

## **Vision and Visionary Leadership – An Islamic Perspective**

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*“Voyage of a thousand miles begins with a single step. It is important that step is in the right direction”. Vision is the first step in the process of strategic management/Leadership. Religion, on the other hand, has a major impact on cultural/societal norms of a country and subsequently on organization’s life and performance. This impact is even bigger in Islamic countries. Islam is the second biggest religion in the world. There has been a lot of work on “Vision” in west but unfortunately, Islamic viewpoint on “Vision” has always remained a secret. This work is specifically aimed at unveiling the Islamic viewpoint on Vision/Visionary Leadership. For this purpose a vision development model has been designed and three case studies have been included in the work.*

**Field of research: Management**

### **1. Introduction**

Generally speaking, vision is a desire that people contain within them selves. However, from a company’s point of view some theorists believe that it reflects the company’s image of some future state, which will be the ideal achievement of the organization. For example: to be a world class manufacturing business, a business leader, a quality enterprise or a rewarding workplace. Whereas others resist that it is not about imaginary thing or concept of an ideal world, there has to be a solid purpose behind it.

*“Great minds have purposes, others have wishes”* (Washington Irving- An American essayist).

Just wishing or hoping good doesn’t make a business successful. Simple hopes or aspirations are not enough; Hope is generally a wrong guide (Charles Montague).

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*“Actually it is much more than good intentions and fine ideas. It represents the framework for the entire business, the values which drive the company and the belief that the company has in itself and what it can achieve.”* (Colin Marshall, CEO, British Airways)

Some also relate it to values and an ability saying it is something which articulates an individual's, or group's most closely held values. It requires an ability to see what others cannot, and this ability doesn't come without confidence and experience to recognize the sudden insight for what it is (Wit /Meyer 2004). In short Vision gives an organization a clear direction. An organization without a vision cannot proceed towards the right direction.

*“How can we go forward when we don't know which way we are facing?”* (John Lennon, 1972)

Vision provides a broad overview of an organization's desired destiny within which the managers are at liberty to set their goals/objectives and make/amend strategies to get there. As long as an organization has a clear direction in form of a strong vision and takes the right steps in that direction, it needs not to worry about its overall strategies.

*“You know we are not necessarily great overall strategists. We often do the things and then work out afterwards what the overall strategy was.”* (Richard Branson, Chairman, Virgin Atlantic)

## **2. Literature Review**

Vision has got reasonable attention by different literatures of social sciences, and every literature has touched the issue from its own perspective. We can find a lot of instances in modern business literature e.g. Davidson (2002), Aranha (2002), Shaw (2006) etc as well as a relatively old western literature such as Barham / Rassam C.1989, Tregoe/Zimmerman/Smith/Tobia (1989), Nanus (1992) and Ford (1993) etc. Where Nanus (1992) has come up with a seven-step process for formulating an effective vision, Edersheim (2006) has related it skillfully to the early days of Modern Management Consulting.

In order to highlight the role of “Vision” in leadership process, Shaw (2006) has described the vision as one of the four most essential ingredients for effective leadership. Hoyle (2006) on the other hand, has found it crucial for the relationship between leadership and futuring.

From a religious point of view although the issue has been explored generously in relation to the Christianity and theorists have discussed Jesus' Way of Creating Vision (Ford, 1993) or the Biblical Vision for Leadership (Bredfeld, 2006) in detail but if we look at the issue from Islamic point of view, no or a very little attempt seems to have been made to derive the lessons from the Holy “Seerah” studying it from power perspective (Siddique, 1998).

The available literature mostly covers the cultural or religious issues of Islamic countries and in some instances also talks about Islamic leadership/Management in general. For example, Hofstede (2003) in his renowned book “Culture’s Consequences” is more concentrating on Comparison of Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations between different nations which included some Islamic countries as well. On the other hand some attempts have been made to explain the Islamic framework of business (Wilson 2006, Jamaluddin 2003 etc) or Islamic ethical values (Tanri 1997). Similarly, Azmi (2002) has also given a brief overview of the nature of Islamic state and leadership, whereas Beekun & Badawi (2004) have thrashed out Leadership roles, the moral bases of Islamic leadership and a couple of leadership models in general.

There is another good piece of work by Ali (2005) who has tried to highlight Islamic school of thought from a business point of view by linking the human nature and motivation to Islam. Although, Farid (2006) has written a wonderful account of his entrepreneurial exploits “Blue Screen of Death” recently which is a magnificent attempt by a young Pakistani entrepreneur to tell his stories of three failed ventures followed by a tremendous success but unfortunately all these pieces of work have failed to highlight specifically the role of vision in the leadership process from an Islamic point of view.

### **3. Research Design**

Islam is often thought to be a misunderstood religion (Qutb 1997). It is a complete code of conduct which provides guidance about every aspect of life including business. As discussed earlier, there has been a lot of work on “Vision” in western literature but unfortunately, the Islamic viewpoint on “Vision or Visionary Leadership” has always remained a secret. This work is specifically aimed at bridging the gap by eradicating such misconceptions, unveiling the Islamic view point on Vision/Visionary Leadership, highlighting the role of religion in vision development process and providing some clear guidelines to the business managers and leaders of Islamic world, in their own religious context as to how an effective vision can be developed and made helpful for their business growth.

For this purpose a vision development model has been designed and three different case studies have been included in the work. The work is a blend of both, the golden teachings of Islam given to the world some 1400 years ago and a few current examples from modern business world. Where the study includes illustration of various qualities of an Islamic vision/visionary leader, it also discusses in detail the reasons as to why many Islamic organizations don’t have a vision or why a vision fails in Islamic countries?

### **4. Importance of Vision**

*“Voyage of a thousand miles begins with a single step. It is important that the step is in the right direction”*

Having a vision means having knowledge of where to go and a greater control over the future. If an organization doesn't control its destiny, other outside forces will decide that for it. The real importance of vision is that it gives an organization that control and opens up new ways and possibilities for a business leadership. The true leaders do understand that reaching a destination that others have discovered already is nothing wonderful.

*“Never walk on the traveled path, because it only Leads you to where others have been”* (Graham Bell)

Effective vision provides a word picture of what the organization wants to become eventually, which may be five, ten, or fifteen years in the future. This statement is not only an abstract but it contains a concrete image of the desired state and provides also foundations for future strategies and objectives. It is true that all organizations including Islamic organizations as well, face problems in their lives but a well thought out vision together with effective operations, gets the organization out of these troubles (Tregoe, Zimmerman, Smith, Tobia 1989). It is not just problems and troubles, similarly every organization also gets opportunities to excel and outperform competitors but to avail these opportunities it must have a creative and visionary mind behind it because *“Chance favors only the prepared mind.”* (Louis Pasteur). For others these opportunities simply come and go unattended.

Cutting the story short, a vision is like the headlights of a vehicle on a road at night which shows the way to the destination on a dark path avoiding any accidents and carefully leaving behind the other cars on the road.

