

ON DEVELOPING A HOLISTIC LEADERSHIP EDUCATION: A SAUDI ARABIAN EDIFICATION OF THE THIRD KIND

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Abstract

The word 'crisis' personifies the world we live in. The recent global financial crisis is merely a symptom of this negative phenomenon. In this paper we explore the ways in which a recent holistic leadership and entrepreneurship experience at the Madinah Institute for Leadership and Entrepreneurship (MILE) provides an exemplar of how to address challenges of education raised by a crisis-prone world. The MILE programme which was convened against a serene canvas of one of the holiest places of the Muslim Diaspora is underpinned by an emphasis on raising a scholar's spiritual and physical self-awareness. The holistic programme also emphasizes core elements frequently overlooked in leadership and entrepreneurship education, namely, reflective practices that develop awareness in every respect; the will to humbly and ethically lead and manage, systems thinking; integration; and perhaps most importantly, understanding how to work selflessly and effectively in a troubled globalized business world. We are of the firm conviction that the MILE model of leadership and entrepreneurship education can contribute significantly not only in contending with global political and economic exigencies, but also towards the eradication and or amelioration of impediments, in the fervent hope that this may lead to an elucidation and solution of the many-faceted problems that confront us. Finally, we believe that this new Afro-Arabic-Asian experience of leadership and entrepreneurship is an alternative to the occidental and euro-centric business models which have miserably failed to comprehend and rectify the toxicity of a world that has fundamentally gone awry.

Keywords

Global, Financial Crisis, Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Alternate Business Models, Edification

1. Contextualising the Mile Experience

In May 2013 we were privileged to attend a conference in Saudi Arabia hosted by the Madinah Institute for Leadership and Entrepreneurship (MILE). The conference which extended over a two week period was a life-changing experience. We chronicle our experience after contextualising the contemporary global pedagogy for business education. We put forward the view that unless there is a radical transformation in the pedagogy of leadership education,

business schools will simply produce graduates who exemplify and mirror the image of a world that is in serious crisis.

In December 2012 the Executive Management of the Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA) and Regent Business School were invited to send delegates to a conference to be hosted by MILE. We were the fortunate ones to have been selected. Our initial scrutiny of the conference programme revealed that it was the intention of MILE to bring senior executives and high potential leaders from all over the world to discover new dimensions in leadership and management practices and help them grow in their careers. Our further scrutiny of the prime aim and vision of the conference revealed that the programme offered potential delegates priceless engagements with the world's most influential academics and business leaders, specifically with a view to discussing and debating a range of critical management and leadership issues. More importantly, the programme offered participants the opportunity to become agents of positive change within their respective organisations and to accomplish their personal goals.

MILE's programs were delivered by industry leaders, professors and authors from top business schools and consultants from leading global consulting firms who shared their knowledge and know-how with a network of participants from around the world, South Africa included. The PALM5 program combined top quality content, world-class speakers and live regional case studies. Participants had the opportunity to expand their business repertoire, to include new concepts, approaches and practices and included faculty and business leaders from Columbia Business School, IESE Business School, Cranfield School of Management, INSEAD, Darden School of Business, LUMS, Egon Zehnder international, Coaching Leaders, TTM International, Bain & Company Middle East, Moby Group, IMC, Edible Arrangement LLC and others.

In the sections that follow, we critically examine the contemporary paradigm of leadership education.

2. The Pedagogy of Leadership Education: Critical Imperatives

The recent financial crisis has exemplified the need for a new era of leadership. The subject field has moved onto the curricular centre stage of graduate business education. Indeed there is a multiplicity of explanations for the rise in leadership education.

Moreover, given our recent experience at Madinah, we strongly posit the view that the issue

relating to the demand for leadership is still locked in the occidental and Eurocentric model of business education and the time is opportune to introduce new paradigms that are more attuned to the realities of a globalised and crisis-prone world. In simple terms, we aver that there is serious divergence in our business education, to the extent that it has led to a serious mismatch between rhetoric and reality. According to Gallos (1993) business educators do not have the reputation of critically questioning pedagogy to understand the implications for student learning, and that, despite the fact that we assiduously produce graduates who are not prepared or ill-equipped to tackle the exigencies of the real world

In the context of the above, this paper challenges all those who are involved in business education to critically and honestly reappraise their position, *vis-à-vis*, leadership. It proposes an alternative approach to leadership pedagogy, advocates a paradigm shift in leadership education, and suggests a holistic model of business education that encourages a blending of the spiritual and physical existence and inculcates values of honesty and integrity, presently-overlooked in many business schools. Consequently, the paper will examine the present gaps in business education and suggest basic fundamentals that could underpin holistic leadership pedagogy. It then explores the components of such an approach and provides exemplars gleaned from the MILE programme.

