

# From What Works To What Makes Sense: A Quranic Wisdom-Based Leadership Model For Madrasah

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## ABSTRACT

*The digital disruption era demands madrasah leadership capable of aligning technological transformation with Islamic values as institutional identity. This study aims to: (1) analyze the limitations of the what works approach in madrasah contexts amid digital disruption, (2) explore the potential of Quranic wisdom for developing adaptive and contextual sense-making leadership, and (3) formulate the integrative HSA2S leadership model (Hikmah, Syura, Amanah, Adil, and Sabr). The research employs interpretive qualitative library research; data were drawn from Quranic verses, thematic exegesis, and indexed journal literature (2019–2025). Analysis comprised thematic content analysis, hermeneutics, and theoretical synthesis. Findings indicate that the what works approach tends toward universalism, neglects the spiritual-cultural context of madrasah, and often produces standardized solutions that misalign with field realities. Conversely, the what makes sense paradigm grounded in Quranic wisdom is more appropriate as a basis for adaptive leadership. The study develops the HSA2S model, integrating Quranic wisdom with sense-making leadership principles and operationalizing it through four dimensions: spiritual, intellectual, social, and digital. Theoretically, the model enriches Islamic educational leadership scholarship; practically, it provides madrasah principals with an operational framework for sustainable, inclusive, and Islamically characterized digital transformation.*

**Keywords:** *madrasah leadership, what makes sense, Quranic wisdom, digital transformation, sense-making leadership*

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## A. INTRODUCTION

The digital disruption era requires a paradigm shift in madrasah leadership that goes beyond mere device integration to include adjustments in pedagogical goals and workplace culture (Ruloff & Petko, 2025). Adaptive capacity is essential so that vision, technology, and human resource

development remain contextually aligned.

Top-down bureaucratic leadership is increasingly less relevant; what is needed is collaborative and responsive leadership. In madrasah settings, the imbalance between leadership quality and learning outcomes intensifies when leadership focuses solely on administrative aspects (Nifasri, 2025).

Under such conditions, *sense-making* becomes the foundation for leaders in selecting information, constructing shared meaning, and formulating adaptive and ethical action (Sahlin, 2023).

For madrasah as Islamic educational institutions, the primary challenge lies in integrating digital technology without eroding Islamic values as the foundation of education. Institutions are required to enhance the quality of teaching and management through digitalization while preserving their character and identity, so they remain relevant in the era of disruption (Laili & Maunah, 2022). Therefore, adaptive transformative leadership critical in technology adoption and contextual in strategy formulation is needed to balance innovation, academic achievement, and the institutional preservation of Quranic values (Nifasri, 2025).

Amid these demands, the what works approach in educational leadership remains frequently dominant, even though it tends to generalize solutions and neglect the madrasah context as well as spiritual-cultural dimensions. Consequently, innovation and creativity are constrained because universal assumptions do not align with the distinctiveness of Islamically grounded digital transformation. Brauckmann et al. (2023) emphasize that there is no automatic transfer of research knowledge to local practice, so the

effectiveness of solutions varies across madrasah. Simkins (2005) has criticized the weaknesses of this approach by stressing the importance of contextual meaning and interpretation in educational leadership practice. On that basis, the what makes sense paradigm—which emphasizes adaptation, meaning-making, and context while integrating Islamic values and digital technology in a balanced manner is increasingly relevant for managing madrasah change in the digital era (Simkins, 2005; Brauckmann et al., 2023).

The phenomena above raise three main issues in madrasah leadership in the digital era. First, there is a gap between Quranic *wisdom* and *sense-making* leadership principles, as an integrative and contextual model based on the values of *hikmah*, *syura*, *amanah*, *adil*, and *sabr* has yet to be adequately developed. Second, digital transformation demands adaptive leadership so that madrasah principals can manage change without abandoning Islamic identity and values. Third, integrating technology with Islamic values requires leadership that balances digital innovation and character preservation so that madrasah do not lose their essence in preparing an adaptive Muslim generation.

