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## **Dr. Israr Ahmed and Application of Servant Leadership in Tanzeem-e-Islami**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Robert K. Greenleaf's theory servant leadership redefines conventional hierarchies by emphasizing the leader's role as a servant and putting the personal development of others ahead of authority or status. The understudied application of this Western concept to non-Western religious contexts—this study looks at its manifestation in Dr. Israr Ahmed's three decades of leadership (1975–2002) of Tanzeem-e-Islami, a Pakistani Islamic revivalist movement. Using a qualitative case study approach that applies Greenleaf's model—which is expanded by Spears' ten traits (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, growth commitment, and community-building)—to biographical data, organizational structures, and uses secondary sources. The study aims to bridge secular servant leadership theory with Islamic principles like Consultative council (Majlis al Shura) and service. It poses three research questions: (1) In what ways did Dr. Israr Ahmed's leadership of Tanzeem-e-Islami manifest the ten characteristics of servant leadership as articulated by Robert K. Greenleaf and elaborated by Larry Spears? (2) What distinctive dimensions of Islamic leadership are evident in Dr. Ahmed's leadership that complement, extend, or diverge from the Greenleafian servant leadership framework? (3) How did the organizational structure and governance mechanisms of Tanzeem-e-Islami embody or constrain servant leadership principles? The results show that all characteristics—conceptualization in his Khilafah vision, stewardship in his voluntary departure in 2002, expansion via halqajat gatherings and TV programs—are strongly aligned, and Islamic contributions expand the model without causing conflict. These post-Ahmed are maintained by Tanzeem's formalized shura and accountability. Contributions include confirming the cross-cultural applicability of servant leadership, enhancing it with Islamic perspectives, and offering religious organizations useful guidance on succession, accountability, and striking a balance between pressing needs and revolutionary objectives. They also call on leadership studies to go beyond Western paradigms.

**Keywords:** Servant Leadership, Islamic Leadership, Dr. Israr Ahmed, Tanzeem-e-Islami, Greenleaf K. Robert.



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### Introduction:

#### Background of the Study

Over the past 50 years, the study of leadership has changed dramatically, incorporating relational, ethical, and service-oriented paradigms in addition to trait-based and behavioral models. Robert K. Greenleaf's servant leadership theory holds a unique and significant place among these new paradigms. In his groundbreaking 1970 essay "The Servant as Leader," Greenleaf first proposed a radical reversal of conventional leadership hierarchies: the leader's primary identity is that of a servant, whose primary motivation is the desire to serve others rather than to exercise power or gain personal prestige. The best indicator of a servant-leader is whether or whether people they serve develop personally, becoming smarter, freer, more independent, and more inclined to serve others (Greenleaf 1977). The servant-leader is "servant first."

The application of servant leadership to religious movements—especially those in non-Western settings—remains comparatively understudied, despite the fact that it has been thoroughly researched in Western economic, educational, and nonprofit contexts. This disparity is important for a number of reasons. First, religious movements provide a wealth of factual data for evaluating and expanding leadership theories that have their roots in secular organizational settings. Second, insights into how spiritual commitments influence interactions between leaders and followers can be gained from the junction of religious ideals and leadership practice. Third, Greenleaf's framework and Islamic leadership principles—which have prioritized service, consultation, and responsibility for more than fourteen centuries—can be better understood by looking at servant leadership in Islamic contexts (Beekun and Badawi 1999).

#### The Concept of Servant Leadership and its Relevance to Tanzeem-e-Islami

Robert K. Greenleaf (1904–1990), a former American Telephone and Telegraph Company

(AT&T) executive who spent the most of his latter career as a consultant, writer, and creator of the Center for Applied Ethics, established servant leadership as a formal theory. Inspired by Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*, where the hero, Leo, is ultimately revealed as the head of a religious order—not because he exercised authority, but because he served others humbly and faithfully—Greenleaf's Quaker religious background significantly influenced his way of thinking (Greenleaf 1977). Larry C. Spears expanded on Greenleaf's seminal work by identifying ten essential traits that together characterize the servant-leader: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, dedication to people's development, and community building (Spears 1995). In empirical study and organizational practice, these traits are now the accepted framework for operationalizing servant leadership (Gustavus Adolphus College 2019).

