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Empathy as a Quranic Leadership Paradigm: A Maqasidi Tafsir Analysis

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Abstract

Contemporary leadership requires not only managerial competence but also empathetic sensitivity in understanding the needs, interests, and conditions of those being led. In this context, the Quran offers a leadership paradigm grounded in empathy, justice, and moral responsibility as foundational principles for social well-being. This article aims to examine the concept of empathy-based leadership from a Quranic perspective through the lens of *Maqaṣidi Tafsīr* and to explore its relevance for developing a more humane and responsive leadership model in contemporary society. The article employs a qualitative method using a content analysis approach. The primary data consist of Quranic verses that portray leadership values, analyzed through Abdul Mustaqim's *Maqasidi Tafsīr* framework, while secondary data are drawn from classical and contemporary Quranic commentaries, literature on *maqaṣid al-shari'ah*, and relevant leadership studies. The analysis reveals four fundamental principles of empathetic leadership: the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), respect for the intellectual capacity and agency of followers (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), humility in exercising authority, and moral responsibility in promoting the common good. These findings demonstrate that empathy in the Quranic worldview is not merely an emotional response but an ethical principle aimed at fostering justice, protection, and social solidarity. The study implies that the *maqaṣidi* approach provides a valuable conceptual foundation for developing transformative, inclusive, and human-centered leadership in contemporary contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The Quran, as the primary source of Islamic teachings, not only contains spiritual and legal guidelines but also presents ethical values relevant to various aspects of human life, including leadership. In the context of modern society, which faces the complexities of social relations, a leadership model is needed that is oriented not only toward effectiveness and the achievement of organizational goals but also toward moral sensitivity, social concern, and the ability to understand the needs of those being led. In this regard, the Quran offers a leadership paradigm grounded in justice, responsibility, and empathy as the primary foundations for building a harmonious social order. One of the Quranic narratives containing this

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leadership message is found in Surah An-Naml, verses 18–19, which describes the interaction between Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) and an ant. Although seemingly simple, this story contains profound lessons regarding communication, the protection of the weak, social awareness, and a leader's humility in exercising power.

Studies on Quranic Surah An-Naml, verses 18–19, have been conducted by various researchers using diverse approaches. Ruslan & Qadir, (2025) examined these verses from the perspective of scientific exegesis and found that ant colonies exhibit effective communication patterns, an organized work system, and collective cooperation that reflect social order and good leadership. Meanwhile, Nailan & Nugraha, (2024) analyzed the use of the word *namlatun* in these verses through linguistic and gender-based approaches. Her findings suggest that the figure of the female ant leading her colony can be understood as a representation of female leadership that prioritizes collaboration, protection, and social sensitivity.

Another study by Nafal et al., (2024) highlights the aspect of communication in the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the ants as a model of effective interaction between a leader and the community he leads. Jamil, (2018) explains that the warning conveyed by the ants to their colony demonstrates a collective awareness to safeguard the group's safety, thereby reflecting the principle of leadership that is responsive to social risks. From the perspective of Quranic ethics, Ruslan & Qadir, (2025) asserts that Prophet Sulaiman leadership represents the integration of power and moral responsibility, which constitutes the defining characteristic of prophetic leadership.

A broader study of leadership in the Quran was also conducted by Jamil, (2015), who stated that the stories of the prophets contain principles of leadership oriented toward the public good and the protection of vulnerable groups. Furthermore, Rendi et al., (2025) explains that the *maqāṣidī* exegetical approach seeks to uncover the objectives, wisdom, and public interest that serve as the primary orientation of a Quranic text, thereby enabling a more contextual reading of contemporary social issues. In line with this, Maharani et al., (2025) explains that *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* is not only oriented toward legal aspects but also toward the protection of life, reason, human dignity, and universal social welfare.

