worry about the permissibility after the fact”. Table 1 shows the justifications by relating these narrations to *Sūrah al-Fatihah* and management principles. These might not be the most pertinent narrations for future managers but this study is very much a first attempt at presenting what has been done to gain feedback from other scholars.

TABLE 1  
Seven Narrations

Description	Tag Line	Justification
1 <i>Hadīth</i> # 10	<i>Allāh</i> is pure and accepts only deeds that are pure	Related to <i>Allāh</i> 's names and attribute. In management, related to planning
2 <i>Hadīth</i> # 19	Be mindful of <i>Allāh</i> and <i>Allāh</i> will protect you	Related to <i>Allāh</i> 's names and attributes. In management, related to leadership
3 <i>Hadīth</i> # 24	I have forbidden wrongdoing ( <i>zulm</i> ) for Myself so do not wrong others	Related to <i>Allāh</i> 's names and attributes. In management, related to planning
4 <i>Hadīth</i> # 42	As long as you call on me, I will forgive you	Related to <i>Allāh</i> 's names and attributes. In management, related to controlling
5 <i>Hadīth</i> # 21	Believe in <i>Allāh</i> completely and then stand firm	Related to appropriate behaviour. In management, related to leadership
6 <i>Hadīth</i> # 9	Avoid sins completely, do good deeds as much as you can	Related to inappropriate behaviour. In management, related to planning and leadership

TABLE 1 (continued)

Description	Tag Line	Justification
7 <i>Hadīth</i> # 7	The religion is <i>naseehah</i>	Related to appropriate behaviour. In management, related to leadership and controlling

These seven narrations are presented in the following section.

## 5. SEVEN NARRATIONS

In the English language, Zarabozo (1999) has given one of the most complete commentaries of the Forty *Hadīth*. Thus Zarabozo (1999) will be used as a reference although many other commentaries exist. For example, Navaid Aziz explained each narration and uploaded the content to YouTube. These links were provided to students as an additional reference (see Table 2).

TABLE 2  
Resources on YouTube

Description	Link
1 <i>Hadīth</i> # 10	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5k6gHdTAIM&amp;t=36s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5k6gHdTAIM&amp;t=36s</a>
2 <i>Hadīth</i> # 19	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSitfPZwJQo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSitfPZwJQo</a>
3 <i>Hadīth</i> # 24	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EghBhEXnNw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EghBhEXnNw</a>
4 <i>Hadīth</i> # 42	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5i764rWK4SE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5i764rWK4SE</a>
5 <i>Hadīth</i> # 21	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fSeyhNwRTE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fSeyhNwRTE</a>
6 <i>Hadīth</i> # 9	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4pY2-AgGvg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4pY2-AgGvg</a>
7 <i>Hadīth</i> # 7	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFs8U6XMJrU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFs8U6XMJrU</a>

The first narration is,

“Verily *Allāh* is pure (*tayyib*) and accepts only that which is pure. *Allāh* has commanded the believers to do what He has commanded the messengers: “O messengers! Eat the good things and do what is right.” And He said, “O those who believe, eat of the good things that We have provided for you.” Then the Prophet mentioned a man who after a long

journey is disheveled and dust coloured. The man stretches his hands out towards the sky and says, “O Rabb, O Rabb”, while his food is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, his clothing is unlawful, and his nourishment is unlawful. How is he to be answered.” (Muslim)

The statement “*Allāh is pure*” is a summary of all of *Allāh’s* attributes. He is perfect in every way and He has no imperfection (Zarabozo, 1999, 549). As a consequence, *Allāh* accepts only pure deeds. Acceptable deeds mean that they are done sincerely for Him and they are in accordance with *Islāmic* law. The person doing the deed has a certain mindset. He or she is aware that deeds need to be done as perfectly as possible in order for them to be pleasing to *Allāh* and therefore acceptable (Zarabozo, 1999, 551). Zarabozo (1999, 558) notes that the narration does not say that deeds of someone with unlawful income will be automatically rejected. *Allāh* may accept these deeds out of His mercy and kindness. The point is that unlawful income is a major reason why deeds are rejected. In Table 1, this narration was linked to planning because each business is either clearly permissible, clearly impermissible, or in a grey area. Muslims should therefore logically be afraid of getting involved in uncertain business transactions.

