

Designing Islamic Management Education through a Systems Thinking Lens: Insights from SABA Winter School

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Abstract

This report presents key insights and reflections from the three-day *SABA Winter School*, held in 1403 and organized by the Student Scientific Association of the Faculty of Management at Imam Sadiq University. The program, titled “*Systems Thinking for Islamic Management*,” brought together instructors and participants to explore how systems thinking can enrich the understanding and development of Islamic approaches to management.

As a first-year undergraduate student in Islamic Studies and Management, I participated in this intensive course, which introduced foundational concepts such as causal loops, system archetypes, and holistic analysis. The sessions focused on applying these principles within an Islamic ethical framework, drawing on sources including the Qur’an, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence.

This report aims to summarize the program’s core content while offering a personal perspective on how such integrative approaches may contribute to future educational and managerial initiatives rooted in Islamic values.

Keywords: Islamic Management, Systems Thinking, Management Education, Islamic Ethics, Holistic Decision-Making, SABA Winter School

Introduction

The winter school on Islamic management with a systems thinking approach was held from December 12 to 14, 2024, in the holy city of Qom, in Iran.

On the first day of the SABA Islamic management course, in the first part of the program, Dr. Mahmood Karimi spoke about the role of the Quran in Islamic management, from ethical frameworks to solving social challenges. Then, the event continued with the presence of Dr. Seyed Mahdi Azizi and the event instructors, where a Case Study on systemic perception of personality role modeling was held, which referred to the operational understanding of each of the observing friends regarding managerial decisions.

On the second day of the SABA Islamic management course, in the first part of the program, Dr. Seyed Mahdi Azizi discussed the position of approaches and schools in Islamic management with regard to the systems thinking perspective. In the second part of the program, Mr. Ahmad Panahiyan gave a speech on Islamic management in light of the Quran and guardianship, from theoretical foundations to practical challenges.

On the third day of the SABA Islamic management course, Dr. Naghi Pourfar spoke about managerial transformation in light of the comprehensive Islamic framework, challenges, and practical solutions. Then, Dr. Morteza Javanali-Azar spoke about the philosophy of management and the role of faith in decision-making. Finally, in the last part of the program on the final day of the SABA Islamic management course, Mr. Saadati spoke about the role of jurisprudence in Islamic management, the connecting link between ethics, law, and governance.

Islamic management, as a modern and comprehensive approach in the field of management, seeks to create a balance between Islamic principles and the evolving needs of society. This type of management is not only based on the teachings of the Quran and Hadith but also utilizes systems thinking to achieve integration and harmony in managerial processes. In today's world, where organizations face complex and diverse challenges, the need for a comprehensive and systematic approach is more evident than ever.

Systems thinking enables us to focus on the entire system and its interactions rather than adopting a narrow, piecemeal perspective. This approach can assist Islamic management in gaining a better understanding of the relationships between various organizational components and their mutual influences. In this context, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and ijtihad

(independent reasoning) serve as rich sources for deriving managerial principles and rules. These resources can help formulate management policies and strategies that align with Islamic values.

Moreover, Islamic philosophy, with its emphasis on ethical and human values, can serve as a theoretical foundation for managerial decision-making. This philosophy reminds us that management is not limited to economic and financial aspects but must also consider human and social dimensions.

1. Biographical Research (Sira Studies) and Documentation of Practical Experiences

also serve as important tools in Islamic management, helping us better understand the managerial methods of the Prophet of Islam and the Infallible Imams. These methods can function as practical models for contemporary managers, assisting them in addressing daily challenges.

Ultimately, by drawing upon these diverse approaches, **Islamic management** can contribute to the establishment of **efficient and ethics-driven organizations** where Islamic and human values coexist with productivity and effectiveness. This article examines various dimensions of Islamic management, with a particular emphasis on **systems thinking and Islamic sources**, and seeks to demonstrate how these teachings can be utilized in contemporary management. Given the significance of this subject, it is hoped that this study can provide valuable insights for **managers and researchers** in the field of Islamic management.