Numerous scholars place the servant leadership as a new field of research in the leadership domain. They focus on key characteristics, measurement instruments, and motivation dimensions to develop a conceptual model of servant leadership. Values affect leaders' behavior and organizational performance (Russel, 2001; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys. 2017). Within this context, the researchers assume that Dr. Israr Ahmed's Tanzeem-e-Islami seeks the Islamic revolution in Pakistan and then around the globe (Raza, 2021). The founder of Tanzeem-e-Islami Ahmed's philosophy is based on the "concept of spiritual awakening and engagement with the Quran materialized into his organization that structures Tanzeem-e-Islami" (Perveen, 2025). Based on the existing literature, researchers find the research



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gap on the application of servant leadership within an organization such as Tanzeem-e-Islami. Therefore, this research is an attempt to explain servant leadership approach in Tanzeem-e-Islami by Ahmed to look at how servant leadership works and how we can apply it in order to examine the organizational performance for the well being of the followers.

When Greenleaf's servant leadership framework is applied to Dr. Israr Ahmed's leadership, it becomes clear that his administration of Tanzeem-e-Islami practically exemplified Spears' ten traits. His institutionalization of the Majlis-e-Shura (consultative council), for example, shows that he paid close attention to the advice of his followers, and his voluntary departure in 2002 due to health issues shows stewardship and understanding of one's own limitations. His long-term goal of founding Khilafah is an example of conceptualization, and his investments in educational books and halqajat (study circles) demonstrate his dedication to human development. Furthermore, through a covenantal relationship, the bai'ah (pledge of allegiance) system fosters community. As a result, Dr. Ahmed's leadership style embodies the theoretical characteristics noted by Greenleaf and Spears, confirming the cross-cultural relevance of servant leadership.

### **Dr. Israr Ahmed and Tanzeem-e-Islami**

Distinguished Pakistani Islamic theologian, philosopher, and physician Dr. Israr Ahmed (1932–2010) was known for his work in Islamic revivalism and Quranic education. He moved to Pakistan in 1947 after being born in Hisar, British India. In 1954, he received his MBBS from King Edward Medical College in Lahore. In 1965, he obtained a Master's degree in Islamic Studies from the University of Karachi. However, he resigned in 1957 because of deep disputes over the party's choice to engage in electoral politics, which he felt took away from the revolutionary approach of social and spiritual reform.

In order to devote all of his attention to the resurrection of Islam, Dr. Israr gave up practicing medicine in 1971. As a result, Tanzeem-e-Islami was founded in 1975 and Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Quran was established in 1972. With the goal of establishing an Islamic system through a disciplined, non-electoral movement, the organization was founded on the Quranic precept of Bay'ah (pledge of allegiance). He wrote more than 60 books and rose to national notoriety with his television show Al-Huda. He emphasized that personal faith and Quranic wisdom are the first steps toward real change. In recognition of his religious services, he received the Sitara-i-Imtiaz in 1981.

Tanzeem-e-Islami has not yet undergone a thorough scholarly examination, in contrast to many other Islamic movements (Ahmad 2019). It is neither a traditional political party nor a religious cult. Shakhsi bai 'at (personal adherence), munfarid rufaqa (isolated members), nizam-i-usra' (family unit system), local tanzim, nizam-I-halqajat (circle system), and a central system are all included in the organization's structure (Ahmad 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

No systematic academic study has applied servant leadership theory to Dr. Israr Ahmed's leadership or Tanzeem-e-Islami's organizational practices, despite the growing scholarly interest in servant leadership and its application to diverse organizational contexts, as well as the movement's significant following and influence in Pakistan and among South Asian Muslim diaspora communities worldwide. Given that Dr. Ahmed led the creation of a worldwide religious organization over the course of nearly three decades (1975–2002), offering a longitudinal case study of leadership in action, this disparity is



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especially noteworthy. The current work addresses the necessity to include concepts from Islamic leadership to the literature on servant leadership.

### Research Questions

This paper addresses the following research questions:

In what ways did Dr. Israr Ahmed's leadership of Tanzeem-e-Islami manifest the ten characteristics of servant leadership as articulated by Robert K. Greenleaf and elaborated by Larry Spears?