To address these issues, this study aims to: (1) analyze the limitations of the *what works* approach in madrasah leadership in the digital era, particularly regarding

standardization and universalism that are poorly suited to the unique character of madrasah; (2) explore the potential of Quranic *wisdom* through the values of *hikmah*, *syura*, *amanah*, *adil*, and *sabr*—as a basis for developing adaptive and contextual *sense-making* leadership; and (3) formulate the HSA2S model that integrates Quranic values with *sense-making* leadership principles to produce a madrasah leadership framework that is adaptive to digital transformation yet firmly rooted in Islamic values.

## B. METHOD

To achieve these objectives, this study employed a qualitative approach using *library research* and an interpretive paradigm to explore madrasah leadership in the digital era and the integration of Quranic values in modern leadership practice. Data were sourced from the Quran and thematic exegesis in indexed journal literature as primary data, and from educational leadership journals (2019–2025) and *sense-making* literature as secondary data. Data collection was conducted through documentation and literature review using selection criteria relevant to educational leadership and Islamic values. Data analysis used thematic content analysis for academic literature, hermeneutic analysis for Quranic verses, and theoretical synthesis for model development. The analytical

stages comprised categorizing *what works* versus *what makes sense*, exploring Quranic *wisdom* and *sense-making* leadership, and synthesizing findings to develop the HSA2S model.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the theoretical foundation, an analysis of the limitations of the *what works* approach, the alternative *what makes sense* paradigm, a synthesis of Quranic *wisdom*, and the formulation of the HSA2S model as outcomes of the literature synthesis.

### 1. Theoretical Foundation

As a starting point for the discussion, the primary theoretical foundation for Quranic *wisdom*-based madrasah leadership centers on five core values: *hikmah*, *syura*, *amanah*, *adil*, and *sabr*. Nur Muhammad (2024) emphasizes that transformative leaders must develop members' intellectual capacity, understand complexity contextually, and commit to collective welfare. Zein (2019) describes *syura* as a process of consultation rather than personal authority, so that decisions reflect shared will. Meanwhile, Fauzi and Hamidah (2021) highlight the importance of *amanah* as responsibility and trustworthiness (QS. An-Nisa: 58), and affirm *adil* and *sabr* as moral foundations in facing dynamics and challenges, shaping adaptive

and integrity-based madrasah leadership (Nur Muhammad, 2024; Zein, 2019; Fauzi & Hamidah, 2021).

The second theoretical foundation refers to sense-making leadership theory in education, which stresses the importance of leaders actively constructing meaning when facing organizational challenges. Sahlin (2023) defines sense-making as a process of selecting and interpreting information to produce a collective understanding that underpins action. Simkins (2005) argues that the skill of making sense of things is as important as searching for “what works,” because it supports leaders in adapting to organizational dynamics contextually. Meanwhile, Brauckmann et al. (2023) note the absence of automatic transfer of research knowledge to practice; leaders need to connect research findings with the unique challenges of their institutions. In the madrasah context, integrating digital technology and Islamic values requires local contextual understanding (Sahlin, 2023; Simkins, 2005; Brauckmann et al., 2023).

Finally, the third theoretical foundation highlights the relevance of Quranic values to contemporary leadership theory. Simkins (2005) maintains that in educational leadership, the concept of making sense of things is as urgent as seeking universal recipes, so that contextually grounded Quranic wisdom can synergize with the

sense-making leadership agenda. Nur Muhammad (2024) states that transformative leadership grounded in the Quran, through intellectual stimulation, approximates hikmah (critical thinking); *qudwah hasanah* demands ethical standards aligned with ethical leadership; and leaders are required to be just, trustworthy, and patient. Devi Pramitha (2016) links Islamic leadership principles—*amanah*, *adil*, and *syura* (consultation)—with integrity, justice, responsibility, and collaboration. Hikmah intersects with contextual intelligence, *syura* with collaborative leadership, *amanah* with ethical leadership, *adil* with transformational leadership, and *sabr* with resilient leadership (Simkins, 2005; Nur Muhammad, 2024; Devi Pramitha, 2016).