## **5. Role of Religion in Vision Development- How Religion Affects Vision ?**

As shown in Figure 1 below, religion has a direct impact on cultural and societal norms of a country; this impact is even larger when the country belongs to the Islamic world. Through these societal and cultural norms, this impact transfers onward to the organizations working in that society. Both individuals as well as group performance within an organization is influenced by the culture. Where religion affects both leaders and followers indirectly through country's culture and organization, it also leaves a direct impact on their individual lives as followers of that religion.

Since organizations are made from people, the human resource of an organization i.e. leaders and followers are usually the key players in shaping the culture of an organization. An organization's culture can be described as a pattern of an organization's norms, values, beliefs and attitudes. (Tregoe, Zimmerman, Smith, Tobia 1989) and it reflects in both the standards of behavior for employees as well as closely held values that organization believes in. If we talk specifically about Islamic religion, the ethical values and moral standards of all Muslims are deeply influenced by religion. Especially with regards to employee's standards of behavior or duty consciousness, Islam expects all

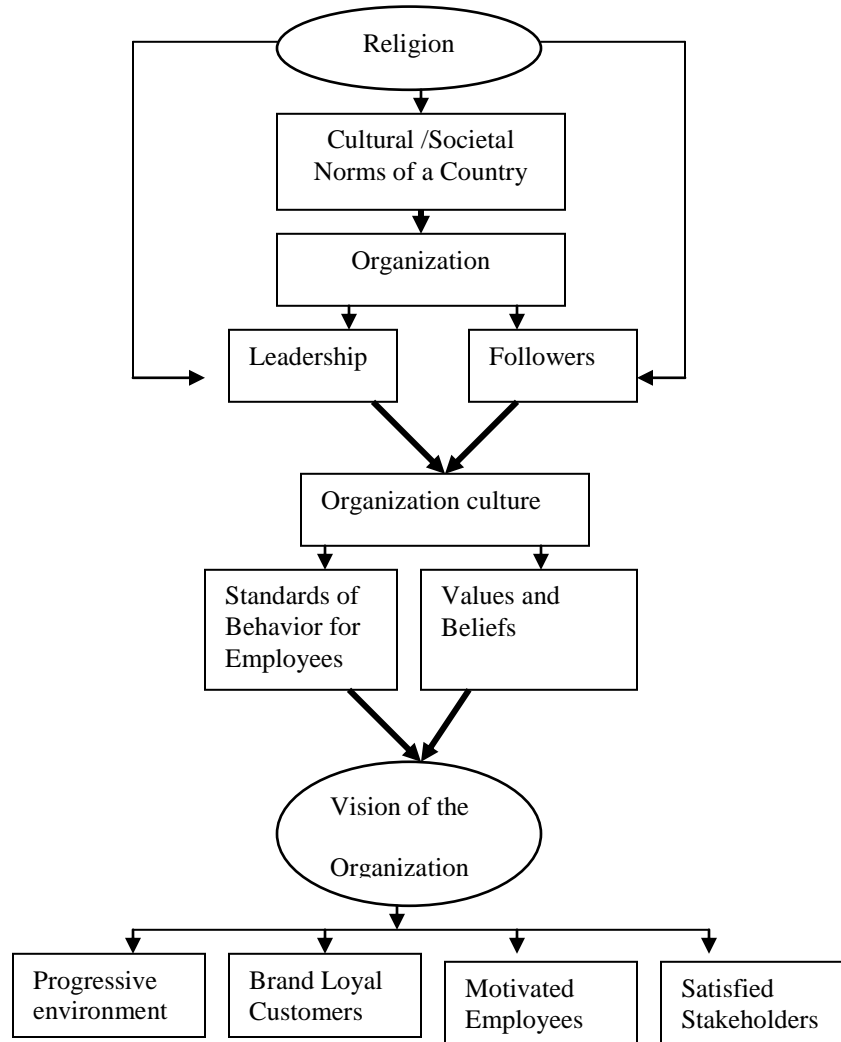


Figure 1. Role of Religion in Vision Development Process

the members of an organization to remain dedicated and devoted to their assigned tasks so that the rights of an individual are unlikely to be transgressed. (Jamaluddin 2003). Through standards of behavior and organization’s values, this impact of the religion transfers onwards to an organization’s vision which ultimately brings an organization, a progressive environment, employee’s motivation, customer’s loyalty and satisfaction of all the stakeholders.

Cutting the story short, a vision in any Islamic country cannot remain unconcerned of religion. Religion impacts an organization life both directly and indirectly. Especially in Islamic world since Muslims are more religious practically than any other religion, any vision which is contrary to the Islamic teachings fails to mobilize them towards achievement of a common objective.

## 6. Vision –An Islamic Perspective

*“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you anywhere.”*

Vision for an organization is as important as a signboard of directions at a roundabout, without which although one can revolve around the same point for as long as one wants but can never reach the destination.

For an Islamic leader where it is important to have a clear-cut vision i.e. An accurate knowledge of the desired destination together with the most suitable way to get there, this is also equally important that the vision is made keeping in mind needs of both the business as well as the society. In true sense, the vision in Islam actually means nothing but what needs of the society a company wants to fulfill.

Islam places a great deal of emphasis on morality and ethics in every sphere of life including business which is a socially useful morally justified and religiously encouraged economic activity from Islamic point of view (Jamaluddin 2003). It provides clear directions for every aspect of human life from highly spiritual to material. Islam declared business the most dignified activity 1400 years ago. Holy Prophet PBUH himself used to be a merchant. He clearly forbade the Muslim traders from outbidding each other in order to raise the price. In short, business is considered a very noble and highly valued occupation in Islam but it should be carried out in accordance with moral and ethical principles given by Islam.

No doubt, these Islamic principles do influence the decisions taken in a business situation as well and sometimes such decisions may not be similar to the decisions made in the financial interest of a business. There can be contradictions between the financial performance of an organization e.g. Net profit after tax, costs and sales etc and the social performance of the organization which is the obligations to others both within and outside the organizations. (Hosmer 1985) Although there has always been a conflict between behavior that can be categorized as ethical and what is considered beneficial for the business (Parson 1995), however Nasruddin<sup>1</sup> suggests that one should always do such things which are useful for others and pleasant for ones own self. This approach meets the both ethical and materialistic requirements of ones being into business.