Question 1: The interest in the topic of "Islamic Management with a Systems Thinking Perspective" stems from several reasons, each of particular importance:

1. **Alignment with Values:** Islamic management enables us to incorporate Islamic principles and values into our managerial processes. This alignment with values can help create an ethical and humanistic environment within organizations.
2. **Efficiency and Effectiveness:** By employing systems thinking, we can enhance organizational efficiency and effectiveness. This approach helps us focus on the entire system and its interactions rather than isolated details, thereby optimizing processes.
3. **Addressing Contemporary Challenges:** The modern world faces complex challenges. Islamic management, drawing from the rich sources of the Quran and Hadith, can provide appropriate solutions to these challenges and assist managers in making better decisions.

4. **Utilizing Historical Experiences:** The study of prophetic traditions (Sira) and documentation of experiences allows us to benefit from the managerial practices of the Prophet Muhammad and the Infallible Imams. These historical examples can serve as practical models for contemporary managers in addressing daily challenges.
5. **Human-Centric Approach:** Islamic philosophy, with its emphasis on human and social values, reminds us that management extends beyond mere economic aspects. This human-oriented perspective can enhance intra-organizational relationships and increase employee satisfaction.
6. **Sustainable Development:** Islamic management contributes to balanced and sustainable development. By adhering to Islamic principles, organizations can be established that pursue not only profitability but also social welfare and environmental preservation.
7. **Achieving Social Justice:** A primary objective of Islamic management is the realization of social justice. This can lead to organizations that respect all individuals' rights and provide equal opportunities for everyone.

In summary, the interest in this subject stems from the need for a comprehensive and transcendent management approach that can improve organizational performance and enhance quality of life. This approach can serve as a successful model for both practitioners and researchers in the field of Islamic management.

Question 2: Gathering data on the topic of "Islamic Management with a Systems Thinking Perspective" requires a systematic and multi-faceted approach. Various methods and sources can be utilized for this purpose:

1. **Religious Textual Analysis**

Examination of the Quran and Hadith as primary sources of Islamic management can help extract managerial principles and rules. Studying authoritative commentaries (tafasir) and explanations can facilitate deeper understanding of these texts.

2. **Jurisprudential and Ijtihadi Analysis:**

Consultation of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) literature and ijtihadi (interpretive) works to derive managerial principles aligned with Islamic values can enrich the data. These sources may include classical fiqh texts, practical treatises (risalah amaliyah), and scholarly articles.

3. Islamic Philosophical Inquiry:

Study of works by Islamic philosophers and analysis of their theories regarding management and ethics can enhance understanding of philosophical dimensions in Islamic management. These sources may include philosophical texts and academic articles.

4. Prophetic Methodology Research (Sira Studies):

Investigation of the managerial practices of the Prophet Muhammad and the Infallible Imams as exemplary models can provide practical and empirical data. This may involve studying biographical literature (sira) and Islamic historical texts.

5. Experience Documentation:

Gathering the experiences of managers and researchers in the field of Islamic management and systems thinking can enrich the data. This can be done through interviews, questionnaires, or case studies.

6. Scientific Research and Articles:

Reviewing academic papers and scientific research on Islamic management and systems thinking can help collect reliable and up-to-date data. These sources may include academic journals, conferences, and seminars.

7. Case Analysis:

Examining successful examples of organizations that have utilized Islamic management and systems thinking can help gather practical and applicable data. This may involve case studies and analysis of their results.

8. Discussion and Exchange Groups:

Participating in academic and research groups that discuss and exchange views on Islamic management can help collect new data and experiences.

By using these methods and sources, comprehensive and diverse data on "Islamic Management with a Systems Thinking Perspective" can be gathered to aid in the analysis and investigation of this topic.

