

TADBĪR AND ADAB AS CONSTITUTIVE
ELEMENTS OF MANAGEMENT:
A FRAMEWORK FOR AN ISLAMIC
THEORY OF MANAGEMENT¹

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Introduction

One of the distinctive features of intellectual Islamic tradition is the utmost care it gives to the correct and precise connotation and denotation of terminologies. It is therefore a common phenomenon in this tradition that the conceptual *content* of science or art will have the most appropriate terminological *form*, something that is rendered possible largely because of the root system of the main Islamic language, the Qur'ānized Arabic. "Islamic Management" as a concept that points to a particular activity or process should not be, in this respect, an exception to this rule. This article aims at putting forth an Islamic theory of management by showing how a synthesis of *tadbīr* and *adab*

¹ This article is based on my earlier writings: "Tadbīr and Adab as Constituent Definiens of the Concept of Islamic Management: A Theoretical Preliminary of Islamic Development Management," paper presented at the First International Conference on Islamic Development Management: Management of Economic Development in Islamic Perspective, jointly organized by the Islamic Development Management Project (IDMP), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) School of Social Sciences, and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI), 8–10 December 1998; "Kesatuan Akal dan Amal dalam Pentadbiran Islam," *Al-Hikmah* 3, no. 1 (January–March 1997), 18–21; "Kesebatian Adab dalam Pentadbiran Islam," *Al-Hikmah* 4, no. 2 (April–August 1998), 2–9; "Beberapa Aliran dalam Pentadbiran: Suatu Sorotan dari Perspektif Pentadbiran Beradab," *Al-Hikmah* 6, no. 1 (2000), 11–17; "A Slave Incapacitated and a Man Just: a Reflection on *al-Nahl* (16):76," *Al-Hikmah* 3, no. 3 (July–Sept. 1997), 28–32; and "Meaning and Destiny in Islam: a Reflection on a Prophetic Reminder," *Al-Hikmah* 5, no. 1 (1999), 24–30.

encompasses all the elements that are deemed primary and necessary for such a process. Given that we generally communicate our ideas and proposals through linguistic mediums, this article will unfold itself within Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's framework of Islamization.² In so doing, it will demonstrate how any management that is Islamic is goal-oriented through and through. Such a management, it will further show, is also imbued with the spirit of *tawhīd* (the unity-in-diversity aspect of Islam)—understood both as a process (unifying) and as a result (unity). This spirit is reflected, for example, in the characteristic emphasis on both theory and practice simultaneously and in the combining of these two operational modes into a single goal-oriented process. Such a unifying force is balanced with its due recognition of the elements of diversity and true hierarchy, as encapsulated by the term *adab* (the diversity-in-unity aspect of Islam).³ Management in Islam, though extensive in its coverage of all layers of human existence, is rooted basically in the psychological make-up of man at its individual level. The above analysis culminates in this organic synthesis: an *adab*-based *tadbīr*, perhaps "virtuous management" in English. It can be described then as "the intellectual and practical process, within the ambit of a true and just system, to obtain good results." For the purpose of logical presentation, this article is divided into three consecutive sections: The Meaning of *Tadbīr*, The Meaning of *Adab*, and Islamic Management as an Organic Unity of *Tadbīr* and *Adab*.

² For further explication on Islamization, see especially Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1978), 127–75; idem, *The Concept of Education in Islām: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1980); and Wan Mohd. Nor b. Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998).

³ It is to be noted at the very outset that in Islam *tawhīd* represents its "unity-in-diversity" aspect while *adab* its "diversity-in-unity" aspect. Taken in pairs, both notions are conceptually self-exemplified since the two are different yet united in Islamic metaphysics.