An Islamic vision should therefore comprise of both the business profits and ethical values/service to the society. The ultimate goals of an Islamic organization should not only be based on financial performance but also the ethical performance of the company i.e. respect and faith of the customers, service to the society etc. The term ethical here is related with a businessman’s moral obligations to society, which the materialistic businesses don’t consider that important. Those businesses run after monetary and business interests putting aside the morality and ethics. Some great businessmen however do understand the true spirit of Islamic teachings in this regard. In the words of Henry Ford (1863-1947), a top American industrialist

*“A business that makes nothing but money is a poor kind of business”.*

Similarly the philosophy of the great business leaders like Konosuke Matsushita the founder of (Matsushita Electric Industrial Co.Ltd.) is also not any different. According to him the mission of a manufacturer is to relieve poverty and create wealth, not only for shareholders, but also for society. The word profit has not been mentioned in any of the 7 principles of Matsushita Company. (See case study 2 for details, page 9)

Islamic teachings cannot allow actions bringing real benefits for the individuals at the cost of a compromise on ethical dimensions. Zakat for example (One of the 5 basic pillars of Islam) puts a strong emphasis that life should not be lived for materialistic purposes it should be lived for greater moral and ethical purposes and needs of the society should be central to every action taken. If financial gains and profits were everything for Muslims no zakat giver would ever have given a penny to any one else. Islam is the religion, which discourages the idea of living for ones own self-only and advocates living the life for others.

*A man is created for nothing but to feel the needs of other humans if that was not the case, angels were more than sufficient to God for worship. (Iqbal, 2006)*

Thinking from a materialistic perspective, it looks very impractical to do business for others or to focus primarily on ethical performance of the company rather than financial gains. However, if we take it from Islamic perspective, neither it is something related to an imaginary world nor it is impractical or unbelievable in a real business world of today. Muhammad Younas of Grameen bank has turned it into an on-ground reality by basing whole of the bank’s business on ethical principles and choosing a right vision for it i.e. Bringing improvement in the living standard of poor class of the society. The case study below will help us understand how a business formed for an ethical goal experienced an unbelievable growth and became an example for the traditional businessmen of the whole country and the world at large.

## **6.1 Case Study 1 - Grameen Bank**

For less privileged class of the society, getting a business loan through traditional banking is nearly impossible. These banks usually demand collateral, mortgage etc before entering into any sort of lending agreement. Since the poor people don’t have any assets to offer as collateral, they are not considered to be trustworthy and reliable by traditional banking system.

But Younas, a Muslim economist in Bangladesh has made it possible for them. Grameen Bank (GB) has reversed conventional banking practice by removing the need for collateral and creating a banking system fully based on trust with a single purpose i.e to serve the mankind.

In 1976, he started his business by lending less than a dollar's amount to each of the needy artisans in Jobra, a small village in Bangladesh. The idea was to help such people who had nothing to offer as collateral and enable them to earn their livelihood respectably. At that time, he didn't realize that he was giving a new trend to the banking industry of his country.

*“When we initiated disbursing tiny loans, we could never imagine that one day we alone would be reaching the figure of seven million borrowers just three decades later”*

(Muhammad Younas)

A sum of less than a dollar was off course a very tiny amount itself but it helped remarkably the artisans in earning their livelihood. On the other hand, this ethical approach proved to be equally beneficial for his business as well, which experienced a rapid growth and was turned into a formal bank in 1983.

Now the Bank has emerged as a big giant on the map of banking world and as of February, 2007, it has about 7.00 million borrowers and 2381 branches providing services in 75,950 villages of Bangladesh, which constitutes more than 90 percent of the rural area of the country.

The tremendous performance of Grameen bank is by no means less than a miracle for traditional bankers who cannot even think about giving out loans merely on the basis of trust unless they are satisfied with the amount of securities offered against proposed loans. To safeguard the interest of the bank, they follow a materialistic approach towards business by trusting the securities offered against loans and still they face bad debts problems. On the other hand, , Grameen bank which looks at business more from an ethical perspective trusts the people (not securities) and enjoys a rapid expansion, with an excellent recovery rate of over 99% and a consistent profitability.

In order to accomplish its vision and serve the lower class of the society, it follows the principle of total trust i.e. no collateral, no legal Instrument, no group guarantee or joint liability and no restriction on utilization of the loan amount. Borrowers are at liberty to use their funds wherever they want.

Due to a single visionary mind, who believed in serving the society wholeheartedly, Grameen Bank today is the best known micro credit bank of the world. Where such an ethical approach towards business has made the bank an exemplary institution, it has also played a quite significant role in reduction of poverty and enabling a large number of people to earn their livelihood respectably. The positive impact of the bank's business on its poor and formerly poor borrowers has been documented in many independent studies carried out by external agencies including World Bank, IFRPI etc. Further admitting the bank's contributions towards poverty reduction and bringing a positive change in the life of the mankind, Muhammad Younas of Grameen Bank has recently been awarded the Noble Prize for Peace.



## 7. Some Basic Characteristics of an Islamic Vision

Islam is often thought to be a misunderstood religion (Qutb 1997). The Islamic leaders need to understand Islam in its true sense. Shariah should be understood first as a moral framework only then it can be helpful for a business leadership to make some remarkable achievement (Lazare 2004). Business people from all over the Muslim world and their organizations need to be reminded about the teachings of their great religion and benefits of making them applicable in day to day business. Matsushita can be a splendid example in this context.

### 7.1 Case Study 2: Matsushita Electric Corporation

Tanri (1997), A Muslim author from Indonesia has beautifully outlined that all the seven principles (Service to the public, Fairness and honesty, Teamwork for the common cause, Untiring effort for improvement, Courtesy and humility, Accord with natural laws, Gratitude for blessings) given by Konosuke Matsushita (The Founder of Matsushita Electric Corporation) as guidelines for his business, had already been given by Islam to its followers some 1400 years ago. But unfortunately Muslim leaders in business world didn't recognize the significance of these golden principles. Even today these ethical principles are as good as they were ever before.

Matsushita, A Japanese Industrialist, probably didn't even know that while giving such principles he was actually following the teachings of such a great religion. Muslims need to learn a lesson from this example that regardless of Konosuke Matsushita's religion, he considered those golden principles important for his business and today he is present in the form of his products in every corner of the world. Whereas Muslims who didn't pay heed to their religious teachings, failed to excel. Since formulating a strong vision is the first and the most important step in strategic management process, before choosing a vision for their business, Islamic leaders need to recall the golden teachings of their great religion.

The above example proves that understanding Islam as a complete code of conduct and making it applicable in the business, facilitates the businessmen a lot to take themselves to the heights of excellence, just the way Matsushita did.

## 8. Qualities of an Islamic Vision

Following issues need special attention of Islamic leaders, first to have a strong Islamic vision for their business and then to turn it into reality.

### 8.1 Clarity of Direction

First of all the clarity of future direction is very important in making the vision a success. Having a blurry image of the destiny unables the organization to set clear targets and it can never reach its desired destination. In this regard Islam gives a very clear guideline "Leave that which causes you doubt in favor of that which causes you no doubt" [Al-

Tirmidhi] and one who avoids the doubtful things, safeguards his faith and his honor. (Riyadh-us-Salaheen, Hadith 588). These instructions are for every sphere of life including business and all the Muslims have been asked to avoid doubts and ambiguities as far as possible and prefer clear-cut things to ambiguous ones. An Islamic vision is therefore free of all types of ambiguities, doubts and confusions.

