# Prophetic Leadership: Lessons from the Greatest Leader of Prophet Muhammad

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There is limited academic research specifically focused on prophetic leadership and its implication for the success of modern business organizations. At the same time, prophetic leadership can play a crucial role in providing vision, guidance, and inspiration to employees and stakeholders to focus on long-term sustainable success. Therefore, this study aims to map the concept of prophetic leadership and its related outcomes within organizations. Also, by considering the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) model, this study offers the comprehensive principles and practices associated with prophetic leadership to achieve long-term success. This study includes the term "prophetic leadership" as a reference in "Article title, Abstract and Keywords" based on the Scopus database (from 1979–July 2023). One hundred forty-eight documents are found in the collected data. A comprehensive bibliometric analysis is applied using VOSviewer to analyze the data. In addition, VOSviewer software is utilized in this study to explore the most prolific authors and potential research avenues. The gist of the findings shows that prophetic leadership brings a unique set of qualities and values that can greatly benefit modern business organizations. Prophetic leadership, for instance, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) indeed provides a clear vision, promotes ethical decision-making, fosters transparency, empowers followers, and develops a mission that encompasses various aspects of life, including spirituality, morality, governance, and social justice, to create the long-term success in this world and the hereafter .

*Keywords*: prophetic leadership, islamic values, Prophet Muhammad, bibliometric analysis

The interconnectedness of economies, cultures, and societies, as well as rapid advancements in technology, have created a highly complex global landscape. Also, ethical dilemmas within organizations emerged (Melé, 2019; Rickards, 2015; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2015) in various forms, such as balancing the pursuit of profit with social responsibility (Cramer, 2017; Filatotchev & Stahl, 2015; Resnik & Elliott, 2016), maintaining privacy and data security in the digital age (Denecke et al., 2015; Martin, 2015; Royakkers et al., 2018), and addressing issues of diversity (Hartwell et al., 2017), and inclusion. Therefore, leaders have to navigate diverse perspectives and complex systems to adapt to rapid changes. Leaders within organizations have to grapple with the implications of emerging technologies (Chen & Decary, 2020; Peifer et al., 2022), such as artificial intelligence, automation and cybersecurity, to stay abreast of these developments to anticipate the impacts on their organizations.

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Effective leaders require adaptability, strategic thinking, ethical decision-making, and a commitment to continuous learning for developing an organization. Leaders have to consider the long-term consequences of their actions (Bibi et al., 2018; Gohar et al., 2023; Leithwood, 2018; Merriman, 2017) and navigate complex trade-offs. In addition, leaders have to be able to inspire and mobilize employees, foster a culture of innovation, and ensure the organization remains agile and adaptable. Therefore, nurturing leadership skills, for example, prophetic leadership, is crucial for the long-term success of organizations (Muhammad, 2015). Prophetic leaders go beyond traditional management approaches and seek to inspire and guide individuals as well as organizations towards a compelling vision of the future (Empson, 2021; Halton, 2018; Yukl & Gardner, 2019) to anticipate emerging trends and envision possibilities to achieve shared goals.

There is limited academic research specifically focused on prophetic leadership and its implication for the success of organizations. While the extensive literature on prophetic leadership is not as commonly recognized within the academic community. However, some scholars have explored leadership approaches that are similar to prophetic leadership. For example, transformational leadership, developed by Burns (1978) and expanded upon by Bass (1997), refers to the leader's capability to inspire and motivate their followers by articulating a compelling vision, demonstrating strong values and ethics, and empowering others to reach their full potential. Additionally, visionary leadership (Ali, 2009; Stam et al., 2010; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989) is another concept that overlaps with prophetic leadership. Visionary leaders have the ability to envision a desired future state, communicate that vision effectively, provide a sense of direction and mobilize others to work towards its realization. Furthermore, spiritual leadership (Egel & Fry, 2017; Tobroni, 2015) and ethical leadership (Gabriele, 2011; Kretzschmar, 2023; Udin, 2023) are also interconnected concepts within the realm of prophetic leadership. Ethical leaders apply ethical principles to navigate complex dilemmas and consider the well-being of the broader societal impact of their decisions. Therefore, this study aims to map the concept of prophetic leadership and its related outcomes within organizations. Also, by considering the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) model, this study offers the comprehensive principles and practices associated with prophetic leadership to achieve the long-term success of organizations.