Question 3: The examination of "Islamic Management with a Systems Thinking Perspective" is important from several aspects that help elucidate and better understand this approach:

1. Integration and Coordination

Systems thinking enables us to focus on the entire system and its interactions rather than isolated components. This approach can help create integration in management processes and prevent conflicts between different organizational units.

2. Analysis of Interrelationships:

Using systems thinking, we can analyze the interrelationships between various organizational components. This analysis can help identify the system's strengths and weaknesses, allowing managers to make better decisions.

3. Predicting and Managing Change:

Systems thinking helps us anticipate changes in one part of the system and consider their impacts on other parts. This can lead to better change management and risk reduction.

4. Attention to Human Dimensions:

Islamic management, with its emphasis on human and social values, can improve intra-organizational relationships and increase employee satisfaction. Systems thinking allows us to incorporate these human dimensions into management processes.

5. Sustainable Development:

By integrating Islamic principles with systems thinking, sustainable and balanced development can be achieved. This approach facilitates the creation of organizations that pursue not only profitability but also social welfare and environmental preservation.

6. Achieving Social Justice:

A fundamental objective of Islamic management is the realization of social justice. Systems thinking enables the identification and elimination of inequalities and discrimination within organizations, contributing to the establishment of a more equitable environment.

7. Leveraging Historical Experiences:

The study of prophetic traditions (Sira) and documentation of past experiences allows us to benefit from historical wisdom. These experiences serve as practical models for contemporary managers in addressing daily challenges.

8. Advancing Knowledge and Research:

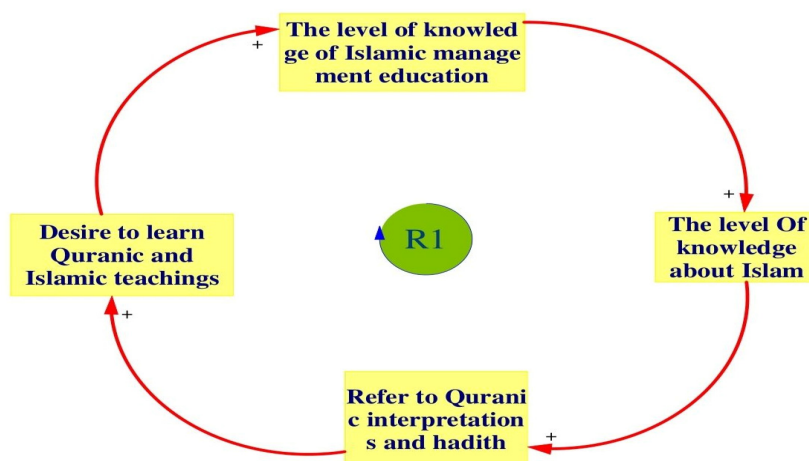
Investigating this subject contributes to the advancement of knowledge and research in Islamic management and systems thinking. This can establish an evidence-based foundation for managerial decision-making.

Ultimately, examining "Islamic Management through a Systems Thinking Lens" can facilitate the establishment of efficient and ethically-grounded organizations where Islamic and human values coexist with productivity and operational effectiveness. This approach may serve as a successful paradigm for both practitioners and scholars in the field of Islamic management.

Loop R1: (Religious Growth and Awareness Cycle)