Meanwhile, in contemporary leadership studies, empathy is viewed as one of the key competencies that determine a leader's effectiveness. Sari et al., (2025) emphasizes that empathy and self-awareness are fundamental components of emotional intelligence that significantly influence a leader's ability to build interpersonal relationships and create a conducive work environment. These findings are reinforced by (Lutfi & Siswanto, 2018), who states that transformational leadership combined with empathetic abilities can enhance the loyalty, motivation, and performance of organizational members. Mubarok, (2021) also found that empathy contributes to increased leader responsiveness in understanding the aspirations and needs of the community. A similar point was made by Goleman (1998), who identified empathy as one of the key elements of emotional intelligence that determines leadership success across various sectors.

These studies indicate that Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 have strong relevance to issues of leadership, communication, social protection, and emotional intelligence. Nevertheless, most previous studies have primarily focused on linguistic aspects, scientific exegesis, gender, communication, or leadership in a general sense. Research that specifically connects this narrative to the concept of empathetic leadership within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, particularly through the perspectives of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (the protection of life) and *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql* (the protection of intellect), remains relatively limited. In fact, these two principles can serve as a normative foundation for understanding empathy as an ethical value that underpins a leader's actions in safeguarding the safety, well-being, and dignity of those under their

leadership.

This article aims to explore more deeply the concept of empathy-based leadership in Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 through a *maqāṣidī* exegetical approach. Through this approach, the article seeks to demonstrate that empathy should not merely be understood as an emotional response or an interpersonal behavior, but also as an objective of Islamic law closely related to the protection of life, respect for the capacities of other creatures, and the promotion of collective welfare. By comparing the interpretations of classical and contemporary exegetes and relating them to modern leadership theories, this article argues that the story of Prophet Solomon and the ant represents a model of empathetic leadership ethics that remains highly relevant to addressing contemporary leadership challenges.

Although numerous studies have examined Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 from the perspectives of scientific exegesis, linguistics, gender, communication, and social ethics, relatively few have specifically analyzed these verses through a *maqāṣidī* exegetical approach to construct a framework of empathetic leadership. On the other hand, modern leadership literature has identified empathy as a core leadership competency; however, it has generally been developed through psychological and managerial perspectives without directly linking it to the normative foundations of the Quran. This gap provides the academic space and rationale for the present study.

The novelty of this article lies in its analysis of the values of empathetic leadership embodied in Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 through a *maqāṣidī* exegetical approach, with particular emphasis on the dimensions of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (the protection of life) and *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql* (the protection of intellect). Unlike previous studies that have focused primarily on biological, linguistic, gender-related, or communicative aspects, this article conceptualizes empathy as a Quranic leadership principle oriented toward the protection of life, appreciation of the capacities of other creatures, and the promotion of social welfare (Ningrum et al., 2025). Furthermore, this study integrates Quranic exegesis with contemporary leadership theory, thereby offering a more comprehensive and contextually relevant conceptual model of empathetic leadership.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the advancement of *maqāṣidī* exegetical studies, particularly in the fields of Quranic leadership and social ethics. Practically, its findings may serve as a conceptual foundation for the development of leadership models that are humane, inclusive, and oriented toward the public good in educational institutions, organizations, governmental settings, and broader social contexts. Moreover, this study demonstrates that the value of empathy embedded in the Quran possesses significant relevance for addressing the demands of modern leadership, which require a balance between effectiveness, justice, and concern for others.

METHODS

To comprehensively explore the values of empathetic leadership in the Quran, this article employs an approach that facilitates an in-depth examination of both the textual meanings and the objectives of public welfare embedded within the text. Through this approach, the analysis focuses not only on the textual aspects of the verses but also on their relevance to the development of leadership concepts in contemporary contexts. Accordingly, this article adopts a qualitative research method combined with a *maqāṣidī* exegetical approach to examine the ethical, social, and humanitarian dimensions contained in Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19.

Method and Type

This article employs a qualitative method using content analysis as its primary research design. Content analysis is utilized to identify, classify, and systematically interpret meanings embedded within textual data (Armita, 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025; 2026; Krippendorff, 2022; Muhlasin et al., 2026). The study adopts a *maqāṣidī* exegetical approach as developed by Rendi et al., (2025); Ta'wil et al., (2025), which is oriented toward uncovering the objectives, wisdom, and public benefits *(maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*) embodied in Quranic verses. This approach was selected because it enables a more contextual and practical understanding of the Quranic message in addressing contemporary social issues (Ruslan, 2022). The primary object of analysis in this study is Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19, which narrate the interaction between Prophet Sulaiman and the ant community.