3. Leadership Education: Current Scenario

In our current education for leadership we seem to be preoccupied with the semantics; should we, for example, be concerned about the means to an end, or the end in itself? We spend an inordinate amount of time spelling out the differences between a manager and a leader. We identify a problem and then spend most of our effort in theorising about the problem. We compartmentalize aspects of leadership in the hope that we will be able to better understand the concept and its vagaries. Seldom do we come back to the crux of the issue. Eventually we are led astray by the nuances of the issue and end up obfuscating the critical question. We offer perspectives and insights into the leadership process. We merely provide our students with glimpses into the lives of those who lead, thus glorifying the individual and not issue at hand. We remind students about the myriad challenges we face in the real world, but never confront them to contextualize the challenges and do something tangible to seriously address the problem. In the end, do our efforts as educators create leaders? The answer is a categorical No!

In our quest to edify, we faithfully mislead our students into believing that by studying the voluminous texts on the subject, they will learn all traits and trappings of a good leader. Our pedagogies are seriously lacking direction. Leadership, after all, is not a uni-dimensional concept. There is need for a profound recognition that leadership is more than the accumulation of knowledge, experience, and skills. It is emotional intelligence that encompasses aspects of desire, conviction, and will. It is about rallying internal strength, passion and drive in the face of insurmountable odds. It is spurring up an intrinsic theoretical, experiential, spiritual and physical knowledge base for the common good. Real leadership, therefore, is about a holistic development. In order for us to do our work as educators well, we need to awaken the human spirit.

What then does a holistic pedagogy of leadership entail? We are of the conviction that in order for one to understand the fundamentals of a holistic leadership education one needs to understand the key issues that underscore the idiosyncrasies and challenges of contemporary leadership. As Frank and Cook (1995) note that we live in a crisis-prone globalised world riddled with challenges, a new break-neck pace in the development of technologies, an explosion of knowledge and a business ethos that insidiously prescribes a ‘winner takes all’ mentality. The recent case study of ENRON exemplifies this new business mentality and philosophy. We are simply inundated with press coverage of these scandals and greed that characterise leadership in today’s public, private, and political arenas and painfully remind us that integrity, conscience, and shared morality are no longer cherished values. In terms of leadership pedagogy, we have simply gone horribly wrong. The academicians and researchers continue with their complicated statistics, debates on government policies, debates on trajectories of economic growth and leave the “poor” as an imagined community by not coming to terms with the fact that notwithstanding their theoretical expertise they cannot predict and prescribe for the poor.

How then does a holistic pedagogy of leadership assist the new breed of leaders to overcome and successfully operate in an increasingly competitive and chaotic global arena? We would like to argue that the answer is revealed in a critical assessment of the basic components of such pedagogy: its purpose and values, content, and praxis. Pedagogy of leadership, therefore, should include a range of learning experiences – an education that acknowledges the cultural, historical, spiritual, ideological and physiological development of an individual. It is an education that

accentuates and nuances the integration of knowledge for leadership. Simply put, it emphasizes that there is no single path or theory of leadership – it has to be a holistic approach.

A holistic pedagogy of leadership educates an individual to be critical and not accept anything as a given. It informs one to value education for leadership, especially in terms of one's own effectiveness, the core value that governs one's behavior and the factors that influence those values. Thus learning about leadership becomes a valued-lesson in accepting the fact that leadership is merely a means to an end and not an end in itself. Human behaviour is complicated. So is real leadership. Leadership is not skills, position, power, or personality. It is a complex cultural, interpersonal, and deeply intrapersonal process, resulting from the interplay of choices, individual competencies, opportunities, determination, needs, and relationships. Leadership is always more than the sum of its parts. Decomposing leadership into discrete parts is one way to handle its complexity. We know how to do that well: Western ways of thinking make it second nature and, as Parker Palmer (1998) reminds us, elevate such disconnections into an intellectual virtue. Leadership education anchored in disconnections, however, does a major disservice to those who struggle to learn.