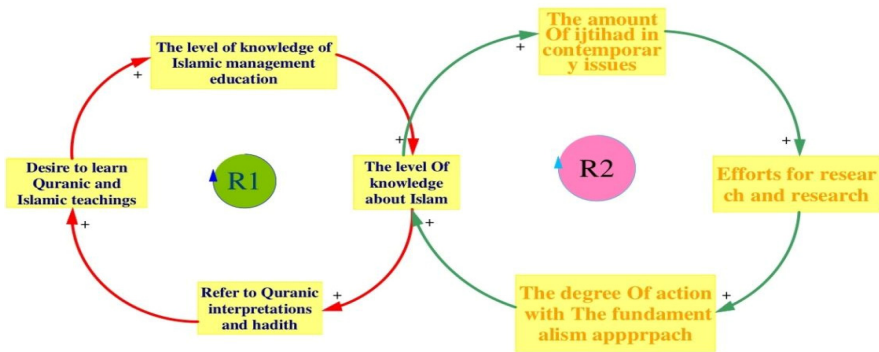
Increasing desire to learn Quranic and Islamic teachings motivates individuals toward deeper understanding of religious knowledge. Those interested in learning Quranic and Islamic teachings typically seek ways to improve their own and others' lives based on these teachings, which raises awareness of Islamic management principles. This awareness level refers to individuals' knowledge and understanding of Islamic management principles. Those eager to learn Quranic and Islamic teachings usually seek to increase their awareness of Islamic management. This awareness helps them apply management principles aligned with Islamic values in their lives and work, which in turn increases their depth of knowledge (ma'rifah) of Islamic teachings, referring to how deeply individuals comprehend and recognize the teachings of Islam.

Individuals with greater awareness in the field of Islamic management typically possess deeper understanding (ma'rifah) of Islamic teachings. This understanding helps them properly comprehend and apply religious teachings in various fields, including management, which leads to increased reference to Quranic exegeses and hadith sources. This stage is considered a tool for enhancing understanding and awareness. Individuals who seek to learn Quranic and Islamic teachings while also paying attention to their level of awareness in Islamic management knowledge typically refer to Quranic commentaries and hadith sources. This referencing helps them gain deeper comprehension of religious teachings and enables them to utilize these teachings in their management practices and daily lives.



R2 Loop: (Ijtihād and Religious Practice Cycle)

As the level of understanding (ma'rifah) of Islamic teachings increases, individuals' depth of comprehension of Islamic principles grows. Those with greater understanding of religious teachings typically have greater ability to analyze and comprehend various issues, including contemporary matters. This understanding serves as a foundation for other stages in this loop. This leads to an increase in ijtihad (independent jurisprudential reasoning) regarding contemporary issues. Individuals with deep understanding of Islamic teachings generally have greater capacity for ijtihad in contemporary matters. Ijtihad means deriving rulings from religious sources, and those familiar with religious teachings can more effectively address new issues. At this stage, increased understanding of Islamic teachings leads to enhanced ability for ijtihad in contemporary matters. This then drives efforts for research and development. Those active in ijtihad regarding contemporary issues typically seek to expand their own knowledge and that of others. These efforts may include research in various religious, social and economic fields. Here, ijtihad in contemporary matters leads to efforts in research and knowledge development. This results in increased practice based on fundamental principles. This stage refers to the degree of practice individuals implement based on religious and Islamic foundations. Those engaged in research and development efforts while practicing ijtihad in contemporary matters generally pay more attention to principle-based practice. This practice can lead to positive changes in society and individual lives. In this phase, research and development efforts lead to principle-based practice.

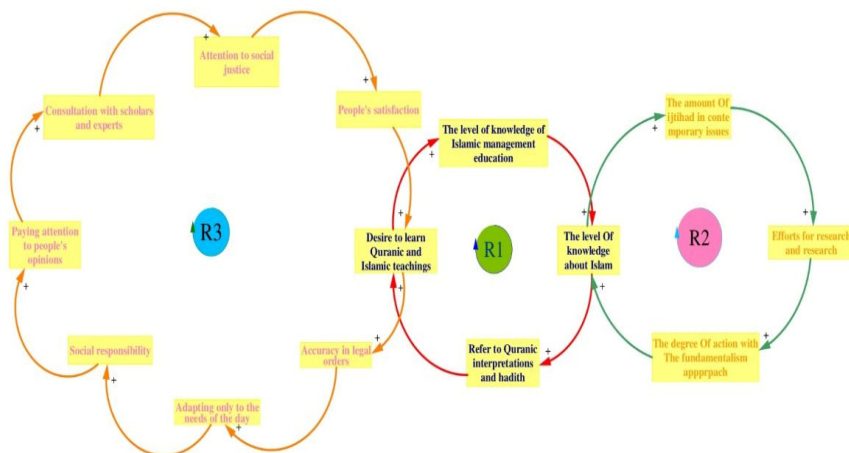


Loop R3: (Jurisprudential and Social Effects Loop)