The second narration is,

“O young man, I shall teach you some words. Be mindful (*ihfadh*) of *Allāh* and *Allāh* will protect you. Be mindful of *Allāh* and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask of *Allāh*. If you seek help, seek help from *Allāh*. Know that if the nations were to gather together to benefit you with something, they would not benefit you with anything except that which *Allāh* has already recorded for you. If they gather to harm you by something, they would not be able to harm you except what *Allāh* has recorded against you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have been dried.” (al-Tirmidhi)

Zarabozo (1999, 739) explains that *ihfadh* means “guarding” or “preserving”. Thus Zarabozo translates *ihfadh* as “*being mindful*”. The idea is that one is mindful of *Allāh’s shari‘ah*. One protects the rights of *Allāh* (e.g., the prayer) and the rights of people (e.g., respecting other people’s dignity). In return *Allāh* will protect that person. Not only one, a Muslim will develop a closeness with *Allāh*.

If a Muslim asks, he or she should only ask from *Allāh*. If a Muslim asks for help, only *Allāh* can help him or her. This portion of the narration – guard the rights of *Allāh*, ask Him for your needs, and ask Him for help – highlights the reliance of the slave upon *Allāh*. This is the essence of *tawheed* (Zarabozo, 1999, 760). The final portion of the narration describes the belief in *al-Qadar*. Belief in *al-Qadar* is often a source of confusion for many Muslims. However, this narration explains it in a simple way by highlighting what Muslims can do – being mindful of the limits set by *Allāh*. Zarabozo (1999, 764) writes,

“Correct belief in this part of the *ḥadīth* should lead to tranquility and happiness in the soul of the person. If a person turns to *Allāh* and puts his trust in Him, he no longer cares what people plot against him”

In Table 1, this narration was linked to leadership. One could argue that respecting the *sharī‘ah* can also be part of planning or controlling so it is a matter of interpretation. However, an important dimension of this narration is that idea of not being afraid of what other people think or say, which seems more pertinent to leadership.

The third narration is,

“O My servants, I have forbidden wrongdoing (*zulm*) for Myself and I have made it forbidden for you. Therefore, do not wrong one another. O My servants, all of you are lost except for those whom I have guided. Therefore, seek guidance from Me and I will guide you. O My servants, all of you are hungry except those that I have fed. Therefore, seek food from Me and I will feed you. O My servants, all of you are naked except those whom I have clothed. Therefore, seek clothing from Me and I will clothe you. O My servants, you sin by night and by day, and I forgive all sins. Therefore, seek forgiveness from Me and I will forgive you. O My servants, you will not be able to harm Me so as to bring any harm to me, and you will not benefit Me so as to bring any benefit to Me. O My servants, if the first and the last of you and the humans and the jinn of you were as pious as the most pious heart of anyone among you, it would not add anything to My dominion. O My servants, if the first and the last of you and the humans and the jinn of you were as



wicked as the most wicked heart of anyone among you, it would not decrease anything to My dominion. O My servants, if the first and the last of you and the humans and the jinn of you were to gather together on the land and all asked of Me and if I were to give everyone of them what he asked, that would not decrease what I have any more than a needle decreases what is in the ocean when it is put into it. O My servants, it is but your deeds that I reckon for you. Then I recompense you for them. The one who finds good is to give praises to *Allāh*. The one who finds other than this should not blame anyone except himself.” (Muslim)

This narration covers every aspect of *Islāmic* law. Everything that is forbidden is a type of injustice (whether people realize it or not) and everything that has been ordered relates to justice. Wrongdoing is divided into three categories.

