Thought Paper No. 9

An Educator's Journey in an Islamic System of Governance

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to promote thoughts and discussions around an educator's experience in an Islamic System of Governance, particularly in the use of the Islamic Governance Conceptual (IGC) Matrix. The author's experience in the education industry has motivated this short piece, for educators or anyone who struggles in the process of action and performance. The author uses the IGC Matrix which is the operational framework used to achieve the objectives of the *Maqāṣid* or Purposes of the Sharī'ah. With a focus on the Maqṣad of intellect, the author visualises the Matrix as a map for readers to navigate from the point of knowledge acquisition towards embodiment and action. The author believes this to be the most optimum route towards the achievement of success in general and a holistic learning experience with a faith-based service orientation in particular, due to the Qur'ānic foundations of the IGC Matrix.

Keywords: *Maqāṣid* of the Sharī'ah, educators, knowledge, action, holistic

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Knowledge must be followed by action. The prominent scholars of Islam emphasise that knowledge must be practised. That the knowledgeable person is one who practises the knowledge he knows and his knowledge is in accordance with his actions.¹ Should an educator not be mindful, even borderline weary, of what can and should be taught by the tongue if it has not been endured by the hand? The importance of action is deeply embedded in the Islamic tradition, so this naturally raises questions on implications on the teacher as well as pedagogy. The Prophet ﷺ said in a *ḥadīth*:

"Whosoever of you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart—and that is the weakest of faith."²

Taking action not only requires the most effort, but it also requires the highest level of faith. The issue these days is the high emphasis on the 'self' and 'action', which disregards the process that takes place before an action physically occurs. To understand this process, we look to the Islamic Governance Conceptual (IGC) Matrix³ as a map that takes the doer on a journey from the point of knowledge acquisition towards embodiment and action in order to achieve a holistic learning experience with a faith-based service orientation. Additionally, an educator functioning in an Islamic System of Governance (ISG) would need a structure with which they could use to help them calibrate and regulate their thoughts, actions, and decisions that would, in turn, help them operationalise their goals to achieve the strategic objectives of the System which are the *Maqāṣid* or purposes of the *Sharī'ah*. This paper attempts this by taking educators and readers through the elements of the IGC Matrix, beginning with an explanation of how it could help them navigate through the Matrix, from the starting point to action and then performance. Secondly, knowledge acquisition and what happens in between that space and the sphere of action. Thirdly, behaviour calibration according to the Qur'ānic values to ensure optimum engagement in the social sphere. Fourthly, cultural considerations that enable the co-production of knowledge as well as collective faith and service-oriented performance. All four elements will be looked at from the educator's perspective as a disseminator of knowledge as well as 'experiencer' of action in hopes to optimise their performance as an educator in an ISG.

¹ Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Syarh Majmu' al-Muhaddzab*, Penerbit Buku Islam Rahmatan. 2009, Pg 81.

² 40 Ḥadīth Nawawī No. 34

³ Amin Abdul Aziz, "Visions of Islamic Governance", Lecture, Institute of Policy Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, January 2021.

The Voyager and the Map

Educating in an ISG takes a mystical approach towards pedagogy, privileging orality, memorisation, and the didactic approach to sacred texts particularly in the context of the *Madrasah* School.¹ Memorisation was the primary tool for embodiment, anchored on the Islamic premise of the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred.² What then is the approach outside of the *Madrasah* School? Particularly when contemplation and critical thinking is concerned, and when dealing with either the revealed or rational sciences, or both. What is the embodiment process like? Armed with the Matrix as a map, the educator embarks on a journey towards a holistic learning experience for their students and in so doing, goes through a holistic journey of their own. One where the embodiment of knowledge is key. A visual of the Matrix is attached in the appendix for readers to follow the movements of the components as described in this paper. This contemplative journey through the map and its components offers the voyager the navigation needed to move knowledge and worshipful action beyond individual needs to the needs of others, beyond benefiting the self to the benefit of the community. Moreover, the journey through the IGC Matrix could support the educator with purpose and a path to action, either within or outside the madrasah environment. One is to look at the map as a system, made up of a three by four Matrix, in which Allah *Subḥānahu Wa Ta'āla* has complete control and dominion over. This journey begins with the heart. At the starting point, which is the "*Tauḥīdic*"³ component, intention is planted in the heart which brings God into the equation.