What distinctive dimensions of Islamic leadership are evident in Dr. Ahmed's leadership that complement, extend, or diverge from the Greenleafian servant leadership framework?

How did the organizational structure and governance mechanisms of Tanzeem-e-Islami embody or constrain servant leadership principles?

### Theoretical Framework

#### Origin and Development of Servant Leadership Theory

Robert K. Greenleaf (1904–1990), a former AT&T executive who spent the most of his latter career as a consultant, writer, and creator of the Center for Applied Ethics (later renamed the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership), developed servant leadership as a formal theory. In his landmark essay "The Servant as Leader" from 1970, Greenleaf first used the term "servant-leadership." He left AT&T in 1964 and founded a business and leadership consulting firm based on his belief that leaders should be servants.

The fundamental principle of Greenleaf's idea is that a servant-leader prioritizes serving others. A basic desire to serve—a "natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first"—is the source of the motivation to lead, and deliberate decision-making then leads to the aspiration to lead (Greenleaf 1977). This contrasts with leaders who are driven largely by a desire for prestige, wealth, or power. "The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served," as noted by Greenleaf (1977, 27).

Greenleaf's Quaker religious background had a significant influence on his way of thinking. In his essay "Essentials of Servant Leadership," Greenleaf claims that reading Hermann Hesse's novel served as the inspiration for his ideology. Leo, the central figure of this tale, is ultimately seen to be the leader of a religious order—not because he used power, but rather because he devotedly and humbly served others. This narrative discovery became the cornerstone of Greenleaf's leadership philosophy, which holds that a leader's proven dedication to service, rather than their position in a hierarchy, is the source of genuine leadership.

#### The Ten Characteristics of Servant Leadership

Larry C. Spears, the former CEO of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, built on Greenleaf's seminal work by identifying ten essential traits that together constitute the servant-leader. In empirical study and organizational practice, these traits are now the accepted foundation for operationalizing servant leadership (Spears 1995; Gustavus Adolphus College 2019). The ten qualities are:

**Listening:** A strong dedication to paying close attention to what other people are saying. The servant-leader places a high value on listening intently to what is being said (and not spoken), understanding that sincere communication is crucial to determining and elucidating the group's will.

**Empathy:** Servant-leaders make an effort to comprehend and sympathize with people, supposing that their colleagues have good intentions and viewing them as complete individuals rather than



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as merely contributors to organizational objectives.

**Healing:** For both themselves and the people they serve, servant-leaders understand that a key component of leadership is emotional and spiritual healing.

**Awareness:** Servant-leaders develop self-awareness and general awareness, realizing that wisdom and power come from knowing one's own ideals, feelings, and limitations as well as the larger organizational and societal context.

**Persuasion:** Instead of using positional authority or coercive power, servant-leaders try to persuade people by being persistent, polite, and clear in order to foster group consensus.

**Conceptualization:** In order to see the organization's long-term future and its role in advancing the greater good, servant leaders are able to think beyond the day-to-day operational issues.

**Foresight:** Servant-leaders with foresight are able to comprehend lessons learned from the past, grasp the reality of the present, and predict the potential outcomes of decisions made in the future.

**Stewardship:** By acting as stewards rather than owners and acknowledging their responsibility to a larger community of stakeholders, servant-leaders hold their organizations in trust for the greater welfare of society.

**Commitment to the Growth of People:** Servant-leaders show a strong dedication to each person's personal, professional, and spiritual development inside the company.

**Building Community:** Servant-leaders strive to create genuine, compassionate, and cooperative relationships both inside and outside of their organizations because they understand that true community is necessary for human flourishing.

Dr. Israr Ahmed and Tanzeem-e-Islami exhibit strong alignment in every aspect when Larry Spears' 10 servant leadership traits are applied to them. Dr. Ahmed promoted healing by resurrecting a Qur'an-centric worldview, showed empathy by attending to followers' immediate needs, and institutionalized listening through the Majlis-e-Shura. He formed a covenantal community through the bai'ah system, relied on persuasion rather than force, and made significant investments in the development of his adherents through literature and halqajat. As a result, Dr. Ahmed's leadership exemplifies each of the ten characteristics of servant leadership.