Data Sources

This study utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data consist of Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 and their interpretations in various classical and contemporary exegetical works, including Jāmiʿ al-Bayān by al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm by Ibn Kathīr, Al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān by al-Qurṭubī, Tafsir al-Mishbah by Quraish Shihab, and Tafsir al-Munir by Wahbah al-Zuḥailī. Secondary data are drawn from literature on *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, maqāṣidī* exegesis, Islamic leadership, empathetic leadership, and scholarly articles relevant to the research topic (Ruslan & Qadir, 2025). These sources are employed to strengthen the analysis and interpretation of the research object.

Instrument

In this study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument (human instrument) responsible for data collection, selection, interpretation, and analysis. Within qualitative research, the researcher functions as the principal instrument tasked with understanding, interpreting, and assigning meaning to the collected data (Moleong, 2021). To support this process, documentation techniques, data-recording sheets, and categorization matrices were employed to identify themes related to empathy, leadership, and the values of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah.*

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through documentation techniques, which involved identifying, compiling, reading, and reviewing various sources of literature relevant to the focus of the study (Aryasutha et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2026; 2025; Sugiyono, 2018). The data were obtained from the Quran, exegetical works (*tafsīr*), academic books, journal articles, conference proceedings, and other documents discussing *maqāṣidī* exegesis, Islamic leadership, and empathetic leadership. The collected data were subsequently classified according to thematic categories and areas of discussion to facilitate the analytical process.

Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach adapted from the qualitative data analysis model developed by Miles, (2015), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The first stage involved identifying the textual meanings of Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 based on the interpretations of classical and contemporary exegetes. The second stage consisted of contextual analysis of the social messages and leadership values embedded within the verses. The third stage focused on identifying the values of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah,* particularly *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (the protection of life) and *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql* (the protection of intellect), in relation to the concept of empathetic leadership (Engkizar et al., 2023; Rusmana, 2015). The fourth stage involved a comparative analysis of exegetical interpretations to identify patterns, similarities, and differences among the commentators. Finally, the findings were interpreted through a dialogue between Quranic exegesis and contemporary leadership theories, resulting in a conceptual

framework of empathetic leadership from a Quranic perspective. Through these analytical stages, this article seeks to demonstrate the relevance of Quranic leadership values in developing a leadership model that is humane, inclusive, and oriented toward the welfare of contemporary society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Empathy is a concept with a rich and profound etymological history. The term originates from the German word Einfühlung, which literally means feeling into and was initially used by psychologists to describe an individual's ability to become emotionally involved in the experiences of others. The concept was later adapted into English from the Greek term *empatheia*, meaning feeling with or sharing in another's feelings, derived from the word pathos, which refers to intense and profound emotions, often associated with suffering. Based on these linguistic origins, empathy is understood as the human capacity to truly enter into the emotional state of another person rather than merely understanding it on an intellectual level (Millah & Mukafiy, 2026).

In Islam, empathy is not merely understood as the ability to feel what others feel; it also encompasses an effort to understand the circumstances and hardships they experience (Abbas et al., 2025). Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) explicitly emphasized the importance of compassion, care, and mutual understanding among individuals, as reflected in his teachings.

لاَ يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّى يُحِبَّ لِأَخِيْهِ مَا يُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِهِ

Meaning: *"None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."* (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 13; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 45).