## **2. Limitations of the *What Works* Approach in Madrasah Leadership**

After the theoretical framework has been outlined, the following discussion examines the limitations of the what works approach. This approach is positivistic and tends to be rigid, and thus has substantial limitations for madrasah leadership in the digital era. Simkins (2005) criticizes the approach because it assumes that what works can be identified and replicated universally, whereas this method is often irrelevant and unhelpful for understanding leadership complexity. The paradigm fails to capture the socio-cultural uniqueness and

religious values of madrasah, thereby neglecting essential local context. Brauckmann et al. (2023) stress the importance of contextualizing leadership programs and note that uniform models often do not fit the needs of every school, including madrasah. As a result, solutions produced are frequently misaligned with field realities. Furthermore, Brauckmann et al. (2023) state that there is no automatic transfer of research knowledge on effective leadership to practice relevant to local contexts, especially in an era of digital transformation that demands considerable flexibility.

The complexity of madrasah leadership in the digital era involves interconnected spiritual, pedagogical, technological, and social dimensions. Devi Pramitha (2016) emphasizes that Islamic educational leaders must uphold *amanah*, *adil*, and *syura* as visionary responsibilities, not merely material demands. Nifasri (2025) notes that amid change, madrasah need to balance academic achievement and character development through transformative leadership. The what works approach, which emphasizes standardization and measurable outcomes, fails to grasp the interconnection of these dimensions; Islamic character as a core madrasah value is often overlooked because it is difficult to measure quantitatively (Devi Pramitha, 2016; Nifasri, 2025).

The limitations of the what works approach are evident in its failure to respond to the rapid dynamics and changes of the digital era. Digital transformation requires fundamental changes in pedagogical goals, leadership practice, and technology integration not merely adding devices; it requires transformational leadership that fosters creativity and the participation of all stakeholders (Ruloff & Petko, 2025). If madrasahs remain attached to old paradigms, they risk falling behind due to insufficient innovation in facing change (Isitianto, 2022). Transformational leadership is considered more effective because it can mobilize organizations through innovation without sacrificing team trust. Moreover, the effectiveness of madrasah leadership is measured by the ability to balance digital modernity and the preservation of Islam as institutional identity (Devi Pramitha, 2016).

### **3. What Makes Sense as an Alternative Leadership Paradigm**

In response to the limitations above, *sense-making* leadership offers an alternative paradigm better suited to madrasah leadership in the digital era. Sahlin (2023) explains that *sense-making* is an active process of constructing meaning when organizational conditions challenge expectations; leaders and teachers select environmental information, interpret it, and

formulate shared understanding that becomes the basis for action—so that the complexity of digital transformation can be understood contextually without losing the meaning of leadership practice. Simkins (2005) affirms the *sense-making* agenda for educational leaders that places *making sense of things* on par with searching for universal recipes, enabling madrasah leaders to design adaptive solutions aligned with institutional uniqueness and avoid rigid standardization (Sahlin, 2023; Simkins, 2005).

Integrating technology with Islamic values is central to the *sense-making* leadership paradigm in madrasah. Ruloff and Petko (2025) emphasize that technology integration must trigger fundamental change in pedagogical goals, not merely replace tools, so leaders must align vision and leadership practice holistically. In the digital era, according to Nifasri (2025), madrasah principals need to promote transformative leadership that inspires teachers and students so that organizational change does not sacrifice character formation. Sahlin (2023) notes that when organizations face uncertainty, *sense-making* helps leaders interpret complexity and formulate adaptive steps according to context. Thus, madrasah can balance digital modernity with Islamic values (Ruloff & Petko, 2025; Nifasri, 2025; Sahlin, 2023).

Fit with local culture and Islamic educational aims is an important parameter in implementing *sense-making* leadership in madrasah. Brauckmann et al. (2023) emphasize that new leadership knowledge becomes meaningful when school principals interpret it within the unique contextual situation of their institution, because the *sense-making* process requires interpretation of universal evidence amid specific local challenges. Zein (2019) adds that leadership based on participatory and inclusive *syura* enables institutions to respond to the demands of the times including the digital era without neglecting religious values as madrasah identity. Accordingly, madrasah leaders are required to align digital transformation with the vision of Islamic education authentically, so that managed change preserves the Islamic essence of madrasah (Brauckmann et al., 2023; Zein, 2019).