1. Wrongdoings that cannot be forgiven (e.g. *shirk*)
2. Wrongdoing that cannot be overlooked because it involves the rights of other people (whether Muslims or non-Muslims). The good deeds and the sins need to be exchanged so as to rectify the rights of people.
3. Wrongdoing that a person does against himself. *Allāh* may punish or overlook these sins at His own discretion because it does not involve the rights of other people.

Muslims should have a zero-tolerance toward wrongdoing and they should do what they can to establish justice in society (Zarabozo, 1999, 930). This part of the narration has many practical implications in the business world. Many business leaders seem to practice some kind of wrongdoing (e.g., bribery, delaying paying their suppliers, misleading customers, getting employees to work overtime without paying them for it and so forth) but they seem to be successful in business. This apparent success is in fact deceiving (Zarabozo, 1999, 926). Success and failure are only in terms of the Hereafter, and oppressing others will have a huge adverse effect. In particular, the supplication of oppressed people is always accepted. The Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) said,

“Protect yourself from the supplication of the one who is wronged, even if he is a disbeliever, for there is no barrier for it” (Ahmad)

The next portion of the narration states that everyone is lost except those that are guided. Zarabozo (1999, 936) says that guidance includes

1. A general guidance to everyone with regard to worldly matters. This is the human nature that *Allāh* has programmed in every person.
2. A general guidance to everyone with regard to religious matters. This is guidance that prophets and scholars can share with the people so as to try to persuade them to accept the truth.
3. A specific guidance which has to do with the placing of faith into the heart of a believer. This guidance comes only from *Allāh*.
4. A specific guidance has to do with guiding someone to the Straight Path. This guidance comes only from *Allāh*.

With regard to Muslims not getting guidance, Zarabozo (1999, 938) writes,

“The only way, based on this *ḥadīth*, is that they did not want the true guidance. They prayed but they were not sincere when asking for guidance. They had already determined what “guidance” was. They had their heart set on some specific path and that is what they were going to follow”

The next part of the narration deals with the means of livelihood. This narration implies asking from *Allāh*, working to earn a living, and having a good expectation from *Allāh* (Zarabozo, 1999, p. 942). Muslims who understand this point will always be thankful for what they have. They will not be jealous for what they do not have. In the last portion of the narration, *Allāh* emphasizes that He forgives sins. The one who does good should praise *Allāh* and the one who has problems should blame himself. In Table 1, this narration was linked to planning. As mentioned earlier, some businesses are clearly permissible, clearly impermissible, or there is uncertainty. However, one may plan to run a permissible business using wrongdoing as a business strategy. Wrongdoing can include lying to customers, lying to employees, lying to suppliers, or lying to the shareholders.

The fourth narration is,

“O son of Adam, as long as you call on Me and put your hope in Me, I have forgiven you for what you have done and I do not mind. O son of Adam, if your sins were to reach the clouds of the sky and then you would seek My forgiveness, I would forgive you. O son of Adam, if you were going to come to Me with sins close to filling the earth and then you would meet Me without ascribing partners with Me, I would bring forgiveness close to forgiving it” (al-Tirmidhi)

This narration illustrates the importance of supplication (*du'a*). Supplication has conditions. One must be sincere, one must follow the manners of supplication, and one must perform pure acts. Zarabozo (1999, 1598) quotes that the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) said, “*You are responded to as long you do not become hasty and say, I supplicated and it has not been responded*” (al-Bukhari and Muslims). As such, one must have hope in *Allāh*. Hoping in *Allāh* means “*fearing his punishment while hoping for his forgiveness. It is hoping for the mercy of Allāh while fearing his greatness and power*” (Zarabozo, 1999, 1589). This proper balance between hope and fear is crucial. Someone who commits a lot of sins should not simply assume that he will be forgiven. Someone who does commit sins should not lose all hope. With regard to forgiveness and repentance, Zarabozo (1999, 1600) notes that the conditions for repentance include,

1. Repentance must be sincere
2. The person asking for forgiveness must feel remorse
3. The person must stop committing the sin – if they have hurt someone’s honour or stolen some wealth, they have to return it.
4. The person must be committed not to repeat the sin
5. The act of repentance must be done as soon as possible.