As the desire to learn Quranic and Islamic teachings increases, individuals who wish to learn religious teachings seek a deeper understanding of Islamic principles and values. This leads to **greater precision in jurisprudential rulings**—as the desire to learn grows, individuals pay closer attention to jurisprudential directives. This precision helps them correctly understand and apply religious rulings in their lives. This, in turn, leads to **increased jurisprudential analysis aligned with contemporary needs**. Those who carefully examine jurisprudential rulings can analyze Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) in light of modern-day needs. This analysis enables them to adapt religious rulings to current conditions and challenges, keeping them relevant. This further results in **greater social responsibility**. By analyzing jurisprudence and aligning it with contemporary needs, individuals develop a stronger sense of social responsibility. They recognize their duty to respond to societal needs and contribute to improving social conditions.

Finally, this leads to **increased attention to public opinions and criticisms**. Social responsibility allows individuals to consider people's views and needs more attentively. This attention to public opinion can help improve decision-making and policymaking. This leads to **increased consultation with scholars and experts**—paying attention to public opinion also drives individuals to consult with scholars and specialists. This consultation can help better understand social issues and challenges, leading to more effective solutions. This, in turn, results in **greater focus on social justice**. Consulting with scholars and considering public opinion helps individuals pay more attention to social justice. This focus on justice can lead to creating a fairer and more balanced society. **Public satisfaction**—ultimately, attention to social justice and responsibility toward people's needs leads to their satisfaction. Public satisfaction

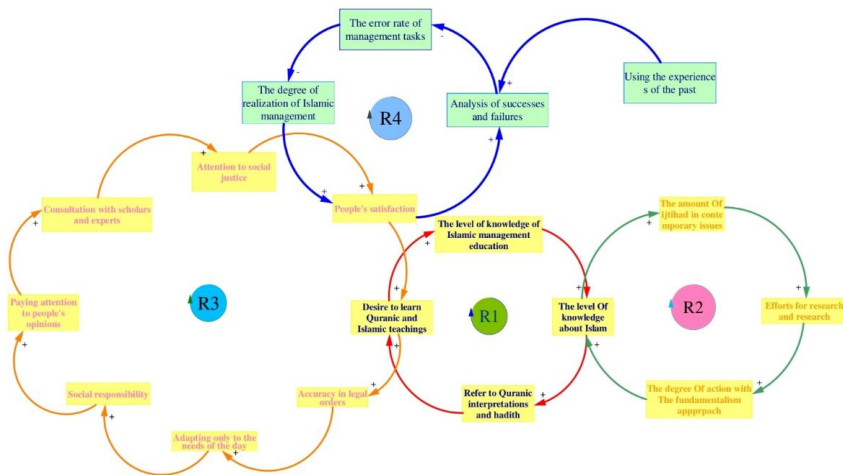
indicates successful implementation of religious and jurisprudential teachings in society, bringing this cycle back to its starting point.



Loop R4: (Social Management Improvement and Social Satisfaction Cycle)

Increased utilization of past experiences leads to enhanced analysis of successes and failures. This stage evaluates management performance. By analyzing successes, strengths can be identified, and by examining failures, the causes of shortcomings can be understood. This analysis serves as a key tool for learning and improving management. This results in **reduced management errors**. Following the analysis of successes and failures, errors and mistakes in management processes can be identified. This stage helps us understand where corrections are needed and how to learn from mistakes. With greater application of this approach, **the realization of Islamic management increases**. By reducing errors and improving processes, better implementation of Islamic principles and values in management can be achieved. This stage indicates whether management is properly adhering to Islamic principles.