### **Islamic Leadership and Its relationship with Servant Leadership**

The Islamic leadership ideology is essentially moral and focused on helping others. According to the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad was a "mercy to the worlds" (rahmah li al-alamin, Qur'an 21:107). "The leader of a people is their servant" (sayyid al-qawm khadimuhum) is a well-known prophetic tradition (hadith) that directly relates to Greenleaf's servant-first philosophy.

Shura (consultation), 'adl (justice), amanah (trustworthiness), taqwa (God-consciousness), and tawakkul (dependence on God) are among the fundamental Islamic leadership concepts highlighted by scholars (Beekun and Badawi 1999). Studies contrasting Islamic leadership and servant leadership have discovered significant similarities between the two paradigms. Mutalib and Razali (2012) used hermeneutics and content analysis to compare and contrast the ideas of Islamic leadership and servant leadership. According to their research, there is significant congruence between the two frameworks, especially in the area of ethical leadership, as the ten traits of servant leadership coincide with nineteen clusters of Islamic leadership (Mutalib and Razali 2012).

However, the study also found five areas of divergence: fairness and injustice; profit-orientedness; moderation and balance; spirituality, religion, faith in God, and devotion; and coercion in specific situations with restrictions (Mutalib and Razali 2012). These distinctions imply that although Islamic leadership and servant leadership have a similar



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ethical foundation, Islamic leadership adds unique elements based on spiritual responsibility and religious teachings. According to Mutalib and Razali (2012), the literature on Islamic leadership should be enriched with more information about modern leadership processes and contexts, while the literature on servant leadership should be enriched with more ideas pertaining to other aspects of leadership, such as Islamic leadership.

### **Applications of Servant Leadership to Islamic Context**

Over the past ten years, there has been an increase in the application of servant leadership philosophy to Islamic situations. While Western and Islamic approaches share many aspects, research on servant leadership in Malaysian da'wah NGOs has found that Western servant leadership does not highlight the religious perspective as emphasized in Islam (Mhd Omar and Ismail 2022). Studies have also examined 'Umar ibn Khattab's leadership as an example of servant leadership, showing that centuries before Greenleaf formalized the concept, the second Caliph's governance—marked by walking the streets at night to check on the welfare of citizens, refusing to eat from public funds while his subjects went hungry, and prioritizing the needs of the marginalized—exemplified servant leadership (Ogunbado et al. 2020). These studies provide a foundation for the present analysis of Dr. Israr Ahmed.

### **3. Dr. Israr Ahmed and Tanzeem-e-Islami: Background**

After graduating from King Edward Medical College in Lahore in 1954, he went on to earn a master's degree in Islamic studies from the University of Karachi in 1965 (Dawn 2010). He became a leader of the Muslim Students Federation and actively participated in student politics throughout the independence process (The Nation 2017).

The writings of Shah Wali Ullah, Mahmud al-Hasan Deobandi, Abu al-Kalam Azad, and most importantly, Maulana Abul A'la Maududi, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, influenced his intellectual development. Dr. Ahmed's conceptual framework was sparked by the combination of Muhammad Iqbal's poetry and Maududi's methodical explanation of Islam as a comprehensive socio-political system (The Nation 2017).

In 1956, Dr. Ahmed left Jamaat-e-Islami because he thought it had lost its revolutionary Islamic spirit and had become simply another political organization by getting involved in electoral politics. Biographical sources state that during a meeting of JI's shura, it was resolved that members who had different opinions were prohibited from attending arkaan-e-jamaat events, from discussing their disagreements with any rafeeq, and from writing anything that expressed disapproval. After quitting his medical practice to fully dedicate himself to the cause of Islam, Dr. Ahmed left the group because this decree was "unbearable to any sane person" (The Nation 2017).

Dr. Ahmed's belief that popular sovereignty is incompatible with the Islamic notion of divine sovereignty served as the foundation for his criticism of electoral politics (Azeem and Tahira 2026). Tanzeem-e-Islami stood out from other revivalist movements in Pakistan because of its non-electoral stance, offering a distinctive example of bottom-up, non-electoral revivalism (Azeem and Tahira 2026).