## **8.2 Ambitiousness, Motivation and Excitement**

Psychological pressures lead to depression and the harmful consequences that affect the individual, and a business life. Societies without spiritual values are mainly its victims because in such societies, the people are given a materialistic view of life right from the very first day. In contrast, in an Islamic society, believers do not feel insecure at any stage of life. Due to their trust on Almighty, they are made immune from disappointment.

Ambition and excitement is also an important ingredient of an effective vision because without willing to get somewhere and having confidence in ones abilities, one ends up nowhere. Once a clear cut guideline in form of a vision is available to the Muslim businessmen, then they are supposed to strive hard and make the best utilization of all the energies they have, for accomplishment of their shared dream. It is only possible if the vision contains within itself some stimulating factors. Such hope-inspiring words in a vision make believers strive better for their common goal.

No doubt, ups and downs come in the trade cycle of almost every business but an inspiring vision makes the people patient, optimist and always hopeful. Then they do not look at life or world with gloomy and aimless eyes. They know that they have been asked to despair not of the mercy of Allah (39.53 Holy Quran) in any circumstances. They firmly believe that impossible is nothing and with greater enthusiasm and ambitiousness all the hurdles coming in the way become easy automatically.

## **8.3 Memorability**

An Islamic vision is never complex or tricky. It is easily understandable and equally memorable for all the members working for the organization from chairman to a watchman. So that they don't need to be reminded from time to time about what they are there for. This will help the members to check before taking every step that if the step is in the right direction or not and to what extent it will contribute to the common goal. A good vision is always short but comprehensive unlike visions of many Islamic organizations which are too much detailed and difficult to keep in mind. For example the vision of a big IOI Group Malaysia is

*“To be a pre-eminent corporation in our core businesses by providing products and services of superior values and by sustaining consistent long-term growth in volume and profitability. We shall strive to achieve responsible and balanced commercial success by satisfying our customers' needs, giving superior performance to our shareholders, providing rewarding careers to our people, having mutually beneficial relationship with*

*our business associates, participating and contributing effectively towards nation building and the welfare and advancement of the society in which we operate. “*

Such visions, no doubt represent selection of beautiful words covering almost all aspects of an organizations life but since it is not easy for all the members of the organizations to memorize it, it may deviate them from their original purpose during the work.

#### **8.4 Relevance to Customers**

A vision having nothing to do with customers has nothing to do with business. An Islamic vision is always relevant to its targeted customers. No business enterprise can survive without giving importance to its customers. A vision in fact is nothing but an honest commitment with the customers. In Islam, fulfillment of a commitment is considered as one of the characteristics of prophet hood (Holy Quran 19. 54). A vision which does not take into account its targeted customers and revolves around an organization's own materialistic purposes only, cannot be called a good vision. The vision of Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC), a big Islamic business for example is

*“To be a leading global manufacturer and marketer of hydrocarbon and metal products”.*

It signifies only the business's own money-oriented intentions without any representation to its customers which in no way is going to be beneficial for the company in the long run.

#### **8.5 Truthfulness**

The most strong and firm pillar of a Muslim's character is straight dealing. According to Islamic teachings all evils can be found in a Muslim, except dishonesty.

The success of any business or nation depends on the truthfulness and transparency in the dealings. If they have an abundant record of making honest commitment followed by right and truthful actions they can reach the peak of success and glory, otherwise, they swerve from their destination for more redundancy, ridiculous activities, slogan shouting and self praise.

A statement given as a vision of an organization should truly reflect the real intentions of a business. Giving a vision statement just for the sake of having a good vision statement is not permissible in Islam.

If we look around the Islamic world, we come across with many examples where organizations have nothing to do with the vision given by their business and all their energies are focused on maximizing the material gains by every possible means.

*Truly many are the partners (in business) who wrong each other: Not so do those who believe and work deeds of righteousness. (Holy Quran 38-24)*

Such business people need to be reminded that truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to paradise, whereas falsehood leads to wickedness and wickedness leads to the hell (Sahih Bukhari, 73-116)

## **8.6 Convertibility into Actions**

Islam is a realistic religion which can easily be made applicable in every day life. The word “Islam” itself means submission. This indicates that the first condition of being a Muslim is to submit to the realities. Islamic organizations must develop a new mindset based on Islamic principles and practices through its vision. Islam rejects every kind of exaggeration, stubbornness, prejudice, hypocrisy and blind imitation. It is a practical religion and is not based upon idealistic notions causing real problems of everyday life without any solution or treatment. It never binds an individual or a state with a command, the implementation of which is beyond its control<sup>ii</sup>.

Since an Islamic vision is all about service to the society, in order to effectively serve the mankind, a unique vision which stems from creative thinking is very important. An Islamic vision is not imaginative or unrealistic. An Idea which cannot be transformed into actions is a worthless idea.

*“Everything depends upon execution; having just a vision is no solution.” (Stephen Sondheim)*

A good realistic vision automatically makes the people fall in love with the idea and give them passion and motivation to see the idea becoming manifest. Painting a picture is not a form of self-expression. It is, like any other art, a language by which you communicate something about the world<sup>iii</sup>.

Good intentions and ideas are not enough for building the organizations. An organization has to be really good at disseminating those ideas. Since personalities and circumstances in the way of its implementation, always intervene, big ideas in the hands of a wrong person can be terrifying. In order to change peoples mind and putting their skills into action, one has to go beyond conventional approaches while thinking about a vision. In Syria one of the main points of vision of The Ministry of Higher Education (concerning reforms of higher education in the country) includes

*“Good ideas are not enough – focusing on implementation is as important as policy design itself. The bitter realities of taking an idea to the field and bringing it to scale must be considered in the design of policy.”*

In a nutshell, before finalizing a vision, apart from its being impressive for the people the Islamic leadership needs to see if such a vision will be easily convertible into action or not afterwards.

## 8.7 Needs of the Society

Social interdependence is one of the most important principles of Islam. It is a significant part of the Islamic teaching which aims at the development of a secure, united, and peaceful society. Ethics lies in the heart of Islamic teachings and all the people irrespective of their professions are expected to act ethically towards rest of the society in whatever activities they are involved in. As the Prophet (PBUH) said

“A faithful believer to other faithful believers is like the bricks of a wall, strengthening each other.” While (saying that) the Prophet clasped his hands, by interlacing his fingers (*Sahih Bukhari, 8- 468*).

## 8.8 Case Study 3: Umar bin Khattab

Umar Bin Khattab, a man who would qualify as the fairest and most just ruler in the Islamic history was also the most successful conqueror mainly because of his fearlessness and popularity in the public. He was literate, which by some accounts is considered to be uncommon in those times, and he was also well known for his physical strength, being a champion wrestler.

During his caliphate the Islamic empire grew at an unprecedented rate. Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, North Africa and Armenia etc are some of the lands conquered in his regime.

Umar introduced many administrative reforms e.g. establishing an advanced administration for newly conquered lands, induction of several new ministries and bureaucracies, as well as ordering a census of all the Muslim territories.