In Islam, empathy is not merely a sentimental trait but also a moral and spiritual principle reflected in several fundamental values. One of these is *taʿāwun* (cooperation in goodness). Allah SWT has endowed human beings with various capacities that enable them to cooperate harmoniously in pursuing shared success (Dalle & Tobroni, 2025). Any act that helps a fellow Muslim overcome hardship will become a source of assistance on the Day of Resurrection, helping the benefactor face the difficulties of that momentous day. Indeed, divine recompense is commensurate with one's deeds. Another fundamental principle is *raḥmah* (compassion and mercy), as Allah SWT states:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللّٰهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ ۚ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيْظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوْا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ ۖ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِى الْاَمْرِ ۚ فَاِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللّٰهِ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِيْنَ

Meaning: *So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him]* (QS. Ali-'Imran: 159)

This verse provides an example of how the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) exemplified gentle and compassionate leadership. It explains that even during a critical situation, such as the violations committed by some Muslims during the Battle of Uḥud, which resulted in suffering and losses for the Muslim community, the Prophet remained gentle and forbearing toward those who had erred. Rather than responding with anger, he forgave them and sought Allah's forgiveness on their behalf.

Another fundamental principle is *shūrā* (consultation). The Prophet consistently consulted with his companions in various matters, particularly in military affairs. Consequently, the Muslim community willingly adhered to the outcomes of these consultations because the decisions represented not only the Prophet's judgment but

also their collective agreement. The final principle is *ʿadl* (justice), which encompasses several meanings, including placing things in their proper positions, refraining from oppression, respecting the rights of others, and avoiding actions that contradict wisdom and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) (Muttaqin & Apriadi, 2020).

The Indonesian word for leadership, derives from the root word leader, which according to the (Indonesian Dictionary) means "to guide" or "to lead." From this root emerge the terms leader, and (leadership authority or chief). A leader is an individual who occupies the highest position within a group. Leadership refers to the methods or skills employed to lead a group, while a leader is a person entrusted with directing the activities of a group. Leadership is a broad concept encompassing knowledge of leadership, leadership techniques, the art of leading, leadership characteristics, and the history of leadership. Moreover, leadership signifies more than merely a responsibility assigned to a particular individual; it also involves long-term vision and character as essential components of effective leadership (Fazillah, 2023).

Empathetic leadership refers to a leader's ability to feel the suffering of others, understand their needs, and take actions that reflect compassion, care, and justice. Such concern is directed not only toward vocal majority groups but also toward those who are voiceless and even invisible, including small animals and other vulnerable creatures. Empathetic leadership implies a profound sensitivity to social realities, particularly the conditions of marginalized groups such as the poor, orphans, persons with disabilities, and those oppressed by social systems. An empathetic leader does not merely listen but also genuinely feels the experiences of others. Such a leader does not simply formulate policies but ensures that those policies support and protect the vulnerable. Rather than acting as a ruler who exercises authority, an empathetic leader serves as a protector and guardian. This characteristic distinguishes empathetic leadership from forms of leadership that are merely administrative or technocratic (Amertha & Wicaksono, 2026; Kurnia, 2026).

The relevance of this discussion becomes particularly evident when considered in light of contemporary society's growing empathy crisis, especially among leaders. Many policy decisions are made with little consideration for the welfare of ordinary people, environmental sustainability, or other vulnerable beings. In the verses examined in this study, Prophet Sulaiman is portrayed as a great leader who nevertheless remained highly sensitive and attentive to a creature as small as an ant. Upon hearing the ant's warning, which reflected concern for the safety of its community, Prophet Solomon not only listened but also responded with a smile and a prayer. This attitude illustrates that the ideal leader, according to the Quran, is one who is capable of hearing and responding even to the faintest voices of the weak and vulnerable.

In contrast, many contemporary leaders tend to overlook the voices of those who remain unheard behind the walls of power. Poor communities are often the victims of development projects, economic policies frequently fail to prioritize the interests of the disadvantaged, and environmental degradation continues as a result of decisions made without adequate consideration of sustainability. Even vulnerable creatures such as animals and entire ecosystems are often neglected in policymaking processes. Therefore, this article underscores the importance of empathy as a leadership value that forms part of the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*), namely the preservation of life, the realization of justice, and the promotion of sustainability. Empathy should not be regarded merely as an emotional disposition; rather, it constitutes a moral and spiritual principle that must be embedded in a leader's actions for the benefit of all creation, not only those who are powerful and vocal.

Based on the analysis of Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19, this article serves as a call to revive a model of leadership that is just, compassionate, and empathetic in response to the humanitarian and environmental crises confronting contemporary society.