Dr. Ahmed worked on preparation for Tanzeem-e-Islami for almost twenty years between his resignation from JI in 1957 and its formation in 1975. He contributed to the founding of the Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Qur'an in Lahore in 1972, a group devoted to the study and dissemination of the Qur'an (Dawn 2010). Tanzeem-e-Islami,



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which was formally established on April 29, 1975, was preceded by this (Ahmad 2019). Of the 103 people who attended Tanzeem-e-Islami's first event, 62 became official members of the organization. The group had 1,778 members in Pakistan and 234 throughout the Middle East by 1992; by 1990, the women's department, which was established in 1983, had 122 members (Ahmad 2019). Dr. Ahmed talked about Tanzeem-e-Islami's gradual development, stressing perseverance and ongoing self-evaluation while drawing comparisons to the hardships faced by Prophets Muhammad and Noah (Ahmad 2019).

### Organizational Structure

Dr. Ahmed's leadership style is reflected in Tanzeem-e-Islami's unique organizational structure. The following are the main structural components (Ahmad 2019):

Shakhsi bai'at (personal adherence): Members make a personal commitment to the organization's head, or Ameer.

Munfarid Rufaqa (isolated members): People who are unable to fully participate may continue to be affiliated as isolated members.

Nizam-i-usra (family unit system): The fundamental unit of organizational life is the family.

Local Tanzim and Nizam-I-Halqajat (circle system): Study circles and local organizational units offer organized chances for mutual aid and education.

Central System: Local units' operations are coordinated by a central leadership structure.

Majlis-e-Shura (consultative council): The shura council advises the Ameer and takes part in important organizational choices.

Dr. Ahmed's dedication to establishing organizational practice in Islamic sources is seen in the system's distinction from the Jamaat-e-Islami framework based on the principles of masur (continuous practice by individuals), the practice of masnun (according to the Sunnah), and the concept of mansus (according to the Qur'an) (Ahmad 2019).

### Television, Public Influence and National Recognition

Through his television shows on Pakistan Television, Dr. Ahmed's influence went well beyond Tanzeem-e-Islami's official membership. His debut show, "Al-Kitab," which aired during Ramadan in 1978, was followed by "Alif Lam Meem," "Rasul Kamil," "Umm ul Kitab," and "Al-Huda," the most popular religious program in PTV history, which made him a household figure throughout Pakistan (The Nation 2017). Zia-ul-Haq, the president of Pakistan, strongly encouraged him to appear on state television.

In 1981, Dr. Ahmed received the Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Star of Excellence) in honor of his contributions to religious education. Additionally, from 1981 to 1982, he was a member of the Majlis-e-Shura, the National Assembly. Nine of his around sixty publications on various facets of Islam and religion have been translated into English (Dawn 2010).

### Voluntary Resignation and Succession

Due to severe health issues, Dr. Ahmed voluntarily resigned from Tanzeem-e-Islami's leadership in October 2002 and asked the Majlis-e-Shura to select a different Ameer (Dawn 2010). Hafiz Akif Saeed, his son, was chosen by the shura to be Tanzeem-e-Islami's second Ameer, and all of the organization's rufaqa (fellows) reaffirmed their allegiance (bai 'ah) to him (Dawn 2010). Until his passing on April 14, 2010, Dr. Ahmed continued to support the group; however, he did not attempt to regain leadership.

This voluntary retirement is an important example of servant leadership, especially considering that Dr. Ahmed founded the organization and could have rightfully claimed leadership for life. It exhibits stewardship (holding the organization in trust rather than as personal property), dedication to the organization's expansion beyond his own tenure,



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and self-awareness (Ahmad 2019).

### **Transnational Expansion**

Following the guidance of shura councils in both North America and Pakistan, the North American branch was founded in 1993 and gained independence in 2003. The North American branch aims to create a just socio-politico-economic system based on Islamic principles, support Muslims in total submission to God, encourage Muslims to deepen their faith through a close relationship with the Qur'an, and invite humanity to Islam. Dr. Ahmed's conceptualization and long-term vision for Islamic regeneration outside of Pakistan's boundaries are reflected in this international growth.