Tauḥīdic and Juristic: From Knowledge to Action

Narrated in a *ḥadīth*, our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "The deeds are considered by the intentions, and a person will get the reward according to his intention."⁴ This sets intention as the foundation of our actions. It can even turn any action into a form of worship, including the mundane, like sleeping and eating. With or without intention which precedes action, *hidāyah* endowed by Allah *Subḥānahu Wa Ta'āla* in the form of knowledge remains in the mind and is placed somewhere in between the Matrix's *Tauḥīdic* and Juristic component.⁵

¹ Aishah Ahmad Sabki, & Glenn Hardaker, The Madrasah Concept of Islamic Pedagogy, *Educational Review*, 65:3, 2013, 342-356, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2012.668873.

² Ibid.

³ Everything starts with Tauḥīd (a consciousness of Allah), or a belief, and belief lies in the heart.

⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 54, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1907

⁵ Amin Abdul Aziz, "Visions of Islamic Governance", Lecture, Institute of Policy Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. January 2021

Operating from the perspective that Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla* has power over everything,¹ most of all over the self, the impulse to act or the *taufiq* is sought. Besides an impulse to act, it is also defined as a means to wish for the Truth and to attain goodness, truth, and correctness in affairs.² Among the reasons one could be granted *taufiq* are sincerity in intention, belief that the source of *taufiq* is only from Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla*, repentance, turning back to and relying upon Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla* and the prayer of guidance (*istikhārah*). Another cause is making the Hereafter one's goal and Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla* organises His affairs.³ *Tafakkur* (contemplation) can also lead to *taufiq* where knowledge that is produced from contemplating, in turn, causes beauty and safety to manifest.⁴ The various ways of internalisation could be the cause of knowledge to move to the *Tauhīdic* component. This allows for that knowledge to be internalised in the heart, thus creating *taufiq*, and thereby moving forward to Juristic to be manifested into action. The complex dynamism between the components signified by the beginning (of knowledge) at the Juristic component, as opposed to the *Tauhīdic* 'starting point', mirrors the importance for educators in an ISG and other players alike to appreciate the inseparability of the physical and the metaphysical, the mind and body as well as the heart. One may begin to wonder what the consequences are for an educator who runs with the knowledge endowed without seeking *taufiq* to act upon it? What are the implications of those actions towards the overall objectives and bigger picture? These considerations must be reflected upon by educators if they are to optimise their performance in an ISG world and live an aligned, congruent life as a Muslim educator and member of the *Ummah*.

The shift from the *Tauhīdic* back to the Juristic component marks the embodied learning in acts of worship for the sincere seeker of Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla*'s *taufiq*. In the educator's context as well as others, mandatory supersedes the supererogatory. This stage is occupied by the educator who is securing a connection with Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla* through obligatory devotional worship incumbent upon them. This is imperative so as to move on to more supererogatory acts beloved to Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla*, ultimately

¹ The translation of sūrah *at-Talāq*: 12 ﴿It is Allah who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. [His] command descends among them so you may know that Allah is over all things competent and that Allah has encompassed all things in knowledge.﴾

² Al-Munajjid, Al-Tawfiq, Fajr Wordpress. (2008)

³ Zayd ibn Thabit reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ, said, "Whoever makes the world his most important matter, Allah will confound his affairs and make poverty appear before his eyes and he will not get anything from the world but what has been decreed for him. Whoever makes the Hereafter his most important matter, Allah will settle his affairs and make him content in his heart and the world will come to him although he does not want it." Source: Sunan Ibn Mājah 4105.

⁴ Imam Al-Ghazālī, Fifth Edition: *Mukhtasar Ihya 'Ulumuddin*, Translated by: Yasin, I. Perniagaan Jahabersa. 2013

aiming for Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla*'s guidance to act and live as those whom He loves.¹ The IGC Matrix plays an important part, not only to support the navigation of educators on the straight path but also to set the parameters of their actions, for instance, in attaining embodiment, preserving the knowledge and keeping steadfast on their progress, as well as other acts that are needed to uphold their integrity as an educator and harmony in their other roles as parents, spouses, etc. For the educator who has experienced an embodiment of knowledge from the *Tauhīdic* component, to regress back to the mind without action would set them back in their goals and misalign them from the higher objectives. Internalising knowledge to gain *taufīq* and thereby acting from the *Tauhīdic* as opposed to the Juristic component calls for a refresh in the aforementioned methods of internalising knowledge such as refreshing intentions with the Qur'ānic verse in *du'ā iftitāh*² to improve productivity and performance.³