He used to monitor very closely the public policy and had kept the needs of the public central to his leadership approach. As second caliph of Islam, he refused to chop off the hands of the thieves because he felt he had fallen short of his responsibility to provide meaningful employment to all his subjects. As a ruler of a vast kingdom, His vision was to ensure that every one in his kingdom should sleep on a full stomach.

*“If a dog dies hungry on the banks of the River Euphrates, Umar will be responsible for dereliction of duty”.* (Umar)

He also knew that just having a vision is not enough unless it is supported by effective strategies. He didn't only have a vision; he truly transformed his vision into actions. For example, to ensure that nobody sleeps hungry in his empire, he used to walk through the streets almost every night to see if there is any one needy or ill. One night as usual he went in disguise, with one of his assistants. While patrolling, he heard crying in a house. Knocking at the door, he went in. There was an old woman with her little kids. A pan was boiling on the fire and the children were crying. When Umar asked about what was going on, the woman explained that the children were hungry and there was nothing at home to eat. In order to keep them quiet until they fall asleep, she was boiling

water in the pan. Umar asked her (without letting her know about himself) why they did not inform the caliph Umar of their condition. The woman replied "May God takes Umar's soul! He undertook the management of people but does not concern himself with their hardships". Umar astonishingly asked "how can caliph know of your hardships if you do not inform him". The woman replied calmly, a ruler should know himself, should he not walk round and see what is going on in the city? Hearing this Umar immediately left the house with his helper. He went straight to the state treasury. Umar lifted a sack of flour and some other food-stuff on his back and rushed towards her house. Although the subordinate insisted to carry the sack but Umar did not let him saying that it was he who was responsible for the wellbeing of the people. They arrived at home and went in. The children were still crying. Umar cooked food with his own hands and offered bread and food to the children. After the children went to sleep, he left the house.

Such is the accountability and responsibility of a state and head of state under Islamic law. Where it carries the lessons of bravery, justice and a sense of responsibility in fulfilling the needs of the society, it also highlights the significance of being visionary in leadership and having an ability to convert one's vision into reality.

In short, needs of the society are always central to an Islamic vision. By making the individual entities subordinate to the society, Islam has very clearly defined the responsibilities of a business entity towards society. The role of commercial organizations in an Islamic society includes awakening the springs of goodness in the human heart and strengthening the society with the bond of love, affection, and care for each other by means of fulfilling the needs of the society in a best possible manner. Almost all successful organizations do recognize the significance of a business's contribution to society. Here are some of the examples.

*Panasonic (Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. Ltd):* "Human beings need both physical and spiritual prosperity. Religion guides people out of suffering toward happiness and peace of mind. And business, too, can contribute by providing physical necessities required for happiness. This should be its primary mission"

*Hitachi:* "Our vision is to create richer lives and a better society by providing products systems and services with a new level of value and potential based on the latest advances in technology especially knowledge and information technology. "

*Microsoft:* "Empower people through great software-anytime, any place and on any device."

*The Sony Corporation:* "Sony is a trail blazer, always a seeker of the unknown. Sony never follows old trails but hopes to find its own paths of progress by opening up new trails, yet to be trod. Through this progress Sony wants to serve mankind."

## 8.9 Shared Vision

*“Anyone who gets even one feet away from the Ummah, has taken out the Islamic yoke from his neck, even if he prays and fasts.” (Holy Prophet- Tirmizi 2867)*

Islam is a Religion of Peace, Brotherhood and Humanity. These are the foundational principles of Islam. Muslims are supposed to work together towards a common goal. Keeping their individual interests and motives aside they have been asked to get beyond the narrow boundaries of nationalities (like Indian, Khurasani, Afghani, and Turkish) and jump into the limitless ocean of Islam.”(Iqbal, 2006).

In today’s world, where information and ideas are important for success of any business, access to information and ideas is even more important. The vision of an Islamic organization is always shared with all the members in the organization and their opinions are given full weightage while taking a decision about future vision of the organization. No doubt people differ in intelligence levels, aptitudes and levels of understanding and this way we can expect differences of opinion as well but these consultations and differences are very desirable in Islam and are considered very normal, rather inevitable for the business growth. The real spirit of Hajj which is the 5<sup>th</sup> pillar of Islam is to foster unity and universal brotherhood among the believers through consultation. It is a kind of supreme consultation/assembly to be held once a year where people of all races, colors languages and nationalities get together from all over the world with one Qiblah and direction for worship. This unity of purpose and mission is equally important for business entities as well. Members of an Islamic organization are expected to be the people of a focus and direction, not a confused group of people or the people without any orientation and direction. Allah has made unity an obligation for all Muslims, irrespective of their individual opinions

*“And hold fast, all together, by the rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves” (Holy Quran 3:103) and has given a stern warning to them not to create any divisions amongst themselves.*

*“Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving clear signs: for them is a dreadful penalty.”(Holy Quran 3:105)*

Unfortunately in many Islamic organizations, due to more centralized and autocratic style of management, the decisions about vision of the organization are taken at top management level and employees are not generally aware of their organization’s vision. Such organizations need to understand that a strong vision written in the people’s minds is far better than a weak one on paper (Davidson 2002). Without ensuring involvement of all the members of the organization into vision development process and thereafter, no vision can be turned into reality because it lacks the people’s support, enthusiasm and whole-hearted struggles on its back.

Turkish Petroleum Refineries Corporation (Tupras) truly realizing its significance, has made its human resource an important ingredient of their vision statement.

“Our vision is to be an effective and reliable player in the global petroleum industry most admired for its human resources and performance.”

## **9. Difference between Vision, Mission, Objectives, Values and Purpose**

Most Islamic organizations mix up the idea of a broad purpose of being into business with specific measurable milestones. All the organization members especially, a strategic leader must differentiate between Vision, mission, values and purpose.

Clear definitions of the key things help leadership to take the organization to its desired destiny in a best possible manner.

**Vision-** To which extent is the company going to be beneficial for the society? (What needs of the society the company wants to fulfill.)

**Mission-** How is it going to be beneficial? (What added value the company wants to give to its customers.)

**Purpose-** What are we here for? (What is Company’s reason of being into business.)

**Objectives-** What do we want to be and which milestones are involved in the journey?

**Values-** The deeply held beliefs which will guide us on the journey.

## **10. Vision Development Process**

The nations, who forget their history, get their geography changed. Just like nations, the businesses too must keep in mind their past while planning for the future. Learning from past experience is crucial for future success of any business. Building on what has worked, avoiding interventions that have been unsuccessful, and encouraging practices which proved successful will enhance both the effectiveness and sustainability of actions<sup>IV</sup> in future. As shown in figure 2 below, in a vision development process, a deep understanding of past experiences helps to decide what to keep hold of and what to modify. Then comes the stage of identification of best possible opportunities with least possible risks associated with them. Here the company’s ability to exploit those opportunities is also very crucial. A true assessment of the company’s core competencies together with its shortcomings need to be taken into consideration seriously.