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَتَوْا عَلَىٰ وَادِ النَّمْلِ قَالَتْ نَمْلَةٌ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّمْلُ ادْخُلُوا مَسَاكِنَكُمْ لَا يَحْطِمَنَّكُمْ سُلَيْمَانُ وَجُنُودُهُ وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ(18) فَتَبَسَّمَ ضَاحِكًا مِنْ قَوْلِهَا وَقَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَدْخِلْنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ فِي عِبَادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ(19)

Meaning: *Until, when they came upon the valley of the ants, an ant said, "O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not." So [Solomon] smiled, amused at her speech, and said, "My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to do righteousness of which You approve. And admit me by Your mercy into [the ranks of] Your righteous servants."* (QS. An-Naml: 18-19)

According to the interpretations of classical scholars, this verse offers profound insights into the nature of leadership, wisdom, and gratitude. First, Imam al-Ṭabarī explains in his commentary on verse 18 that Prophet Sulaiman was granted the ability to understand the language of animals. He cites several reports from the *tābiʿūn* affirming that the ant's speech should be understood as actual speech rather than metaphorical expression. The ant genuinely addressed its community, and Allah enabled Solomon to hear and understand its warning. Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī further explains that Solomon, accompanied by his armies of humans, jinn, and animals, passed through a valley inhabited by ants. One ant, acting as a leader among its colony, warned the other ants to seek shelter immediately lest they be inadvertently crushed by Solomon and his forces. Because Solomon was able to comprehend the language of the ants, he smiled upon witnessing this remarkable display of wisdom and awareness from such a small creature, recognizing that Allah had bestowed upon him the unique ability to understand the speech of His creatures and exercise authority over them.

Regarding verse 19, al-Ṭabarī explains that this incident prompted Solomon to reflect upon the extraordinary blessings granted to him, particularly his ability to understand the language of creatures and his divinely bestowed authority. These blessings moved him to smile with gratitude and immediately offer a humble supplication. In his prayer, he asked Allah to grant him the strength to remain grateful, perform righteous deeds, and be included among the righteous servants of God.

An analysis of Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 demonstrates that the Quran presents a model of leadership that is not solely oriented toward power and administrative effectiveness, but is also founded upon values of empathy rooted in the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*). Prophet Solomon's response to the warning of an ant illustrates that ideal leadership in the Quranic perspective is measured not by the magnitude of one's authority, but by a leader's ability to understand, appreciate, and protect those under his responsibility, including even the smallest and most vulnerable creatures.

Based on the interpretations of classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr, as well as modern commentators including al-Shaʿrāwī, al-Marāghī, and Tantāwī, four principal dimensions of empathetic leadership can be identified within these verses. The first is ***ḥifẓ*** *al-nafs* (the protection of life), which emphasizes the preservation and safeguarding of living beings. The second is ***ḥifẓ*** *al-ʿaql* (the protection of intellect), which underscores respect for the capacities, agency, and understanding of those being led. The third is humility in the exercise of authority,

demonstrated by Solomon's grateful and modest response despite his immense power. The fourth is a moral responsibility to promote collective welfare and the common good. Together, these principles establish a Quranic framework of empathetic leadership that integrates compassion, justice, responsibility, and concern for all creation.