### Literature Review
### Prophetic leadership

Prophetic leadership is a style of leadership that focuses on envisioning a better future and inspiring others to achieve that vision (Randolph, 2011). Prophetic leaders have the ability to anticipate and address challenges before they arise, as well as motivate others to create a better organization. Prophetic leaders have a clear vision aligned with the organization's values of what the organization can become (Dantley, 2005; Setiyaningtiyas, 2016; Tiemeyer, 2008). Based on the set vision, prophetic leaders inspire others to strive for excellence (AlSarhi et al., 2014). Prophetic leaders also have the ability to anticipate future trends and opportunities (Adz-Dzakiey, 2009; Sidiq & 'Uyun, 2019). They stay informed about industry developments, emerging technologies, and social as well as cultural shifts. By proactively interpreting the information, prophetic leaders can make informed decisions and take timely action (Beerel, 1997).

Prophetic leaders uphold high ethical standards. They lead by example and encourage a culture of integrity, trust, and respect (Yusuf, 2022) within the organization. They create an

inclusive environment where all individuals feel respected, leading to a more creative organization. Additionally, prophetic leaders possess emotional intelligence, allowing them to empathize with the needs of others (Oswald & Mascarenhas, 2019). This helps them build strong relationships and create a compassionate work environment (Hadiyani et al., 2021). Also, prophetic leaders are skilled at articulating their ideas, actively listening to feedback, and fostering honest communication within the organization to enhance cooperation and collaboration.

### The greatest leader of prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the founder of Islam and final messenger of Allah, is widely regarded as one of the greatest leaders in history. His leadership qualities, achievements, impacts and accomplishments continue to inspire millions of people around the world. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has a clear vision and mission (Noor, 2003) to convey the message of Islam, monotheism (worshipping Allah alone), and social justice to all of humanity. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exhibits impeccable character and ethical conduct, such as honesty, trustworthy, integrity, humility, patience, generosity, and kindness to gain the trust and respect of his followers (Ahmed & Amiri, 2019; Bangash, 2001). Furthermore, throughout the Qur'an, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is praised for his character, wisdom, and devotion to spreading the message of Islam to guide humanity (Ather & Sobhani, 2007). He is described as a mercy to all the world (Qur'an, 21:107) and an excellent example for believers to follow (Qur'an, 33:21).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exemplifies servant leadership, prioritizing the well-being of his community over his own interests. He cares deeply for the welfare of his followers and leads by serving them in times of need (Mir, 2010). Also, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) remains humble and approachable. He highly values the contributions of others and does not seek personal aggrandizement (Beekun & Badawi, 1999).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) further displays exceptional strategic thinking in managing the affairs of the community (Beekun, 2012). He made well-informed decisions, considering the long-term implications of his actions. He promotes inclusivity and equality among his followers, regardless of their background, race, or social status (Adair, 2010; Dogan, 2015). He emphasizes that all individuals are equal in the sight of Allah. In addition, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is a master communicator. He effectively conveyed his message to a diverse audience through his eloquence, wisdom, and persuasive abilities. His communication skills help in gaining the support and loyalty of millions of people to this day, making him one of the most respected leaders in the world.

### Islamic values

Islamic values are the principles and beliefs that form the foundation of Islam (i.e., a monotheistic religion) followed by over a billion people worldwide. These values are derived from the teachings of the Quran (the holy book) and the Hadith (the sayings, actions, and approvals of Prophet Muhammad 'peace be upon him') (Halstead, 2007; Rafiki & Wahab, 2014) to provide Muslims with a moral framework to live a meaningful life, both in their relationship with Allah (God) and their interactions with fellow human beings (Zaelani, 2015).

The core Islamic values include *tawhid* (i.e., the belief in the oneness of Allah), *ihsan* (i.e., striving for excellence in all aspects of life), *akhlaq* (i.e., displaying honesty, humility, patience, forgiveness, and sincerity in interactions with others), *justice* (i.e., fair in dealings with others, regardless of their race, gender, religion, or social status), *responsibility* (i.e., being responsible and accountable to fulfil the rights towards Allah, themselves, families, and all society), and *compassion* (i.e., show kindness, empathy, and mercy towards others, especially those in need or less fortunate). Additionally, Islamic values emphasize the importance of hard work and excellence (Rosyada et al., 2018). Islamic values, in turn, promote a strong work ethic among employees, leading to increased productivity and a commitment to delivering quality work (Zaim et al., 2021).