In Table 1, this narration is linked to controlling. The logic is that people make sins all the time. These sins can be intentional (generally out of arrogance) or unintentional (generally out of forgetfulness). If Muslims were afraid that none of their sins would be forgiven, nobody would venture into the business world. The reality of business is that, despite the best of intentions, things go wrong. These are often honest mistakes. Similarly, there are two dimensions to controlling. One emphasizes punishment for deviating from goals set by top management. The other emphasizes improving

after mistakes are made (Fontaine, 2016). Part of one's reliance on *Allāh* is that if one repents and corrects one's mistakes, one's previous sins will be forgiven. This optimism should naturally translate into how one deals with one's subordinates.

The fifth narration is,

“O Messenger of *Allāh*, tell me a statement about Islam such that I will not have to ask anyone other than you.” He answered, “Say, I believe in *Allāh*” and then stand firm (*istiqamah*) on that” (Muslim)

This narration implies that believing in *Allāh* is not simply affirming that *Allāh* exists. One must worship Him sincerely, continuously ask Him for help, protection, guidance, forgiveness, and sustenance. One must constantly guard the limits of the *sharī'ah* and make sure not to wrong anyone else. Faith is not just verbal affirmation. It is always belief followed by action. Zarabozo (1999, 216) writes.

“This relation between true faith and acts may be one reason why *Allāh* so often describes the believers by the acts they perform. If true faith really exists in the heart, the corresponding good deed must follow. It is simply inconceivable that the inner aspects are at the level of great faith and the external deeds do not demonstrate that faith.”

Zarabozo (1999, 234) notes that entering Paradise is tied to being a believer, not to simply being a Muslim. Muslims have fulfilled the external requirements of their faith. Believers (*mu'min*) have fulfilled the internal and external requirements of their faith. One starts as Muslim and then gradually increases in faith until one becomes a believer. Zarabozo (1999, 826) says that even the testimony of faith has conditions attached to them. These conditions are,

1. Knowledge (*al-ilm*)
2. Certainty (*al-yaqin*)
3. Acceptance (*al-qabul*)
4. Submission (*al-inqiyad*)
5. Truthfulness (*al-sidq*)
6. Pure sincerity (*al-ikhlas*)
7. Love of the testimony of faith and everything that it implies (*al-mahabbah*)

Thus believing in *Allāh* properly is not an easy matter. There is necessarily struggle involved. One must, for example, struggle against one's desires. This requires constancy (*istiqamah*). It means being committed to Islam, struggling to stay on the straight path, and being resilient. The *Qur'ān* makes it clear that human beings are unable to attain perfection. People should try their best and they should seek forgiveness for their shortcomings (Zarabozo, 1999, 836). In Table 1, this narration was linked to leadership. Leaders may plan to have a permissible business but things may happen. Thus every day, one's faith and commitment to *Islāmic* principles need to be renewed.

The sixth narration is,

“What I have forbidden for you, stay away from. What I have ordered you to do, do as much as you can. Verily the people before you were destroyed only because of their excessive questioning and their disagreeing with their prophets.” (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

This narration is fundamental to the correct understanding of *Islāmic* law. The command to avoid prohibition is absolute. The priority is:

1. One must fulfill the minimum requirements to be a Muslim (e.g., pray five times a day for example). If one is unable to do them perfectly, one can do them according to one's ability (e.g., a sick person can pray sitting on a chair).
2. One must abstain from sins
3. One can then do additional good deeds (e.g. voluntary prayers) to get closer to *Allāh*

Zarabozo (1999, 526-527) writes, “*It is more important to avoid the forbidden acts than to go beyond those obligatory acts into the non-obligatory acts.*” Abdullah ibn Umar stated, “*it is better to return one-sixth of a dirham illegally gotten is preferred to spending one hundred thousand dirhams in the path of Allāh.*” This sense of priority is an integral part of worshiping *Allāh* sincerely. The second part of the narration relates to seeking knowledge. There are good questions and bad questions. One extreme is to focus on hypothetical questions that have no real benefit. The other extreme is to never ask any questions. The middle way is to ask practical questions but to not venture into useless speculations (Zarabozo, 1999, 531). In Table 1, this narration is linked to planning and leadership. Poor planning may lead some Muslims to commit business-related sins (for

example, borrowing money using interest-based loans) that was not in the original business plan. Poor leadership means that unethical business practices are not corrected because they seem to be profitable.