Nevertheless, as the Matrix will remind us, the parameters of Muslim action are always calibrated by the Qur'ānic values⁴ which will be discussed in the next section. This in turn reminds us that productivity and performance cannot be separated from an altruistic consideration of others of Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla*'s creations. Even in acts of preserving knowledge such as *murājī'ah* (revising) and audible recitation,⁵ which eventually propels the educator from an individual sphere of learning towards the social sphere. Teaching to learn and engaging in the debate is the most relevant for the learner-educator as it helps deepen knowledge and aid their retention on both individual and social levels, while also training them to be open to others' opinions and perspectives. Good treatment of others in

¹ On the authority of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), who said that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: Allah (mighty and sublime be He) said: Whosoever shows enmity to someone devoted to Me, I shall be at war with him. My servant draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it. I do not hesitate about anything as much as I hesitate about [seizing] the soul of My faithful servant: he hates death and I hate hurting him. It was related by al-Bukhari.

² The translation of sūrah *al-An'ām*: 162 ﴿Surely, my prayer, my sacrifice, my life and my death are for Allah, Lord of all the worlds. No partner has He, and I am first among the Muslims.﴾

³ Amin Abdul Aziz, "Visions of Islamic Governance", Lecture, Institute of Policy Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, January 2021.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Imam Ahmad ibn Lutfullah al-Mulawi, *Enlightenment from the Sacred Precinct: A Manual on the Art of Reading*. 978-0-9984380-0-9. 2019.

perspective-taking, empathy, adopting views and opinions different from their own¹ is imperative so as to be sincere in ﴿ cooperating in righteousness and piety. ﴾²

Values and Culture: From Collaborative Action to Results

After stressing the paramount duty of affirming the oneness of God (*Tauḥīd*), both the Qur'ān and Sunnah stress one thing above all: the unity of the Muslim *Ummah*.³ The educator is in need of good engagement with others of Allah *Subḥānahu Wa Ta'āla*'s creations to be able to perform social forms of worship. The foundations for all good actions begin with behaviour that is calibrated by Qur'ānic values of compassion, equity, and justice.⁴ For the educator, these values are the basis for the engagements that enable them and their students 'growth, enrichment of the mind, and stimulation of intellectual development within a healthy (learning) framework.⁵ Beginning with compassion is more important than ever since the most dangerous disease which currently afflicts the Muslim *Ummah* is arguably that of disagreement and discord.⁶ Without a doubt, Muslims have lost the 'ethics and norms of proper Islamic behaviour and proper moral imperatives'⁷ which have led to the inability to embrace different or new perspectives. How will creativity and innovation thrive? How can deep learning occur when we are unable to learn and gain knowledge from each other, particularly when one is to view knowledge as the light that Allah *Subḥānahu Wa Ta'āla* places in the hearts.⁸ The reality is that being compassionate is a feat of its own. It is far easier, at times, to jump straight to justice instead of compassion and equity. Imam al-Ghazālī warns us of the diseases of the heart such as greed, envy, or anger which he claims is central to the downfall of human character.⁹ Another sign of a diseased heart is selfishness and having a high regard for oneself.¹⁰ According to the scholars of *Tasawwūf*, this preoccupation in looking at the goodness and importance of the self makes it difficult to recognise the goodness and importance of others. Moreover, selfishness champions feeling

¹ Raimo P. Hämäläinen, and Esa Saarinen. Essays on Systems Intelligence, Systems Analysis Laboratory Aalto University. 2010. DOI 10.1057/jors.2009.175.

² The translation of *sūrah al-Mā'idah*: 2

³ Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam. *International Institute of Islamic Thought*, Herndon, Virginia. 1993.

⁴ Amin Abdul Aziz, "Visions of Islamic Governance", Lecture, Institute of Policy Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, January 2021.

⁵ Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam. *International Institute of Islamic Thought*, Herndon, Virginia. 1993.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibn Wahb reported: Malik, may Allah have mercy on him, said, "Knowledge is not knowing many narrations. Verily, knowledge is only a light that Allah places in the hearts." Source: *Ḥilyat al-Awliya* 8987

⁹ Rothman, A., & Coyle, A. Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul, *Journal of Religion and Health*. 2018. DOI:10.1007/s10943-018-0651-x

¹⁰ Ibid.

good about oneself or superior to others which leads to always wanting to be right, not owning up to mistakes and areas of development, or even aiming for the wrong things in life just to avoid the hard work of genuine self-improvement.¹