#### **4. Quranic Wisdom for Sense-Making Leadership**

With the theoretical foundation and alternative paradigm in place, the literature synthesis in this section strengthens the integration of Quranic *wisdom* in *sense-making* leadership. At the epistemological dimension, *hikmah* (QS. An-Nahl: 125) and *syura* (QS. Asy-Syura: 38) reinforce the foundation of Quranic *wisdom* for adaptive madrasah leadership in the digital era. Laili

and Maunah (2022) emphasize that intellectual stimulation in transformational leadership in Islamic educational institutions encourages leaders to understand organizational complexity contextually. Mirza (2023) adds that the meaning of leadership in the Quran—including *al-khalifah*—requires semantic reading that considers *sunnatullah* and specific situations. Hidayat (2015) states that *syura* is a normative principle of consultation, while Zein (2019) finds it to be collective, inclusive, and participatory in accommodating shared interests. Thus, *hikmah* and *syura* acquire operational meaning as the basis of *sense-making* madrasah leadership in facing digital transformation.

At the ethical dimension, the literature synthesis shows that *amanah* (QS. Al-Ahzab: 72) and *adil* (QS. An-Nisa: 58) strengthen the moral foundation of adaptive madrasah leadership in the digital era. Hermawan et al. (2020) report *amanah* as the human obligation as God's vicegerent to safeguard trust and integrity in an Islamic educational perspective. Devi Pramitha (2016) positions the fulfillment of God's trust and the just delivery of mandate as the leader's obligation to stakeholders. Fauzi and Hamidah (2021) find that *amanah* is closely related to *siddiq*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah* as leader qualities in a Quranic perspective. Thus, *amanah* and *adil* acquire operational meaning as *equitable leader-*

*ship* so that digital transformation remains inclusive (Devi Pramitha, 2016; Fauzi & Hamidah, 2021).

At the resilience dimension, the literature synthesis shows that *sabr* (QS. Al-Baqarah: 155) strengthens the foundation of *resilience* in adaptive madrasah leadership in the digital era. Zabidi et al. (2023) report *sabr* as restraint from complaint and inner turmoil so that leaders maintain composure in facing trials. The study positions *sabr* as active self-restraint for the common good. Nur Muhammad (2024) states that *sabr* aligns with steadfastness in struggle and perseverance in doing good. Thus, *sabr* acquires operational meaning in safeguarding long-term vision amid madrasah digitalization.

These five values—*hikmah*, *syura*, *amanah*, *adil*, and *sabr*—acquire operational meaning as the foundation of Quranic *wisdom* correlated with the *sense-making* leadership agenda for madrasah facing digital transformation.

## 5. The HSA2S Model for Madrasah Leadership

Based on the synthesis of Quranic *wisdom* and the *what makes sense* paradigm above, the following HSA2S model articulates five core values in an integrated manner. *Hikmah* (QS. Al-Baqarah: 269) underpins *contextual sense-making* and *practical wisdom* (Sahlin, 2023); *syura*

ensures participatory decision-making through consultation (Zein, 2019; QS. Asy-Syura: 38); *amanah* affirms spiritual and professional ethical responsibility (Fauzi & Hamidah, 2021; Hermawan et al., 2020). *Adil* (QS. An-Nisa: 58) demands impartial justice in madrasah transformation (Fauzi & Hamidah, 2021; Hermawan et al., 2020), while *sabr* (QS. Al-Baqarah: 155) strengthens perseverance and sustainable

transformation (Zabidi et al., 2023; Nur Muhammad, 2024). The five values form leadership that is adaptive, collaborative, accountable, and resilient in the digital era.

So that the model does not remain at the conceptual level, its operationalization is summarized in Table 1. A brief account of the four practical dimensions is as follows.