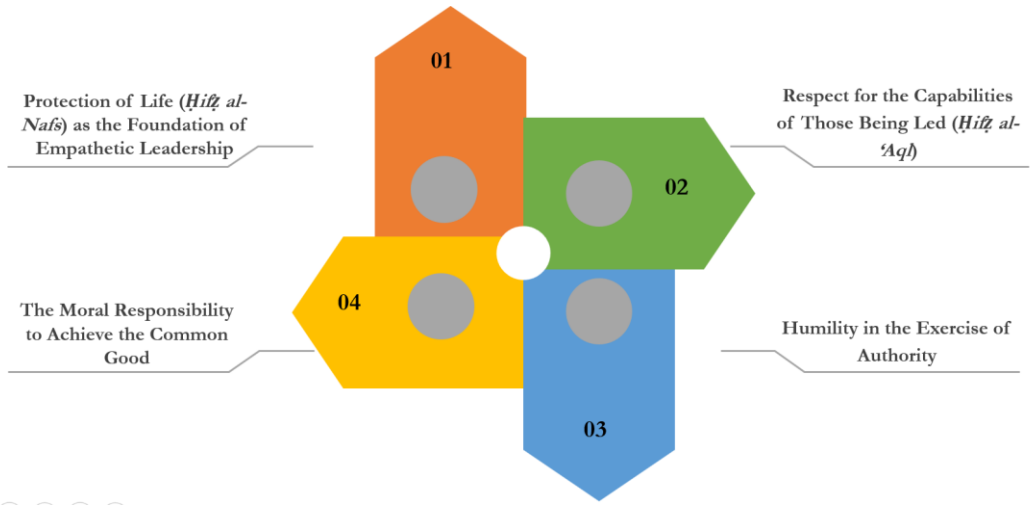


Fig 1. Empathy as a Quranic Leadership Paradigm

Protection of Life (*Ḥifẓ al-Nafs*) as the Foundation of Empathetic Leadership

The first principle that can be identified in the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the ant is the importance of protecting life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) (Hazban et al., 2025). In these verses, an ant warns its colony to immediately enter their dwellings before the army of Prophet Sulaiman passes through their valley. This warning reflects a collective awareness of the need to safeguard members of the community from potential harm. Significantly, the ant does not accuse Solomon and his army of intentionally causing harm; rather, it acknowledges that such harm could occur unintentionally. This attitude demonstrates moral awareness and a commitment to the protection of life, which constitutes a central value in the passage.

Exegetes explain that Prophet Solomon was able to understand the ant's speech and responded to it with a smile and gratitude to Allah (Fauzan, 2022). His response indicates that he did not ignore the existence of the small creatures under his authority. On the contrary, he showed concern for their well-being and safety. From the perspective of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, this attitude represents the principle of *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, namely the preservation and protection of life from all forms of threat and harm (Maharani et al., 2025). Empathetic leadership in the Quran is not limited to the protection of human beings but extends to all living creatures within a leader's sphere of responsibility (Zakiyamani et al., 2026).

The relevance of this principle in contemporary contexts is considerable. Many social and environmental problems today arise from leaders' lack of sensitivity toward vulnerable groups and the consequences of public policies on people's lives. Development programs that marginalize impoverished communities, environmental exploitation that threatens the sustainability of life, and the neglect of marginalized groups all reflect the absence of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* in leadership practices. Therefore, the story of Prophet Solomon teaches that ideal leaders are those who prioritize the protection of life in every policy and action they undertake.

Respect for the Capacity of Those Being Led (*Ḥifẓ al-ʿAql*)

The second principle found in these verses is respect for the capacities and potential of those under leadership, which may be associated with the concept of *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*. Exegetes explain that the ant in this narrative is portrayed not merely as a small creature but as one possessing the ability to think, communicate, organize its

community, and make decisions to protect its group. The ant is capable of assessing a situation, identifying potential dangers, and conveying effective instructions to its colony. This portrayal demonstrates that every creature possesses capacities and roles worthy of recognition and respect.

Prophet Sulaiman smile upon hearing the ant's words reflects an appreciation for its intelligence and capabilities (Jamil, 2018). Rather than dismissing the voice of a small creature, he responded with attention and appreciation. From a leadership perspective, this action illustrates that leaders should be willing to listen to voices often perceived as lacking influence or power. Empathetic leadership requires respect for the intellectual capacities, experiences, and aspirations of all community members, regardless of their social status or position.

In modern contexts, this principle can be realized through participatory and inclusive leadership. Leaders should not function merely as sole decision-makers but also as facilitators who create opportunities for dialogue, welcome input, and value the contributions of all stakeholders. Recognition of individual capacities is essential for fostering a healthy and productive social environment. Thus, *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql* signifies not only the protection of intellect from harm but also respect for every individual's capacity for thought and potential contribution within society.