### **The Relevance of Servant Leadership in Ahmed's Personality**

This section systematically applies the ten servant leadership characteristics to Dr. Israr Ahmed's leadership

### **Listening**

The governance structure that Dr. Ahmed created for Tanzeem-e-Islami is the strongest proof of his listening practice. The Majlis-e-Shura, or consultative council, is an essential part of organizational decision-making rather than a ceremonial entity. The North American and Pakistani shura councils' recommendations were taken into consideration when Tanzeem-e-Islami North America was granted independence. Furthermore, Jamaat-e-Islami's unwillingness to hear opposing viewpoints was the same reason behind Dr. Ahmed's split from the group. He purposefully established an organizational culture that institutionalized listening, including listening to criticism, when he founded Tanzeem-e-Islami. This dedication is further evidenced by the focus on "a system of accountability and open critique within the organization" (Ahmad 2019).

### **Empathy**

Dr. Ahmed prioritizes "immediate needs like basic necessities while pursuing long-term revolutionary goals," which demonstrates empathy in his leadership (Ahmad 2019). This dual focus demonstrates a sympathetic understanding of the human condition by simultaneously caring to followers' immediate material needs while upholding a commitment to long-term reform. In addition to demonstrating empathy for the intellectual and spiritual needs of his community, Dr. Ahmed chose to dedicate himself to teaching and organizing instead of pursuing a career in medicine, which would have allowed him to make a considerable income (The Nation 2017). Millions of Pakistanis watched his television shows, which were intended to satisfy the spiritual need of a populace he believed to be cut off from the teachings of the Qur'an.

### **Healing**

Dr. Ahmed's goal of "reviving the Qur'an-centered Islamic perennial philosophy and world-view" is a clear example of healing (Ahmad 2019). He believed that urbanization, colonization, and the replacement of Islamic values by Western philosophies had left Muslim societies with intellectual and spiritual wounds. His entire endeavor aimed to restore a Qur'anic worldview in order to heal these wounds. By reestablishing a connection between viewers and the teachings of the Qur'an, the television program "Al-Huda" was specifically created to alleviate spiritual melancholy. His criticism of modernity as representing "misleading thoughts and philosophy" was a therapeutic



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reaction to what he saw as the spiritual harm caused by secular modernity, rather than just an intellectual disagreement.

### **Awareness**

Dr. Ahmed's voluntary departure from leadership in 2002 due to ill health is the most remarkable example of his self-awareness. Dr. Ahmed acknowledged his limitations and resigned rather than holding onto power despite deteriorating abilities. Instead of appointing a successor on his own, he asked the shura to select a different Ameer (Dawn 2010). Additionally, Dr. Ahmed "discussed the slow growth of Tanzeem-e-Islami, emphasizing patience and continuous self-assessment" (Ahmad 2019), candidly admitting rather than downplaying organizational difficulties. The understanding that characterizes servant leadership is reflected in this readiness to face organizational reality.

### **Persuasion**

Persuasion, not force, was the foundation of Dr. Ahmed's whole career. The strength of argument and persuasion was his main tool as a scholar, speaker, and television personality. This dedication to persuasion is shown in the organization's emphasis on "passive resistance and perseverance" to first obtain a "substantial foothold" before pursuing institutional change (Azeem and Tahira 2026). Instead of top-down indoctrination, the halqajat (circle system) and nizam-i-usra' (family unit system) offer forums for debate, research, and mutual persuasion (Ahmad 2019). A culture of persuasion rather than compliance is further supported by Dr. Ahmed's emphasis on "constructive criticism and self-correction" within the company.

### **Conceptualization**

In Dr. Ahmed's leadership, conceptualization is perhaps the most prominent of all servant leadership traits. The long-term goal of his entire endeavor was the creation of the System of Khilafah, a legitimate Islamic State (Ahmad 2019). Before addressing the politics of authority, he outlined a methodical process to constructing Islamic governance, starting with da'wah (invitation), tarbiyah (education), disciplined organization (tanzim), and moral transformation (Azeem and Tahira 2026). This long-term perspective is reflected in the founding of Tanzeem-e-Islami in 1975, the Tehreek-e-Khilafat in 1991, and the 2003 decision to grant independence to the North American branch.