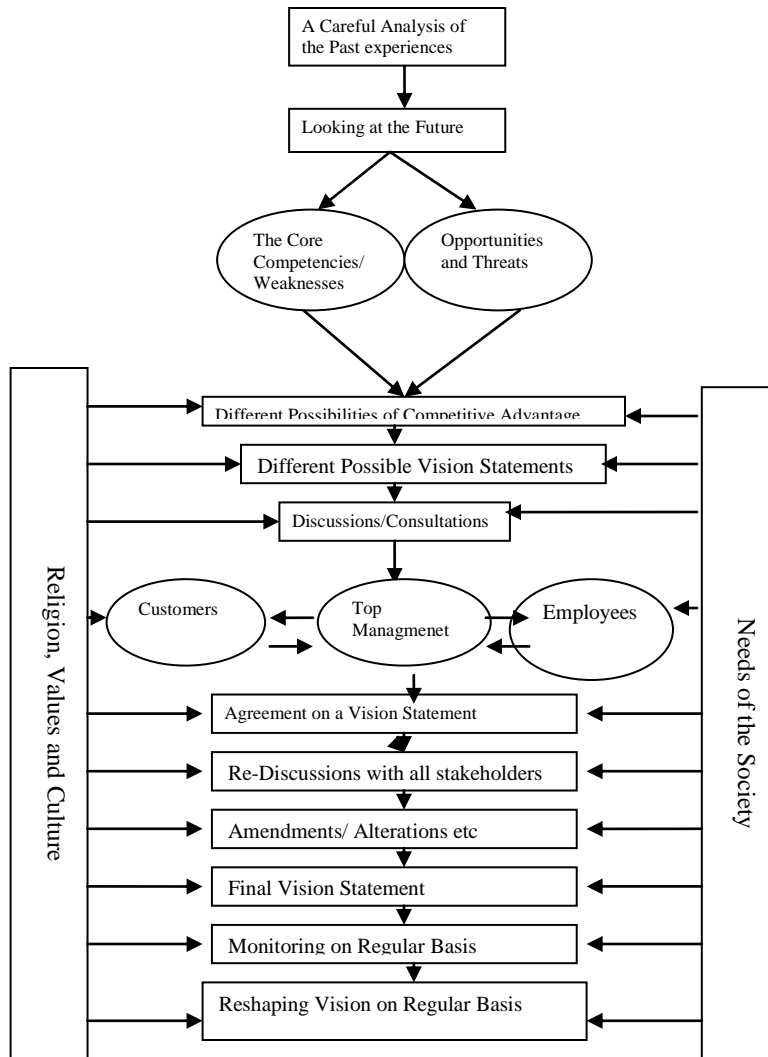


Figure 2. An Islamic Vision Development Process

Such an analysis will help Islamic leaders in identification of different possibilities of competitive advantage. Keeping in mind those possibilities to remain competitive in the market, an Islamic organization then considers various options for its future vision statement.

Islam encourages discussions and consultations at all levels before taking any decision. In the Holy Quran, leaders have been given clear instructions to consult subordinates in the affairs. (Holy Quran 3: 159). Among other things, managing the affairs through “mutual consultation” is described as one of the characteristics of righteous people.

*“Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer, who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation, who spend out of what We have bestowed upon them for sustenance”. (Holy Quran 42:38)*

Through this verse, we are reminded that consultation is a type of conduct which is as important for Muslims as prayers, which means that a society or an organization which does not consider consultation important in the decision making process cannot be considered to be a fully believing one.

From business point of view consultation is the first condition for the success of any decision made on any issue. Top management of Islamic organizations need to understand that those who consult can never lose. Holy prophet PBUH said

*“He who consults, he is not denied attaining the right, and whoever leaves it falls into deviation.”*

If we look at companies operating in Islamic world it is not hard to see, how all decisions made without taking into account the views and criticisms of others, have resulted in fiasco, loss, and great trouble to the business. On the other hand, how a culture of communicating the information, asking for members support, encouraging differences of opinion has helped organizations in building a shared vision (Wit/Meyer 2004) which is inevitable for any business’s success in today’s world.

It is important that the vision is talked over and modified several times before its finalization. The members within an Islamic organization must know their aim and they are all made a part of vision development process. Their opinions are considered important and at the time of discussions, there is no distance between employees, management and leadership at all levels. In an Islamic organization, everyone is at liberty to disagree and present his own opinion. After having discussions and re-discussions with all the stakeholders especially the employees, customers and shareholders, Islamic leadership is supposed to develop a consensus on a single vision statement acceptable to all.

Once a consensus is obtained with regards to the future vision statement of the company, it is an Islamic leader’s responsibility to keep monitoring vision’s success from time to time. Vision needs encouragement and expires if left untended. Just setting up an apparently good looking vision is not sufficient, it is also equally important to see if we are on the right track to implement the vision that we have set. (Tregoe/Zimmerman/Smith/Tobia1989).

Since service to the society is the central theme of an Islamic vision, during whole process of vision development, (right from identifying different possibilities of competitive advantage to Monitoring and Re-shaping the Vision on regular basis) Islamic leadership is liable to ensure that needs of the society remain a focal point during the discussions involved and religious and cultural values are not disregarded at any stage. Because these two factor are the unavoidable ingredients of an Islamic vision. A vision without any of these two can hardly be described as an Islamic vision.

## 11. What is Visionary Leadership?

*“Life can only be understood backward but it must be lived forward”.* (S Kierkegaard)

Visionary leadership involves the gift to predict and look into the future. It requires plenty of guts, courage of conviction and risk-taking capability to pursue the vision with energy. Being capable of predicting the future right and exploiting the hidden opportunities with creative and innovative thinking are crucial for the organizations to remain competitive. Relying on current success is not something wise to do as current success is never a guarantee for the future success.

*“If we are all operating in a day to day environment. We are thinking 1-2 years out. Fred (chairman, CEO and President of FedEx Corporation) is thinking 5, 10, 15 years out.”*  
(William Conley Vice President FedEx Logistics)

However it is not about one leader, it is about visionary leadership process. Many Islamic organizations today face serious succession problems when a leader leaves. Therefore there has to be a whole chain of visionary successors ready to take charge in case of a leader’s retirement, resignation or death.

*The key is to leave behind not one person but a cadre of competent people with a talent to run the company, to set a clear strategic direction and to change direction where and when needed with the passage of time.* (Jack Ludington Dow Corning)

## 12. Who is a Visionary Leader?

A visionary leader is a great artist, inspiring and driving everyone around to reach his visionary target.

*“To succeed, one has to accept the world as it is and climb above it. One cannot see the world in black and white and has to manage in areas of gray and pursue objectives through uncertainty”.* (Habil Khorakiwala 1983)

A visionary strategic leader who formulates strategic change in his or her mind will clearly understand the current and desired strategic perspective. He is a great communicator and tutor. He has the skills to transplant his conviction to his group and encourage them to work for the vision, with greater interest and dedication. He can inspire such belief that his members not only give their best efforts to accomplish the vision, but are also willing to go through sacrifices to reach the common goal.