Ultimately, accepting the challenges of leadership means that we have to deal with issues that are deeply emotional, uniquely relational, powerfully systemic, and often firmly rooted in our cultures, structures, traditions, and institutions. Finally, a pedagogy of courage, passion and love rejects an over-reliance on rationality and an engineering-like approach to leadership effectiveness. Like all human exchanges, leadership is filled with challenges that lie beyond the reach of logic. A pedagogy of courage, passion and love is more consistent with Bennis's (1997) invitation to "invent oneself" - to break away from prescribed roles and learned expectations. Educating leaders is not an easy task. It is, however, exciting and creative work. It anchors leadership education in performance, on-going learning, human development, community, and change. It stretches us to teach interdisciplinarity - it pushes us to acknowledge that religion, philosophy, psychology, education, and more are needed to ground the souls, nourish the hearts, enrich the characters, and develop the minds of real leaders. It asks us to connect in new and expanded ways with colleagues locally and globally. It firmly reminds us that our work is sacred. Finally, we would like to firmly reiterate, that leadership education is not linear process. It is a process that is characterized by the view that a whole system of beliefs must be incorporated

rather than simply its individual components. Our experience at the MILE programme resonates and personifies that holistic approach to leadership education as enunciated above.

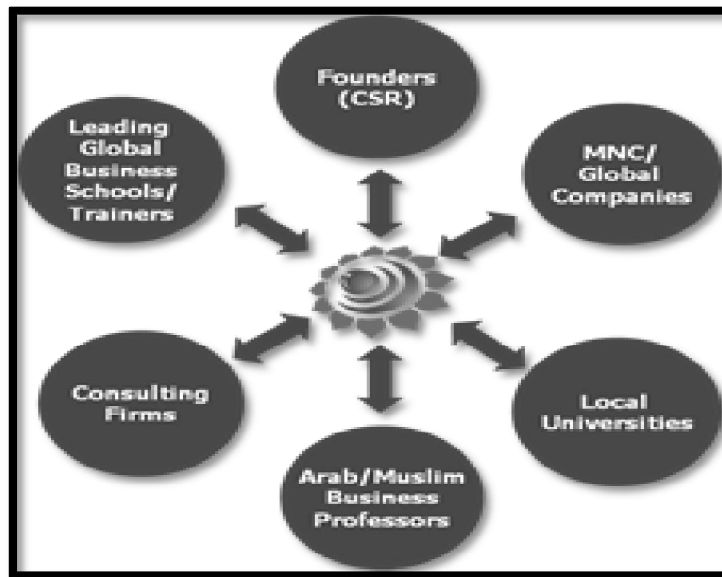
4. The MILE Experience

We begin by outlining the Mission and Vision of the MILE programme. Basically MILE aspires to achieve its vision through building an effective collaborative network; leveraging information technology; offering relevant holistic life-long developmental services; ensuring sustainability and continuous development of intellectual capital; and striving in being a role model in applying the most advanced and ethical management practice. MILE identified seven key areas which help to underpin its mission and vision. They are as follows:

4.1. Collaboration

To achieve collaboration, MILE identified its key stakeholders and developed for each one the main features of a win-win relationship. Figure (1) below illustrates MILE key stakeholders.

Figure 1: MILE Key Stakeholders



4.2 Leveraging Information & Communication Technologies

Mile makes the best use of web technologies and social networking tools to facilitate dialogue among local executives. MILE has already established its presence on LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Gmail, and Yahoo, to name a few. It also intends to build a state-of-the-art Portal which aims to become the meeting place of our local managers who seek developmental resources and a platform to share and discuss issues of common concern.

4.3 Localization

One of the distinguishing features of MILE is its capability to offer learning experience which is relevant to local and global needs and challenges. MILE has already taken active steps to:

- develop case studies specific to the geography of its trainees;
- produce documentaries of successful local business leaders;
- provide guidance to invited speakers on areas of adjustments needed in their training tools and materials to suite local requirements; and
- develop the skills of local university business professors in offering Executive Education programmes

4.4 Holistic Development

MILE'S holistic approach to executive education is rooted in the Muslim worldview of human nature. It encompasses the four aspects of the human being; mental, physical, emotional and spiritual.