### **Foresight**

Foresight was the basis for Dr. Ahmed's 1956 split from Jamaat-e-Islami. He believed that political politics would damage the organization's Islamic identity by compromising its ideological purity and resulting in concessions with secular power structures. Subsequent history has confirmed his prediction, as Islamist parties that have entered electoral politics have frequently encountered issues of co-optation and compromise (Azeem and Tahira 2026). He demonstrates strategic foresight by emphasizing "passive resistance and perseverance" in order to first establish a "substantial foothold" before attempting direct confrontation, realizing that an early conflict would result in defeat.

### **Stewardship**

The most convincing evidence of Dr. Ahmed's leadership management is his voluntary departure from the Ameer role in 2002. A leader would never have resigned if Tanzeem-



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e-Islami had been his personal property. Rather, Dr. Ahmed viewed the organization as an enduring trust (Dawn 2010). Stewardship is also demonstrated by the Majlis-e-Shura's creation as a check on the Ameer's power. In order to keep himself and future Ameer's accountable, Dr. Ahmed established institutional measures. Stewardship is further demonstrated by the focus on "a system of accountability and open critique within the organization" (Ahmad 2019).

### **Commitment to the Growth of People**

Tanzeem-e-Islami's organizational structure is infused with a dedication to human development. The nizam-i-usra (family unit system) and halqajat (circle system) are specifically made to support members' spiritual and intellectual growth. According to Ahmad (2019), the group has created "a lot of literature to educate, motivate, and prepare the public in general and its followers in particular." Millions of Pakistanis were educated about the teachings of the Qur'an through Dr. Ahmed's television shows (The Nation 2017). His books—roughly sixty in Urdu and twenty-nine translated into English—represent a significant investment in readers' intellectual and spiritual development. Tanzeem-e-Islami's method is based on the idea of tarbiyah (nurturing, education).

### **Building Community**

At its core, Tanzeem-e-Islami is a community-building initiative. The family is acknowledged by the nizam-i-usra (family unit system) as the fundamental unit of community (Ahmad 2019). Small-group communities are established through the halqajat (circle system) for mutual aid, research, and group activity. With affiliates in North America and Europe, Tanzeem-e-Islami's international growth represents a notion of community that cuts across national boundaries. By emphasizing bai 'ah, or the pledge of allegiance, as the cornerstone of membership, Dr. Ahmed establishes a covenantal rather than merely contractual link between followers and leaders as well as among followers themselves (Ahmad 2019). A sacred connection known as the bai 'ah creates reciprocal commitments that are interpreted as religious requirements.

### **Distinctive Islamic Leadership Dimensions**

Dr. Ahmed's leadership exhibits a number of unique aspects derived from Islamic leadership concepts in addition to the 10 Greenleafian traits. These include the bai 'ah covenant, which has no direct equivalent in Greenleafian servant leadership; the prophetic model of revolution—the pattern of prophets who struggled for decades and ultimately succeeded through patient perseverance (Ahmad 2019; Azeem and Tahira 2026); spiritual accountability (taqwa) as the foundation of leadership—his decision to leave medical practice and devote his life to Islamic work reflects accountability to God rather than to organizational hierarchy (Azeem and Tahira 2026).

### **Discussion/ Summary of Findings**

Through the prism of Robert K. Greenleaf's servant leadership theory, this analysis has looked at Tanzeem-e-Islami's organizational procedures and Dr. Israr Ahmed's leadership. According to the analysis, Dr. Ahmed's leadership and the 10 servant leadership traits listed by Spears (1995) significantly align. Conceptualization (his long-term vision for Khilafah), foresight (his strategic understanding of organizational development), stewardship (his voluntary resignation and institutionalization of accountability), dedication to human development (his investment in education through



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halqajat, books, and television programs), and community building (the covenantal structure based on bai 'ah) all exhibit particularly strong alignment (Ahmad 2019; Azeem and Tahira 2026).