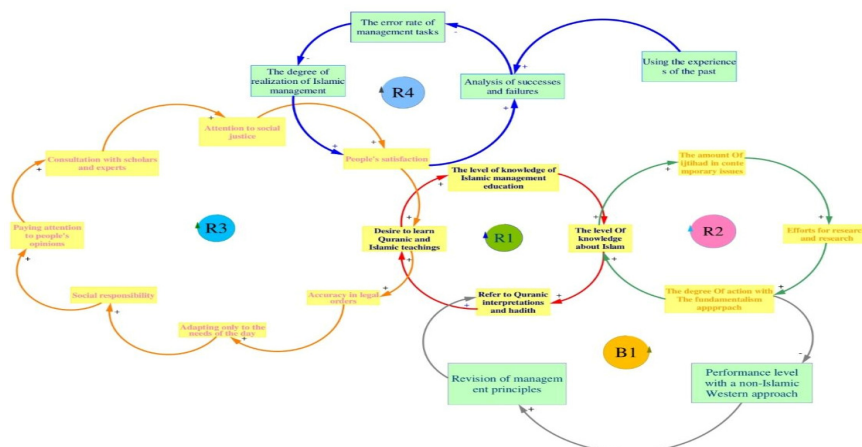
This ultimately leads to **increased public satisfaction**. When Islamic management is correctly implemented and errors are minimized, it results in public satisfaction. Public satisfaction reflects successful management and its positive impact on society.



Loop B1: (Synergy Cycle of Islamic Principles and Management)

Increased implementation of principle-based approaches leads to examination of how Islamic principles and values are applied in management. The principle-based approach emphasizes Islamic foundations in managerial decision-making and practices. This results in **reduced implementation of non-Islamic Western approaches**. At this stage, the impact of Western management approaches that may conflict with Islamic principles should be evaluated. This assessment helps identify weaknesses and challenges that may arise in implementing Islamic management. This leads to **increased revision of management principles**. Based on previous analyses, there emerges a need to review management principles. This revision can help modify and improve processes and approaches to better align with Islamic principles.

This then results in **increased reference to Quranic exegeses and hadith sources**. Ultimately, to refine and correct management principles, referring to Islamic sources like the Quran and hadith becomes essential. This stage helps us benefit from religious teachings and shape management principles accordingly; which subsequently leads us back to **repeating the R1 loop process**.



Transformative Proposals for Promoting and Expanding Islamic Management with a Systems Thinking Approach

For Islamic management to become a real and influential movement in the field of management, we need actions that go beyond theoretical recommendations. Here are proposals that can not only increase awareness and impact but also strengthen managerial skills among students and managers, creating profound transformation in this field.

1. Establishing an "Academy of Islamic Management and Systems Thinking" in Universities and Seminaries

Why is it important?

Students of Islamic management need a space where they can not only learn theoretical foundations but also practically experience managerial skills.

What should be done?

- Establish a specialized academy in universities and seminaries that offers special courses in **"Applied Islamic Management."**
- Design an educational program that, in addition to theoretical foundations, includes **practical projects, management simulations, and decision-making workshops based on Islamic principles.**
- Launch **Mentor-Mentee programs** where successful Islamic managers train students as apprentices.

Outcome: A new generation of Islamic managers will be trained—equipped with **knowledge, skills, and real-world experience.**

2. Launching an "Islamic Management Laboratory" to Address Real Organizational Challenges

Why is it important? Students and researchers need to test Islamic management theories in real-world conditions and derive practical solutions.

What should be done?

- Establish **Islamic Management Labs** in universities where students work on real challenges faced by organizations and governments.
- Implement **problem-solving projects**, where public and private sector organizations present their issues, and students propose solutions using Islamic management models.
- Analyze **successful and unsuccessful cases** of Islamic management in practice and extract actionable patterns.

Outcome: Students learn how to **translate Islamic management from theory to practice** and create tangible impact in real-world settings.