Humility in the Exercise of Authority

The third principle highlighted in the story of Prophet Sulaiman is humility in the use of authority. Prophet Solomon was both a prophet and a king endowed with immense power. He exercised authority over human beings, jinn, and various other creatures. Nevertheless, upon hearing the words of an ant, he displayed neither arrogance nor contempt. Instead, he smiled and immediately offered a prayer to Allah in gratitude for the blessings bestowed upon him.

Exegetes such as *al-Shaʿrāwī, al-Marāghī,* and *Tantāwī* emphasize that Sulaiman smile was not an expression of pride in his authority but rather a manifestation of spiritual awareness of Allah's extraordinary favors. The prayer he offered reflects his recognition that all of his abilities and power originated from Allah and should therefore be employed in ways that earn divine pleasure. This attitude demonstrates that authority should not give rise to arrogance but should instead strengthen one's sense of responsibility and submission to Allah.

From the perspective of contemporary leadership, humility is an increasingly important quality amid the growing prevalence of authoritarian and leader-centered leadership models (Fitriah et al., 2026). A humble leader is more receptive to criticism, willing to accept input from diverse stakeholders, and less likely to abuse power for personal gain. Humility also serves as a foundation for building trust between leaders and the communities they serve (Indriyani et al., 2025). Accordingly, the story of Prophet Solomon provides a powerful example that significant authority must be accompanied by profound moral and spiritual consciousness.

Moral Responsibility for Promoting the Common Good

The final principle reflected in these verses is the moral responsibility to promote the common good. Prophet Sulaiman prayer, in which he asks for the ability to remain grateful, perform righteous deeds, and attain Allah's pleasure, illustrates that the ultimate purpose of leadership is not the preservation of power but the realization of benefit for all creatures (Nafal et al., 2024). In the Quranic perspective, leadership is inseparable from trust (*amānah*) and moral accountability before Allah (Rochim & Muttaqien, 2025).

The value of *maṣlaḥah* (public welfare) in these verses is evident in Sulaiman understanding of power as a means of doing good and promoting prosperity. Authority is not viewed as a privilege for personal benefit but as an instrument for protecting, serving, and enhancing the well-being of those being led. Consequently,

empathetic leadership extends beyond the ability to understand the feelings of others and is realized through concrete actions that generate broad social benefits.

In contemporary society, this principle requires leaders to integrate moral considerations into every public policy they formulate. Decisions should take into account their impact on social welfare, social justice, environmental sustainability, and the protection of vulnerable groups. The common good thus becomes the primary measure of leadership success, rather than solely economic or political achievements. Accordingly, the model of empathetic leadership exemplified by Prophet Solomon remains highly relevant for addressing the social, humanitarian, and environmental crises confronting modern society.

Based on the overall analysis, Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 present a paradigm of leadership centered on empathy as a moral and spiritual foundation. Empathy in leadership is not merely the ability to understand the feelings of others; rather, it entails the capacity to protect life, respect the capacities of every individual, exercise authority with humility, and direct all actions toward the realization of the common good. These four principles demonstrate that empathetic leadership in the Quran is closely aligned with the fundamental objectives of Islamic law and offers a leadership model that remains highly relevant for contemporary society.

Based on an examination of the interpretations of both classical and contemporary exegetes, a common thread emerges indicating that the central focus of the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the ant lies not only in the miraculous ability to understand animal language but also in the ethical and leadership dimensions embedded within the narrative. Al-Ṭabarī emphasizes Solomon's ability to understand the communication of ants as a divine blessing that inspired greater gratitude toward Allah. Al-Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr draw attention to the social organization of the ant community, highlighting its ability to coordinate and protect its members. Meanwhile, contemporary exegetes such as *al-Shaʿrāwī, al-Marāghī,* and *Tantāwī* emphasize moral aspects, including gentleness, humility, respect for vulnerable creatures, and a leader's responsibility toward those under their care.

These differing emphases indicate that the verses possess multidimensional significance. On the one hand, they describe the prophetic miracle granted to Prophet Solomon. On the other hand, they articulate social principles that can serve as foundations for developing leadership character. What unites all of the exegetes is their recognition that Solomon's response to the ant's speech reflects the character of a leader who does not exercise authority arrogantly but instead demonstrates gratitude, compassion, and moral responsibility.