Rather than being fundamentally at odds, the relationship between Islamic leadership and servant leadership as it appears in Dr. Ahmed's example might be described as significant convergence with unique additions. As demonstrated by Dr. Ahmed, the Greenleafian framework is generally in line with Islamic leadership values. When there is disagreement, it usually relates to aspects that Greenleaf's framework ignores (such the bai'ah covenant) as opposed to aspects that Greenleaf's framework conflicts with. One area of possible conflict, though, merits consideration: Greenleaf's framework places a strong emphasis on persuasion and reaching consensus, while Islamic leadership, as defined by Dr. Ahmed, allows the leader to reject judgments made by the majority when they are in violation of Islamic law (Mutalib and Razali 2012). The shura system and emphasis on constructive criticism, however, suggest that Dr. Ahmed actually used his power in ways that were more in line with persuasion than with unilateral imposition (Ahmad 2019).

The organizational structure of Tanzeem-e-Islami demonstrates a conscious attempt to formalize the concepts of servant leadership. The shura system institutionalizes listening. The halqajat and nizam-i-usra formalize a dedication to human development. Covenantal community is institutionalized through the bai'ah system. Transparency and stewardship are institutionalized by the accountability procedures (Ahmad 2019). This institutionalization implies that a leader's personal qualities need not be the only factor in servant leadership. The organizational structure that Dr. Ahmed established still upholds the values of servant leadership even after his resignation and passing.

There are various theoretical ramifications to this analysis. First, it shows that Greenleaf's framework may be effectively used outside of corporate and organizational contexts by extending servant leadership theory to religious movement contexts. Second, the idea that both frameworks are complimentary rather than antagonistic is supported by the significant convergence between Islamic and servant leadership, indicating the possibility of creating integrated leadership models. Third, the effective institutionalization of servant leadership ideas by Dr. Ahmed implies that servant leadership can be ingrained in organizational structures and endure after the initial leader leaves office. Fourth, as Ogunbado et al. (2020) noted in their study of 'Umar ibn Khattab, the idea that "the leader of a people is their servant" is deeply ingrained in Islamic history, proving that servant leadership is not only Western in origin or application.

Dr. Ahmed's case provides leaders of religious and ideological groups with a number of useful insights. His acceptance of gradual growth shows that servant leadership does not necessitate rapid expansion, which is consistent with patient growth. Institutionalize accountability; open critique mechanisms, accountability procedures, and the shura system all guard against power abuses. Plan for succession: The smooth transfer and Dr. Ahmed's voluntary departure due to health issues highlight the significance of succession planning as a show of stewardship. His focus on meeting basic needs while pursuing revolutionary transformation demonstrates a balanced approach that servant leaders in any setting should emulate: striking a balance between long-term vision and responsiveness to urgent needs (Ahmad 2019; Azeem and Tahira 2026). Furthermore, Islamic organizations can gain by intentionally using servant leadership concepts while staying rooted in their religious traditions, as mentioned by Mhd Omar and Ismail (2022).



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### Conclusion

An important but little-researched example of servant leadership in the context of an Islamic organization is Dr. Israr Ahmed's leadership of Tanzeem-e-Islami. His long-term conception of Khilafah as a civilizational vision, his institutionalization of shura and accountability, his dedication to the intellectual and spiritual development of followers, his patient acceptance of slow organizational growth, and his voluntary resignation from leadership all significantly align with Greenleaf's servant leadership framework. However, his leadership reflects unique Islamic aspects that go beyond Greenleaf's framework and provide resources to enhance servant leadership theory, such as justice, spiritual accountability, the bai'ah covenant, and the prophetic model of revolution (Beekun and Badawi 1999; Mutalib and Razali 2012).

The example of Dr. Israr Ahmed shows that servant leadership is not limited to the West. The prophetic statement that "the leader of a people is their servant" embodies the deeply ingrained Islamic tradition that the leader is the people's servant. Dr. Ahmed's instance invites leadership experts to go beyond Western organizational settings and take religious movements seriously as places where leadership theory can be developed. His example teaches practitioners about succession planning, patient development, institutional accountability, and how to balance long-term goals with present human needs. As the field of leadership studies expands internationally, such cross-cultural and interfaith investigations will be essential to developing truly universal conceptions of leadership that respect and consider numerous cultural and religious traditions.

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