The seventh narration is,

“The religion is *naseehah*. The people said, “to whom?”. The Prophet replied, “to *Allāh* and to His Book, and to His Messenger, to the leaders of the Muslims, and to the common folk of the Muslims” (Muslim)

This is a comprehensive narration. Zarabozo (1999, 479) notes that this expression “*the religion is naseehah*” is very unique. It is similar to the statement that says, “*the Haj is ‘Arafah*”. Scholars know that there is more to the Haj than simply gathering at ‘Arafah but missing ‘Arafah invalidates the Haj. Zarabozo (1999, 479) concludes that,

“One of the interpretations is that one’s religion cannot be complete unless he fulfills the *naseehah* to *Allāh*, His Book, and the others mentioned in this narration”

This is a very heavy statement that has enormous importance for students and practitioners of *Islāmic* management. The meaning of *naseehah* is very comprehensive and it includes all forms of virtue. It means to clean, to purify, or to improve something; and to unite and join something together. The scholars have concluded that it is an action or statement that contains goodness for another person. It is an essential part of brotherhood. The *Qur’ān* describes the prophets as giving *naseehah* to their people. Zarabozo (1999, 495) gives an example of how the companions understood this concept.

At-Tabarani narrates that one of the companions, Jareer, had a slave buy a horse on his behalf and the slave paid 300 dinars for the horse. Jareer returned to the seller and told him that the horse was worth 800 dinars, so he gave the man an extra 500 dinars. Jareer explained, “*I made the oath of allegiance to the Prophet to do the following: to establish the prayer, to pay the zakat, and to make naseehah to every Muslim*” (Zarabozo, 1999, 495). This incident illustrates the importance of *naseehah* because it is as important as the prayer and zakat. The following Table 3 summarizes the different dimensions of *naseehah*.

One notes that the actions of the heart – such as loving others for the sake of *Allāh* – are always implied. Indeed, the Prophet said,

“None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself” (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

TABLE 3  
The Dimensions of *Naseehah*

<i>Naseehah</i>	Description
To <i>Allāh</i>	To love <i>Allāh</i> more than anyone or anything else, to respect <i>Allāh</i> 's laws, to support other believers, and to be thankful for His favors.
To His Book	To believe that the Qur'an is the Speech of <i>Allāh</i> . One reads it, understand it, loves it, and applies it to the best of one's ability.
To His Messenger	To believe in him, love him, his family, and his companions. It means taking the Messenger as the final say when it comes to religious matters. One must love and support people who attempt to promote his <i>Sunnah</i> .
To the leaders of the Muslims	To help and to advise religious leaders and worldly leaders. This should be done with wisdom, dignity, and in secret.
To the common folk of the Muslims	To help them in worldly and religious matters, to protect them, and to conceal their faults.

In Table 1, this narration is linked to both leadership and controlling. Leaders should not simply be exploiting employees. They should be concerned with developing their skills and talent through coaching, mentoring, or training. Similarly, *naseehah* has obvious relevance to controlling. In many organizations, controlling is often reduced to setting key performance indicators and evaluating performance based on these indicators. In reality, good controlling combines performance evaluation and developing talent. When people do the right thing, they should be praised. When they make mistakes, one has to understand why the mistake was made (Fontaine, Ahmad, and Oziev, 2017).