At the same time, the leader doesn’t get obsessed with the human issues and go down on the tough, relentless pursuit of the vision. One has to balance both sides, which comes naturally to visionary leaders. A leader needs to understand where the organization was, where it is now, what are the possible key success factors for future and what are the trends and opportunities lying ahead. (Davidson2002)

In business world, we find many examples of the leaders who knew the art of visionary leadership and using their visionary mind, have taken their companies to great heights.

*“The personality and charisma of a Visionary leader and his or her ability to sell his or her ideas together with speed of action and timing and commitment are the crucial issues, which make the strategy highly successful.”* (Richard Branson, Chairman, Virgin Atlantic)

### **13. An Islamic Visionary Leader**

*“We do not change the circumstances of people until they do not change what is within themselves”* (Holy Quran 13:11)

Islam has no problems with creative and innovative ideas, in fact there is no place for a lazy and idle brain in this religion and an empty brain is said to be a devil's house by Islam. According to Islamic teachings, A man can have nothing but what he strives for (Holy Qur'an 53:39) and in such a scenario the role of an Islamic leader becomes very crucial.

In addition to basic leadership qualities, an Islamic visionary leader is self triggered, confident and determined to do something extra ordinary. As per Islamic teachings, a leader is the one who follows his own light (Rumi) and sees what others can't see. He doesn't rely on what is in existence already; He is a dynamic open minded person with a very keen perception. Using his visionary mind, he creates the world of his own (Iqbal, 2006). This creative thinking together with a strong will power within himself takes him to the heights of excellence. The fasting month of Ramazan holds within itself great lessons for enhancing will power, patience and self control. A leader cannot take his organization to the heights of excellence until he has extra ordinary future anticipation/risk taking skills using which he takes bold but wise and well-timed decisions. Although a leader's confidence on his own self and the decisions taken is a must but in compliance to the Islamic teachings of learning the knowledge from cradle to grave, an Islamic leader never puts a full stop to his knowledge, skills and expertise and keeps striving hard for self development and bringing improvements in himself. Admitting the fact that there is always a room for improvement, he always prays to Almighty Allah to increase him in knowledge (Holy Quran 20 -114) no matter how knowledgeable or skillful he is.

A Beautiful verse from the poetry of Allama Iqbal (A great Muslim philosopher) guides us as to what makes a visionary leader.

*“Re-read the lessons of Truthfulness, Judgment and Bravery, and you will be chosen to lead the world”.*

Where truthfulness and boldness are crucial for a leader's success, an ability of true judgment of the situation is also an equally important characteristic of an Islamic visionary leader's personality. An Islamic leader knows the art of keeping a balance

between idealism and realism, target and resources, core competencies and weaknesses, opportunities and risks etc.

The case study of Khalid Pervez gives us a beautiful insight.

### 13.1 Case Study- 4: Khalid Pervez

Nobody will believe that Khalid Pervez who is the Chairman of Pakistan Publishers Association and owner of the Biggest Publishing House in Lahore (Pakistan) today, he or his family was not in a position to buy books for his school in his childhood. In 1956, at the age of 13-14, when he could not continue his studies due to poverty, he started his business with two books and a total sum of Rupees 10/- only. He had to change his original school just because it was away from Urdu Bazar (The Biggest Books Market in Lahore) where he used to sell his books.

He used to sell his books outside a shop and if one of his two books was sold, he used to replace it with a fresh one and that is how he went on and on. He had a vision that no child in Pakistan should stop his studies due to lack of sufficient funds to buy books. For this purpose he decided not to take more than 1 Rupee profit per book and his organization is following this rule even till today.

*“There were two things in my head when I decided not to take more than one Rupee profit per book*

- *Since I could not study further due to shortage of funds and not being able to buy books, it was my desire that no child of my homeland should stop his studies for this reason. There should be someone to take care of those who cannot buy expensive books.*
- *And secondly, I knew that it's the only way to grab maximum number of customers, where my competitors strived for maximization of profits, I went for maximization of students as my customers” (Khalid Pervez)*

His vision of providing books to every needy student together with an idea of earning just 1 Rupee profit per book has made him a renowned figure in business sphere of Pakistan in particular and world at large. Today 8 out of every 10 books sold outside Pakistan bear the name of Taj Group as its publishers.

*“I never see how profitable the book price would be, I always see how beneficial it is going to be, for a student. That is why, the books published by Taj Group are far cheaper than other books including the books published by Government”. (Khalid Pervez)*

Apart from business activities, he provides his generous support to poor students. Today no child is deprived of education due to inability to buy books or pay the fee. Any needy student, who contacts Taj group for financial help, is given every possible assistance. Poor students from far-flung areas who cannot afford to stay in a big city like

Lahore are provided accommodation and all other necessities of life under one roof. And it's not just limited to individual students, many educational institutions who don't have government funds, are given financial support by Taj Group on regular basis.

## **14. Some Important Questions Related to Vision**

Answers to the following questions can be helpful for Islamic leaders to determine how strong or weak their organization's vision is.

- Is the Vision statement in accordance with Islamic teachings?
- Is the Vision statement relevant to the needs of the society?
- Is the Vision statement in accordance with organization's activities and mandate?
- How memorable, motivating, and customer based is the vision?
- What percentage of employees is familiar with vision statement of the company?
- Do most of the people in the organization understand/agree with the vision?
- How frequently the vision statement is updated?
- What percentage of employees participates in developing the vision of the organization?
- How relevant are the mission, objectives, values and overall strategies of the business to its vision statement?
- Are organization values well defined, measured and reinforced on regular basis?
- Is vision practiced in every day decisions and actions?

### **14.1 Why many Islamic Organizations don't have a Vision?**

Here the question arises, when vision is so important for a business, why many Islamic organizations can be seen without an explicit vision. Actually CEOs and Board of directors are very important people in every organization. Especially in a centralized environment, the whole fate of the organization is in their hands. The first and the foremost reason is that, in most of the Islamic organizations unfortunately this centralized atmosphere still exists. Many Islamic organizations don't have a vision just because the CEOs or Board of directors don't take it as an important thing for their business. In order to justify their actions they insist that they don't believe in imaginations but practice. Another reason is that leaders are also not innovative, confident and initiative which is another brick in the way of having an inspiring vision.

On the other hand some of the Islamic leaders are also afraid of vision because it may limit their maneuver and the process could cause internal conflicts since it involves heated debates, fights and arguments. Since this can make the leaders uncomfortable, they don't want to disturb the peace and harmony in the organization. Apart from all this egoism is another important factor because some leaders do not have the ability to listen to other's ideas and cannot tolerate criticism at all. Such an attitude is totally against the spirit of Islamic teachings and such leaders need to be reminded the regime of great Umar bin Khattab the second caliph of Islam, where during his address to the public, a young man from the congregation stood up to the ruler of the time and announced that

*“We will not listen to you, until you give us the explanation that you owe us.”*

The people were shocked at this audacious interference. Umar paused for a moment, and then turning to the young man asked, “Explanation for what.”