3. Developing an "Islamic Management Performance Index" for Organizational Assessment

Why is it important? Without precise metrics, it is impossible to determine how well an organization aligns with Islamic management principles.

What should be done?

- Develop **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** for Islamic management, including:

Organizational justice, Productivity, Professional ethics, Employee and customer satisfaction, Participatory decision-making, Commitment to sustainable development

- Design a **ranking system** for Iranian organizations based on these metrics to identify top performers.
- Establish an annual **"Excellence in Islamic Management Award"** for organizations that successfully implement these principles.

Outcome: Healthy competition among organizations to adopt Islamic management practices and elevate industry standards.

4. Establishing an "Islamic Governance School" for Future National Leaders

Why is it important? Senior national leaders must develop a deep understanding of Islamic management and systems thinking to drive sustainable transformation.

What should be done?

- Create a **specialized school** to train future administrators and policymakers based on Islamic management principles and systems thinking.
- Offer **tailored executive programs** for ministers, senior government officials, and corporate leaders focusing on practical applications of Islamic management.
- Organize **study visits** to successful Islamic management models in other Muslim countries to examine implementation strategies.

Outcome: Leaders who **operationalize Islamic principles** and can implement them at a **national scale**.

5. Organizing "Islamic Management Challenges" in Hackathon Format

Why is it important? Competitive management challenges can engage students and professionals in creative problem-solving based on real-world issues.

What should be done?

- Design **Islamic Management Hackathons** where student and professional teams solve complex organizational problems using **systems thinking and Islamic principles**.
- Award prizes for the **most innovative and practical solutions**, with support for implementation in real organizations.
- Utilize **AI and data analytics** to evaluate the effectiveness of proposed solutions.

Outcome: Islamic management transforms from a theoretical concept into **actionable, executable solutions**.

6. Establishing an "Islamic Entrepreneurship Development Center" to Support Value-Based Businesses

Why is it important? Islamic management should not be limited to government and traditional organizations, but must also enter the entrepreneurship sphere.

What should be done?

- Launch **accelerators and incubators** for businesses operating on Islamic management principles.
- Provide **financial and advisory support** to startups that incorporate justice, transparency, professional ethics, and social responsibility into their business models.
- Highlight **successful Islamic entrepreneurship models** and develop specialized training for young entrepreneurs.

Outcome: Growth of a new generation of **innovative and sustainable Islamic businesses** capable of competing globally.

7. Compiling a Comprehensive Scientific and Practical Reference Titled "Encyclopedia of Islamic Management"

Why is it important? Many resources on Islamic management are scattered and lack a cohesive structure.

What should be done?

- Develop a **comprehensive reference** covering key concepts, successful models, academic research, and practical solutions in Islamic management.
- Create an **interactive digital version** for managers and researchers to easily access management solutions.
- Ensure **continuous updates** based on new academic findings and real-world organizational experiences.

Outcome: Quick and easy access to Islamic management knowledge for all researchers and practitioners.

Final Note: The future of Islamic management depends on **practical action!**

If Islamic management is to go beyond a theoretical concept and become a practical and transformative model, it requires bold and strategic actions. The above proposals not only increase awareness and effectiveness, but also strengthen Islamic management skills in students and managers and will lead to transformation in organizations.

The time has come for Islamic management to come out of libraries and step into the real world of management!

8. Interested researchers in Islamic management can also utilize the flow state model.

Conclusion

The conducted study demonstrates that:

1. Integration in management: Islamic management with systems thinking helps coordinate different organizational units.
2. Analysis of interrelationships: Using systems thinking assists managers in identifying strengths and weaknesses.
3. Change management: By predicting the impact of changes in one unit on the entire organization, decision-making becomes more optimal.
4. Attention to human dimensions: Enhancing employee satisfaction is achievable through management based on Islamic ethical values.
5. Realization of social justice: By observing Islamic principles in decision-making, equal opportunities are created for all.
6. Utilization of past experiences: Drawing upon the practices of the Prophet and Imams in management can help solve everyday problems.