## 6. SECOND CYCLE

In June 2020, this author was teaching three sections totaling 110 students. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the usual face to face

meetings were not possible. Using a combination of Zoom and WhatsApp, he sent his students a draft of this paper. They were asked to read the paper, do some basic research, and include their findings in the assignments that they were due to submit. Although a somewhat crude method of data collection, the author made two important conclusions. First, they all understood the basic message of the document that they received. Second, it was much easier for them to make sense of seven narrations rather than 42 narrations (as was done in the first cycle). In particular, the explanation of each narration was very helpful. In this case, quality was much better than quantity.

## 7. THE NEXT CYCLE

God willing, the next cycle starts in 2021. The plan is to give these seven narrations to students. Through class discussions and class presentations, the author ensures that they understand them. Students are then divided into groups of three and asked to survey friends and family to find out three challenges that people face at work in the light of these narrations. They are asked to report their findings. For example, it might be that the majority of groups discover that most people agree that Muslims today are very casual about earning permissible income, or that many people feel that their managers wrong them on a regular basis, or that most managers do not give *naseehah* to their subordinates. The point is that the *Sunnah* is not simply a number of narrations that need to be memorized. It is not a series of detailed explanations that need to be understood. The *Sunnah* is made up of narrations that allow Muslims to make sense of the world, in this case, the world of work. This is in line with the overall vision of *Islāmic* management.

## 8. DISCUSSION

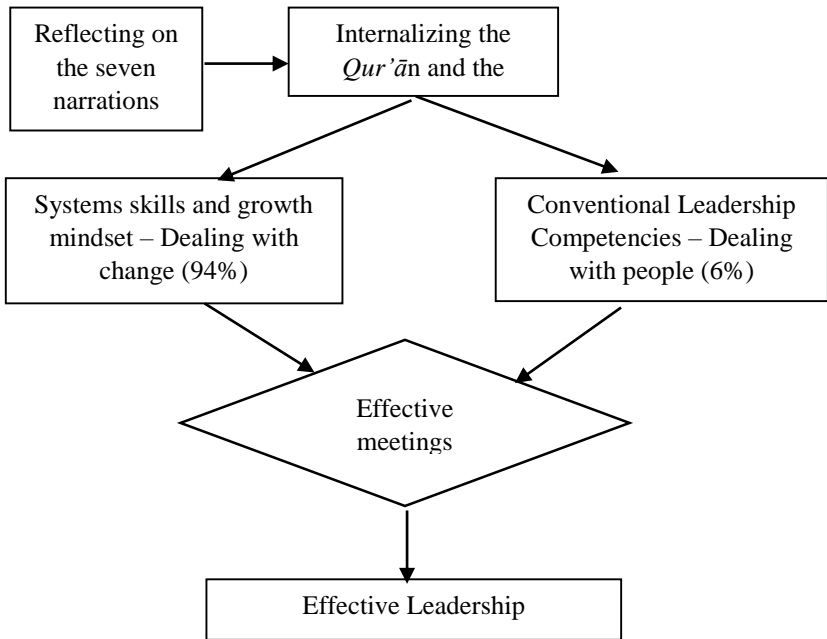
Every study should make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Clearly, Muslim scholars of management have always appreciated the importance of the *Sunnah*. For example, Jabnoun (1994) quoted several narrations in his seminal work. The problem is that a narration without a detailed explanation is not very useful. Indeed, it can be misleading. Some writers do provide detailed explanation. For example, Tahir (2019) quoted one narration (“*Richness is not having many possessions, but richness is being content with oneself*”) and wrote 40 pages to explain its significance.



That is very much the exception, not the norm. If Muslim writers of management would quote narrations and provide the relevant explanations, that would be a great step forward.

Second, the author believes that it is important that Muslim writers of management rely on a model of *Islāmic* management. The author currently relies on the Prophetic Leadership Model to guide his research (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1  
The Prophetic Leadership Model



Source. Adapted from Fontaine (2020)

This model is made up of several components. The first component focuses on internalizing the values of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*. Fontaine (2020) identified four core values from the *Qur'ān* (*iman*, *islam*, *ihsan*, and *taqwa*). These seven narrations can be added to this list. These values are not merely statements of intentions. In future, HR managers can use them to survey employees and find out how managers compare these values. The second component focuses on dealing with change. The third component focuses on dealing

with people. The narration that states that the “the *Deen is naseehah*” is very relevant here. The next component is effective meetings.