## Method

This study explores all documents relevant and related to prophetic leadership published in the database of Scopus over the last 45 years (from 1979–July 2023). This study includes the term "prophetic leadership" as a reference in "Article title, Abstract and Keywords" based on the entire Scopus database. One hundred forty-eight documents are found in the collected data. Of 148 documents, based on the category "document type", there are 93 (62.8%) research articles, 32 (21.6%) book chapters, 15 (10.1%) review papers, 6 (4.1%) books, and 2 (1.4%) conference papers. Furthermore, based on the category "subject area", 110 (74.3%) cover arts and humanities, followed by social sciences (41.9%), business, management and accounting (7.4%), economics, econometrics and finance (4.1%), and other areas such as psychology (2%). The majority of documents are written in English (143, 96.6%) and open access sources (36, 24.3%). In addition, based on the category "country/territory", there are 67 (45.3%) documents are from the United States, South Africa (19, 12,8%), United Kingdom (14, 9.5%), and other countries such as Malaysia (5, 3.4%). A comprehensive bibliometric analysis is further applied using VOSviewer to analyze the data. In addition, VOSviewer software is utilized in this study to explore the most prolific authors and potential research avenues.

## Results and Discussion

The network visualization maps and data analysis in this study are created using VOSviewer software.
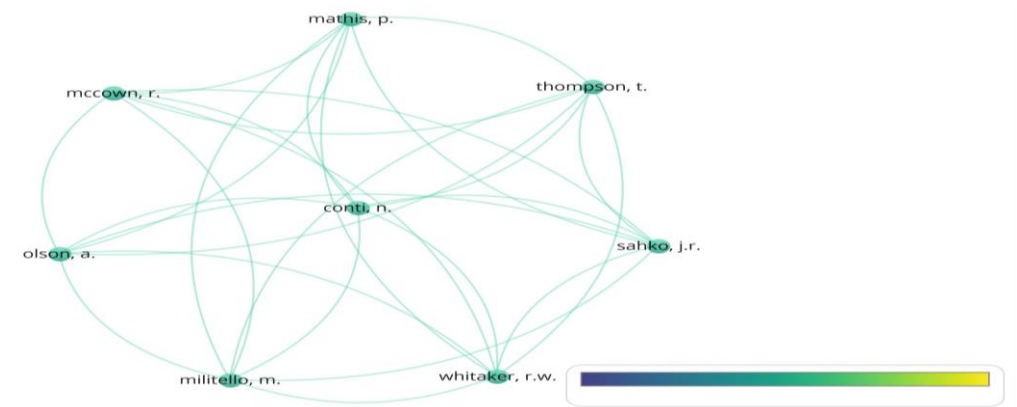


Figure 1. Overlay visualization of authors

Figure 1 indicates the collaboration among authors. N. Conti from Duquesne University, Pittsburgh – United States, has the highest frequency of collaboration than other authors. He has collaborated with other experts from different fields of study such as A. Oslon, R. McCorn, P.Mathis, T. Thompson, J. R. Sahko, R. W. Whitakel, and M. Militello.

**Table 1**

*Top five prolific authors*

| No. | Document title | Authors | Year | Source | Citations |
|-----|----------------|---------|------|--------|-----------|
| 1 | African American spirituality and Cornel West's notions of prophetic pragmatism: Restructuring educational leadership in American urban schools | M. E. Dantley | 2005 | Educational Administration Quarterly, 41(4), pp. 651–674 | 95 |
| 2 | On heroes, hero-worship, and the heroic in history | T. Carlyle, D. R. Sorensen, and B. E. Kinser | 2013 | On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, pp. 1–350 | 40 |
| 3 | Islamic perspectives on leadership: a model | A. J. Ali | 2009 | International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management, 2(2), pp. 160–180 | 36 |
| 4 | Maasai age-sets and prophetic leadership: 1850–1910 | J. L. Berntsen | 1979 | Africa, 49(2), pp. 134–146 | 17 |
| 5 | The prophet and the engineer meet under the mango tree: Leadership, education, and conflict in the Southern Philippines | J. A. Milligan | 2010 | Educational Policy, 24(1), pp. 28–51 | 7 |

Table 1 shows that M. E. Dantley becomes the most productive author (with 95 citations) in investigating related to the issue of prophetic leadership. Following his records, T. Carlyle, D. R. Sorensen, and B. E. Kinser performed 40 citations, A. J. Ali with 36 citations, J. L. Berntsen with 17 citations, and J. A. Milligan with 7 citations. In addition, J. L. Berntsen, as the first prolific author, has introduced the concept of prophetic leadership in the Scopus database since 1979.
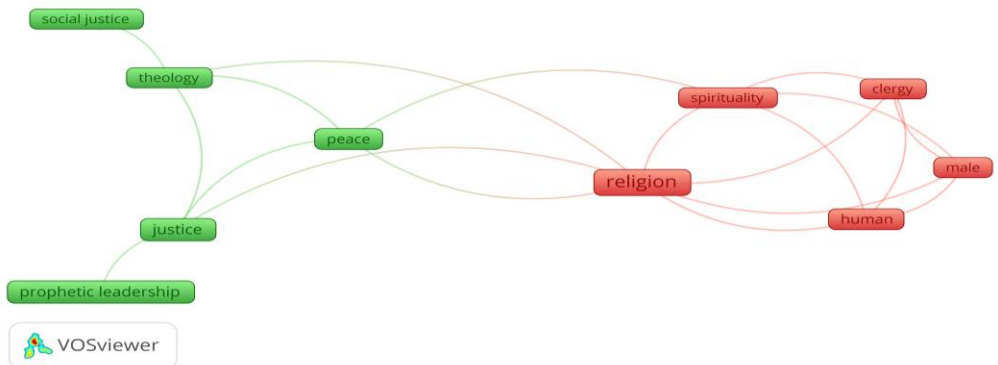