Through a *maqāṣidī* exegetical approach, Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 may be understood as a representation of the objectives of Islamic law manifested in leadership practice (Ika et al., 2026). The story of the ant warning its colony to avoid danger highlights the importance of protecting life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*). Life is positioned as a fundamental value that must be preserved, even in relation to creatures often considered insignificant within human power structures. This demonstrates that leadership in Islam should be oriented not toward domination but toward the protection of life and the continuity of creation.

Furthermore, the ant's ability to communicate and organize its community reflects recognition of the intellectual capacities and potential possessed by every creature. Within the framework of maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, this can be associated with *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*, which signifies not only protecting the intellect from corruption but also respecting the capacities for reason, dialogue, and decision-making. Prophet Solomon's willingness to listen to and respond to the ant's voice symbolizes the need for leaders to create space for those voices that are often marginalized in decision-making processes.

In addition, Sulaiman prayer after hearing the ant's words contains a profound spiritual dimension. The power he possessed did not make him feel superior; rather, it heightened his awareness of his dependence upon Allah. This awareness fostered humility in the exercise of authority. From a *maqāṣidī* perspective, humility functions as an ethical mechanism that prevents the abuse of power and ensures that leadership remains directed toward the realization of public welfare.

The final dimension present in these verses is an orientation toward the common good. Prophet Sulaiman did not regard leadership as a means of securing personal benefit but as a trust that should be used to bring benefit to all creatures. Therefore, the model of empathetic leadership presented in these verses is closely connected to the principle of *jalb al-maṣāliḥ wa darʾ al-mafāsid* (promoting benefit and preventing harm), which constitutes one of the primary objectives of Islamic law.

The findings of this study are highly relevant to contemporary socio-political conditions. Many modern leadership crises stem from a loss of sensitivity to the needs of society. Public policies are frequently formulated based solely on economic and political considerations without sufficient regard for their effects on vulnerable communities, the environment, or future generations. In such circumstances, the values of empathetic leadership contained in Quran Surah An-Naml verses 18-19 become increasingly important to revitalize.

A leader who prioritizes the protection of life will incorporate humanitarian considerations into every policy decision. A leader who values the capacities of those being led will foster participation and dialogue, resulting in more inclusive decision-making. A humble leader will not exploit authority for personal or group interests, while a leader committed to the common good will place societal welfare at the center of leadership objectives. Within organizations, educational institutions, governments, and businesses, these principles can serve as a foundation for more humane forms of leadership. Leadership is thus understood not merely as the ability to control others, but as the ability to understand their needs, protect their interests, and direct collective potential toward the achievement of the common good.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed to examine the concept of empathy-based leadership from a Quranic perspective through a *Maqāṣidī Tafsīr* approach and to explore its relevance to contemporary leadership discourse. The analysis reveals that empathetic leadership is founded upon four interrelated principles: the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), respect for the agency and awareness of others (*ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*), humility in exercising authority, and moral responsibility in promoting the common good. These findings demonstrate that empathy in the Quranic worldview should not be understood merely as an emotional response, but rather as an ethical principle embedded within the objectives of Sharīʿah and directed toward justice, protection, social solidarity, and human welfare.

The novelty of this article lies in its application of the *Maqāṣidī Tafsīr* framework to construct a model of empathetic leadership by integrating Quranic interpretation with contemporary leadership theories. This approach offers a broader understanding of empathy as a foundational value of transformative, ethical, and human-centered leadership. The findings contribute to the advancement of *maqāṣidī* studies in the field of leadership ethics while providing a conceptual foundation for leadership development in educational, organizational, and governmental settings. Furthermore, the study highlights the continuing relevance of Quranic values in addressing contemporary leadership challenges and opens new avenues for future research on empathy, social responsibility, and human welfare within the broader framework of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*.

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Author contribution

Afifah Az-Zahrah: data curation, writing-original draft preparation, **Fauziah Melati Br. Ritonga**: analysis, conceptualization, **Wiko Yuheldi & Fateh Muhammad Al Izzi**; methodology, **Auliya Rahma Humairah**: visualization, and editing.

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