Fontaine (2020) proposed that managers adopt the principle of data-centricity. Thus, when attending meetings, managers ought to have valid and relevant data. They ought to make decisions that benefit the organization, not one that simply reflects their personal agenda. Gardner (2009) notes that many groups make extreme decisions. There are other concerns with using appropriate resources, changing business processes, and so forth. Thus, future researchers might be able to develop checklists that would operationalize each narration. Table 4 is an example of what might become the norm in the future.

TABLE 4  
Operationalizing “*the Deen is naseehah*” in a Meeting

Variable	Key points
Values	The decision of any meeting must reflect the values of the organization
Data	Participants make decisions based on data
Intention	Participants made decisions that are good for the organization as a whole, not simply their department or themselves
Change	Participants do not simply accept the status quo. In a fast moving environment, people must move with the times
Concern for people	Participants cannot overburden employees. Burnout is a lose-lose scenario
Prudence	Extreme decisions are to be avoided
Resources	Participants must look for the best ways to optimize existing resources
Processes	Often, problems exist not because of bad people but because of bad processes. Should processes be revised?
Transparency	Minutes of meetings must be kept

The point of Table 4 is to highlight that different people in different organizations can take the same narration but operationalize it differently in the light of the realities specific to their organization and their industry.

## 9. CONCLUSION

This study has summarized the lessons learned when it comes to sharing the *Sunnah* with *Islāmic* management students. In the first cycle, they were given the entire Forty *Hadīth* to reflect upon. That proved to be too much information with no enough explanation. In the second cycle, seven narrations were extracted and more emphasis was given on explaining these narrations. This proved more successful.

The future aim is to introduce this approach to individuals in the workplace. The author has two platforms to use. One is through MBA students as these are often full-time employees who are doing their MBA part-time. The other is through a training company called Akademi Sinergi Ikhlas. It is possible that a variation of this study might be packaged as a one-day or two-day training program. The outcome of each training program would be for each group to operationalize the narrations as per the example in Table 4. In this case, different employees from different organizations would operationalize these narrations according to the realities of their organization and their industry constraints.

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## APPENDIX 1

### The Forty Hadith in One Table

No	Key Idea
1	Actions are based upon intentions
2	Islam, iman, and ihsan
3	Islam has been built on five pillars
4	Creation in the mother's womb
5	Religious innovation is rejected
6	The lawful is clear
7	The religion is sincerity
8	Fight against the people
9	Avoid what is forbidden
10	<i>Allāh</i> is pure and only accepts what is good
11	Leave that which makes you doubt
12	Leave what does not concern you
13	Love for your brother what you love for yourself
14	The blood of a Muslim is sacred
15	Speak good or be silent
16	Do not become angry
17	<i>Allāh</i> has ordered ihsan in all things

APPENDIX 1 (*continued*)

No	Key Idea
18	Have taqwa of <i>Allāh</i> wherever you are
19	Be mindful of <i>Allāh</i>
20	If you feel no shame, do as you wish
21	Entering Paradise by focusing only on the <i>wajib</i>
22	Purity is half of faith
23	Do not oppress others
24	Multiple kinds of charity
25	Every joint must perform a charity
26	Righteousness is good morality
27	Consult your heart
28	Stick to my <i>Sunnah</i> stubbornly
29	Acts that lead to Paradise
30	Respecting <i>Allāh</i> 's boundaries
31	Renouncing the world
32	No harming and no reciprocating of harm
33	Taking an oath to make a claim
34	Change evil with your hands
35	Do not envy one another
36	Removing a worldly grief from another believer
37	How good deeds and bad deeds are counted
38	<i>Allāh</i> protects his beloved slaves
39	<i>Allāh</i> has lifted the Pen
40	Be in the world as a stranger
41	Being inclined to what the Prophet brought
42	Call upon <i>Allāh</i> and He will forgive