**Figure 2. Network visualization of prophetic leadership**

Figure 2 shows that prophetic leadership in this study is divided into two clusters: green and red cluster. The green cluster includes peace, theology, justice, social justice, and prophetic leadership. In comparison, the red cluster includes religion, spirituality, human, clergy and male. Prophetic leadership inspires individuals and communities to work towards peace and create a more just society. Prophetic leader, for example, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Abd Rahman et al., 2022; Izudin, 2021; Mirela et al., 2021; Retnaningdiah et al., 2023), provides a vision of a more peaceful world by inviting all humans to worship the one God (only Allah). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) inspires others by articulating a compelling vision of compassion and dignity for all individuals (Ahmed & Amiri, 2019), challenging people to aspire to higher moral standards. By casting a clear vision for the future, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) motivates and mobilizes individuals to work towards achieving peace and justice (Prier, 2019). Furthermore, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) often works towards social transformation. For example, after prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) migrated to Yathrib (later known as Medina), everything shortly changed and this city transformed into a state with the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as head of state (El Syam, 2017). In Medina, the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) established a Muslim community, and the city served as the center of Islamic governance during the time of the Prophet, covering almost all of the Arabian Peninsula. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encourages critical thinking and dialogue to bridge divides and foster understanding among different people (Armstrong, 2023). By promoting empathy, inclusivity, and respect, the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) contributes to the creation of a more equitable and harmonious society.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) often promotes the importance of service to others as a manifestation of spirituality. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encourages individuals to reflect on their spiritual beliefs, values, and principles as a source of inspiration to seek meaning and purpose in their lives (Armstrong, 2023; Tabroni et al., 2022). By promoting spiritual practices such as prayer and self-reflection, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) inspires individuals to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationship with others, leading to personal growth and spiritual awakening in the workplace. Additionally, in the context of humanity, the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) fosters a sense of unity and collaboration, empowering people to overcome challenges and realize their potential for the well-being of humanity as a whole.

### Conclusion

The gist of the findings concludes that prophetic leadership brings a unique set of qualities and values that can greatly benefit modern business organizations. Prophetic leadership, for instance, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) indeed provides a clear vision, promotes ethical decision-making, fosters transparency, empowers followers, and develops a mission that encompasses various aspects of life, including spirituality, morality, governance, and social justice, to create the long-term success in this world and the hereafter.

The practical implication of prophetic leadership by prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is very complex. As a prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him) received divine guidance through the revelation of the Quran. His role as a leader is intertwined with his mission of delivering Allah's message and guiding people on matters of faith, spirituality, and moral conduct around the world. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) advocates for social justice and equality regardless of social status, race, or gender in all aspects of life. Also, the prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasizes the importance of personal integrity, honesty, compassion, justice, and humility to establish a foundation of ethical conduct in both personal and societal affairs.

This study uses the Scopus database as a secondary data source, so it becomes a limitation that needs to be noted. By limiting further to the specific keywords related to prophetic leadership, there are only five articles that clearly mention the term in their research titles, such as Berntsen (1979), Doohan (1983), Smollett (2013), Indra, Tanjung, Setiawati, Primarni, and Norman (2022), Kretzschmar (2023). Therefore, it is beneficial for future studies to explore prophetic leadership in multiple data sources: Web of Science (WOS), ScienceDirect, PubMed, IEEE Xplore, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). In addition, focusing solely on the prophetic leadership of Muhammad (peace be upon him) could lead to bias, as it may not provide a comprehensive understanding of leadership practices across different religious or cultural contexts (Ghani, Rahim, & Mat, 2021). Prophets in various religious traditions might have different teachings, beliefs, and leadership styles. Thus, to gain a more holistic perspective on prophetic leadership, it is essential to consider a broader range of religious and historical figures, as well as cultural contexts.

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