**Table 1.** Operational dimensions of the HSA2S model

Dimension	Main practices	Quranic values (HSA2S)	References
Spiritual	Internalization of the Quran; <i>amanah</i> ; consistent character	<i>Amanah</i> , moral conduct ( <i>akhlak</i> )	Devi Pramitha, 2016; Fauzi & Hamidah, 2021; Laili & Maunah, 2022; Nifasri, 2025
Intellectual	Continuous learning; critical evaluation of innovation	<i>Hikmah</i> , vicegerency ( <i>khilafah</i> )	Laili & Maunah, 2022; Mirza, 2023; Devi Pramitha, 2016; Simkins, 2005; Sahlin, 2023
Social	Consultation; stakeholder networks; collective culture	<i>Syura</i> , <i>amanah</i> , <i>adil</i>	Hidayat, 2015; Zein, 2019; Isitianto, 2022; Devi Pramitha, 2016; Hermawan et al., 2020
Digital	Pedagogical technology selection; phased implementation	<i>Sabr</i> ; academic-character balance	Ruloff & Petko, 2025; Nifasri, 2025; Zabidi et al., 2023; Nur Muhammad, 2024

Source: Devi Pramitha (2016); Fauzi & Hamidah (2021); Hidayat (2015); Isitianto (2022); Laili & Maunah (2022); Mirza (2023); Nifasri (2025); Nur Muhammad (2024); Ruloff & Petko (2025); Sahlin (2023); Simkins (2005); Zabidi et al. (2023); Zein (2019); Hermawan et al. (2020).

At the spiritual dimension, madrasah leadership requires the internalization of

Quranic values and *amanah* as the foundation of every strategic decision.

Leadership that emphasizes spirituality and morality ensures that digital transformation remains grounded in the mission of Islamic education and preserves institutional integrity and Islamic character. Implementing amanah as an obligation to safeguard trust and integrity is essential in Islamic educational leadership (Devi Pramitha, 2016), so that Islamic values and professionalism can be consistently maintained throughout madrasah managerial processes (Hermawan et al., 2020).

At the intellectual dimension, leaders are required to continue learning and to critically evaluate every innovation, in line with hikmah and sense-making. Decision-making needs to account for the socio-cultural context of madrasah so that it does not merely imitate external patterns. Laili and Maunah (2022) stress the importance of empowering reason and adapting to organizational change, while Sahlin (2023) highlights the need for leaders to interpret complexity through sense-making for long-term relevance.

At the social dimension, consultation (musyawarah) becomes the foundation of decision-making involving teachers, students, parents, and the wider community. This process builds consensus, strengthens collective identity, and clarifies the institution's shared direction. Stakeholder engagement expands

cooperation networks and active participation in the madrasah vision and mission. Consultative practice is not mere formality but the embodiment of inclusive and participatory syura as mandated in the Quran (Hidayat, 2015; Zein, 2019). Participatory leadership based on consultation also strengthens the legitimacy of madrasah policy in society (Isitianto, 2022).

At the digital dimension, leaders need to select pedagogical technologies aligned with the vision of Islamic education and implement innovation in phases so that change remains sustainable (Ruloff & Petko, 2025). Digital transformation is not only about device adoption but also about adjusting curriculum and learning culture to support students' Islamic character (Nifasri, 2025). Synergy between academic achievement and character formation is strengthened through integrating *sabr* and resilience in facing technological challenges (Zabidi et al., 2023).

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Based on the literature review presented above, this study draws several main conclusions for the development of madrasah leadership in the digital disruption era. First, the what works approach is inadequate for the madrasah context because it tends to be universalist, neglects local contextual uniqueness, and

reduces attention to spiritual-cultural dimensions as institutional identity. Second, the what makes sense paradigm grounded in Quranic wisdom and sense-making leadership principles is more relevant as a basis for adaptive leadership in facing the complexity of digital transformation. Third, the HSA2S model (Hikmah, Syura, Amanah, Adil, and Sabr) is developed as an integrative framework that combines both agendas and is operationalized through spiritual, intellectual, social, and digital dimensions (Table 1) to realize effective and Islamically characterized leadership.

Theoretically, this study enriches Islamic educational leadership scholarship through a synthesis of contemporary leadership theory and Quranic values. Practically, the HSA2S model provides madrasah principals with an operational framework for managing digital transformation aligned with Islamic educational identity and mission. The implications are that capacity-building programs, strengthened follow-up research, implementation guidelines, and leadership curricula that integrate Quranic values with modern leadership theory need to be developed so that madrasah transformation proceeds sustainably and inclusively.

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