Whatever progress and changes that educators wish to see in their students, the *Ummah* or the world, it must first begin with them. The role of the educator in facilitating learning engagements and proactively planting these Qur'ānic values in themselves and their students for optimum engagement, and therefore performance, is vital. It is worth reminding ourselves that the knowledge in the Values component may need to go back to *Tauhīdic* for the behaviours to manifest and counted as acts of social worship. It is also worth reminding that these Values are behaviours that are meant to police our actions in serving others for Allah *Subhānahu Wa Ta'āla*'s sake. This has great merits as mentioned by the Prophet ﷺ, "Whoever would love to be shaded in the shade of Allah, let him help someone in hardship or waive a loan."² The educator is driven towards this side of the Matrix by their preoccupations in thinking and tending to the needs of God's Creations, their students in particular, and the community at large in general. The educator begins with the end in mind, leaning into Purpose or rather, Purposes of the *Sharī'ah*. A culture of alignment towards those objectives requires collaborations on many levels, starting with an identification of like-minded (or rather, like-hearted) individuals that are working towards the same Purpose(s). People working within the third *Maqṣad* (single purpose), which is the preservation and promotion of intellect³ is an obvious choice. However, the subject taught may serve other purposes as well from the preservation and promotion of faith, life (including those of nature and the environment), progeny (which encompasses welfare conditions conducive for the growth of children), and wealth.⁴ When educators are able to tap into the knowledge of, and co-create knowledge with, experts, professionals, and students who are driven by their respective *Maqṣad* – they stand a better chance at producing deeply sustainable and holistic learning experiences, with an emergent curriculum that is well equipped to face the challenges of the times as well as the deep troubles faced by the *Ummah*.

¹ Ibid.

² Sunan Ibn Mājah 2419.

³ Amin Abdul Aziz, "Visions of Islamic Governance", Lecture, Institute of Policy Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, January 2021.

⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

In a world mapped out in these three by four matrices, there are several hopes for the educator. Firstly, that they would find ease in navigating through their 'learner teacher' experience in this world. Secondly, that it would potentially help educators achieve a deeply sustainable and holistic learning experience. One that begins with them as agents of both inner and outer change, strengthening first one's relationship with Allah *Subḥānahu Wa Ta'āla* through obedience and then moving towards a loving and compassionate relationship with His creations. This then opens avenues towards servicing others' needs and solving their problems with other experts who are driven by their own respective *Maqāṣid*. Thirdly, and possibly most importantly of all, that they would realise how differently they would need to operate within this Matrix in which Allah *Subḥānahu Wa Ta'āla* has complete dominion and power, as He does overall. Every step of the way, be it a vertical or horizontal movement on the journey, the educator is either surrendering to Allah *Subḥānahu Wa Ta'āla*'s will or going against it. To go against it is to champion the self and ego, whereas to surrender is to be guided through acts of devotional and social forms of worship which is the essence of faith-driven action. Through this contemplative journey, it is hoped that the educator would realise how much of the self and self-importance is shed (or should be shed) each step of the way as they move further along and engage with the Matrix's components. The more Allah *Subḥānahu Wa Ta'āla*'s importance is prioritised and His creations considered, the less of the self is prioritised. The less the self is in control, the better the educator is able to surrender to their very own Guide and Infallible Teacher.

الله تعالى اعلم

Appendix 1. The Concept of Islamic Governance and the Matrix

Where ‘governance’ is the notions, processes, rules, and values that are constructed within its own socio-political context that effectively gear organisations in the protection and promotion of its objectives, the Matrix provides the framework in which these objectives can be achieved.

Figure 1. The Concept of Islamic Governance. Source: Amin Abdul Aziz, “Visions of Islamic Governance”, Lecture, Institute of Policy Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, January 2021

The paper welcomes readers to view the operational framework as a map that begins at the *Tauhīdic* component. For the purpose of this paper, the journey appears to be mostly linear, taking readers from the *Tauhīdic* component, following the (green coloured) arrows to Juristic, Values and then Cultural component before moving upwards (with the blue coloured arrow) towards achieving the *Maqṣad* of intellect in particular, and the *Maqāsid* of the *Shari'ah* in general. While in reality, the components engage together in horizontal as well as vertical dynamic movements that reflect the complexities of life and the heart, moving back and forth along the four components and the respective micro to macro levels.

Since the paper focuses on educators in an Islamic System of Governance, the movements are mostly on the individual (micro) level as the educator navigates their own self-governance. However, the educator also operates on a social level and therefore moves up from χ_1 (individual) to χ_2 (social) level when in a school setting and engaging with students and other staff.