The young man said, *“The other day each one of us obtained a piece of cloth from the Baitul Mal. Today I find such two pieces of cloth on you. I want to know what right had the Caliph to get a share double than the share of an ordinary Muslim.”*

Before Umar could explain anything. Abdullah (the son of Hazrat Omar) stood up and said, *“Friends, the truth of the matter is that like every other person me and my father obtained a piece of cloth each from the Baitul Mal. My father is so tall that the piece of cloth that he got from the Baitul Mal did not suffice him. So I gave him my piece of the cloth.”*

This explanation satisfied every one. The young man who had interrupted the Caliph said, *“We are satisfied. You can now proceed with your address. We will listen to you and obey your commands.”*

An Islamic leader is never stubborn, rigid or inflexible in his dealings. As shown in above example, he encourages criticism and instead of making it a matter of his ego, is always willing to change his opinion if he is given some solid logics. This egoism and distance between a leader and his followers brings lack of team work in Islamic organization which eventually resists an organization to exploit its true potential.

Finally, some leaders have also a misunderstanding that if they are running their organizations without a clear vision for years, why do they need it anyways? They do not realize that an organization may well survive for years without a vision but eventually some day or the other such an approach will take them nowhere but a fatal end.

## **14.2 Why A Vision Fails?**

Earlier we discussed the Islamic companies who do not have a vision at all. Here we will take into account those organizations who have articulated a vision for their business but do not know the art of making it a success and will try to find out the reasons behind failure of a vision.

If we look at the companies operating in an Islamic atmosphere, following seem to be the main reasons behind failure of a company’s vision.

- Vision of a business operating in an Islamic atmosphere interacting with Muslim people cannot work if the vision is contrary to the real spirit of Islamic teachings.
- A centralized organizational structure doesn’t let vision work in Islamic organizations even if an organization has a good vision.

- In Islamic organizations, sometimes a vision also fails because it has nothing to do with needs of the society.
- A vision doesn't work if it is too complex to understand for members of the organization.
- An unexciting and unenthusiastic vision also fails to motivate people who are the basic instruments to make the things happen.
- A vision which is not customers specific, ultimately fails.
- An unrealistic or unachievable vision makes the people loose hope and discontinue efforts because they know that their entire struggle will go in vain end of the day, so there is no point struggling for an impossible target.
- Vision also doesn't work well if shareholders or owners of the business are not taken into confidence by business management before deciding about the future vision of the company.
- Lack of consultations and discussions before finalizing the vision also result in its failure.
- Vision needs encouragement and expires if left untended (Tregoe et al, 1989)
- Many organizations from Islamic world keep vision as a formality. Such bookish visions which are not made applicable in day to day business can never be successful.
- Lack of monitoring and revisions as per needs of the changing circumstances also makes a vision ineffective for future.
- A vision not relevant to organization's activities can give no benefit to the business.
- Lack of a shared vision i.e. Practice of not involving all the members of organization in vision development process is also a big hindrance in making a vision successful.
- Vision requires strong team work, vision of many Islamic organizations fails due to absence of team work spirit and unity in the organization.
- Operations overlapping vision and values also resist vision to proceed further.
- An imaginary vision which is not convertible into actions also results in failure.
- A vision also fails when overall strategies of the company are not made in accordance with vision statement of the business.
- A vision made without a general agreement or consensus does not have its roots in the people and results in failure.
- A vision fails if it doesn't get the support of organization's values and commonly held beliefs.
- Sometimes due to incompetent leadership also, a good vision gets destroyed.

## 15. Conclusion

Vision is the first step in the process of strategic management/Leadership and it cannot remain unconcerned of religion especially in Islamic countries. Islam is the second biggest and fastest growing religion in the world. It is a complete code of conduct which provides guidance about every aspect of life including business. It is true that Islamic principles do influence the decisions taken in a business situation and sometimes such decisions may not be similar to the decisions made in the financial interest of a business



but since Islam is a religion, which discourages the idea of living for ones own self and advocates living the life for others. It cannot allow actions bringing real benefits for the individuals at the cost of a compromise on overall interests of the society. In such a scenario the role of an Islamic leader becomes very crucial. In addition to some basic leadership qualities, an Islamic visionary leader is always self triggered, confident and determined to do something extra ordinary. As per Islamic teachings a leader is the one who follows his own light. Where it is important for an Islamic leader to have a clear-cut vision i.e. An accurate knowledge of the desired destination together with the most suitable way to get there, this is also equally important that the vision is made keeping in mind needs of the society. In true sense, the vision in Islam means nothing but what needs of the society a company wants to fulfill through its business. Islam is often thought to be a misunderstood religion (Qutb 1997).The Islamic leaders need to understand Islam in its true sense. Islam has no problems with creative and innovative ideas. In fact there is no place for a lazy and idle brain in this religion and an empty brain is said to be a devil's house by Islam. Unfortunately, most of the Islamic organizations mix up the idea of a broad purpose of being into business with specific measurable milestones. All the organization members especially, a strategic leader must be able to differentiate between Vision, Mission, Values and Purpose.

Since Islam is a complete code of conduct, it doesn't only ask for an effective vision, it provides full guidance to the business leaders as to how an effective vision can be developed and how an Islamic vision should look like. Clarity of direction, Ambitiousness, Motivation and Excitement, Shared Vision, Memorability, Relevance to Customers, Needs of the Society, Truthfulness and its Convertibility into actions are some of the basic characteristics of an Islamic vision. However, in view of the fact that service to the society is the central theme of an Islamic vision, Islamic leadership needs to pay special attention to ensure that

- needs of the society remain a focal point during the discussions involved in process of finalizing vision and
- Country's religious and cultural values are not disregarded at any stage.

These factors are two interdependent and inevitable ingredients of an Islamic vision. A vision without any of these two can hardly be described as an Islamic vision.

Cutting the story short, an Islamic vision comprises of both, the business profits and ethical values/service to the society. The ultimate goal of an Islamic organization is not only based on financial performance but also the ethical performance of the company i.e. respect and faith of the customers, service to the society etc.

Where the study will help Islamic leaders and managers to have a better understanding of leadership notions in their own religious context, thus enabling them to exploit their true potential, this will be equally helpful for the non-Muslims to understand leadership paradigm of Islam and to interact with more than one billion Muslims throughout the world in a better way. Especially for the multinational/foreign companies having their operations in the Muslim countries, this work is going to be very useful.

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<sup>i</sup> Nasruddin is an ancient Persian folk character from the 13th century whose tales and stories are read throughout the Muslim world.

<sup>ii</sup> Taken from the Text of the Historic Judgment on Interest Given by the Supreme Court of Pakistan

<sup>iii</sup> Mark Rothko (1903-1970), American Abstract-Expressionist painter. Lecture delivered at Pratt Institute, 1958.

<sup>iv</sup> A Report on Islamic Development Bank-The challenges of Poverty Alleviation in IDB member countries by Dr. Siddig Abdelmageed Salih in Oct-1999