In MILE'S programme, the concept of holistic development has been tested and programme evaluations have revealed outstanding results. Examples of programme's design elements at each of the four domains are as follows:

Mental:

- Teaching Team: a very well selected team of speakers who represent four different categories:
- Renowned business university professors
- Senior Management Consultants

- Role model successful local business leaders
- Professional trainers
- Well selected set of business case studies
- Pre-event on-line learning style assessment to enable participants to understand their learning style and develop approaches to make the best use of the program to accelerated their learning. This process was supported by MILE Personal Development Advisor who provides personalized coaching
- On-Line personality profiling
- One-on-one coaching and Personal Development Planning advice during the program
- A variety of training techniques: role play, case studies, simulation, lectures, and videos
- My Strength Mirror: A tool to enable participants to provide positive feedback to each other by highlighting each other's areas of strength.
- Learning Logs: Each participant was provided with a Learning Log to document the key learning and decisions that he/she intend to execute upon the completion of the program. Speakers allowed time for participants to use the learning log properly

Physical:

- Offering healthy food throughout the program which constitutes more fiber and less cholesterol.
- Dietary advice
- Medical checkup
- Early morning aerobic exercises
- Mid-day stretching exercises.

Emotional:

- Effective ice breaking at the start to boost start rapport building among the group
- Teambuilding exercises
- Networking opportunities among the group during breaks and extracurricular activities
- Gala networking dinners with local business leaders

Spiritual:

- Leading by Islamic values
- Visits to holy places
- Speakers allowed time for participants to use the learning log properly

4.5 Life-Long Learning

MILE believes that its relationship with programme participants starts the day they graduate. Developing executive capability is a journey not an event. A list below illustrates some of the support tools that MILE employed to provide life-long development support for its executives.

4.6 Networking

- MILE Community Network
- Alumni Networks
- Access to consultants/executive education experts/speakers database

4.7 Education and Application

- Executive/Leadership Development
- Assessment Centre
- Conferences
- Benchmarking
- Best Practices sharing

4.8 Web Based Learning

- Leadership Simulations
- Research and tools
- Personal Development Plans
- Webinars

4.9 Support

- Newsletters
- Online resources
- Executive Coaching

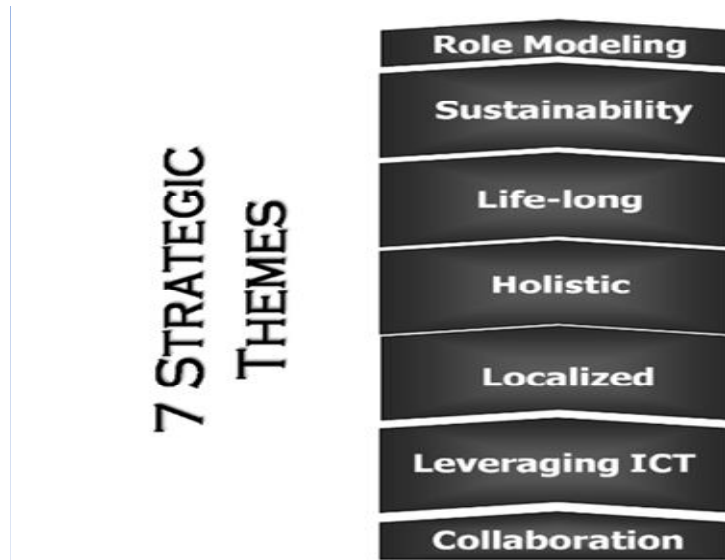
4.10 Sustainability

- Proper corporate governance
- Sound business model based on best use of the endowment fund
- Forging long term win-win collaborations with multiple stakeholders

4.11 Role Modeling

MILE aspires to be a role model through employing best management practices and adhering to the highest standards of business ethics. Figure 2 encapsulates the MILE's major strategic themes.

Figure 2: MILE Strategic Themes



5. Extended Benefits of the MILE Programme

There were numerous additional benefits to delegates attending the MILE programme at Medina. For example, through online tools, information, and analysis, the knowledge base showed how leading companies achieve success. The provision of executive coaching helps the best business people get even better. Primarily future-focused, executive coaching targets techniques and insights that make a positive and profound difference to personal business effectiveness. Talent Q, a global consulting firm, offered each participant three online assessments using a unique ability testing system, along with a one-on-one coaching session to discuss the participant's personality profile in detail.

MILE also organised a course on leveraging **Web 2.0** technologies for the modern executive. This helped participants and their businesses improve their search engine listings and rankings

and created a wider network for collaboration through social media. MILE provided all trainees a **"Memory Jogger"** which a series of pocket guides that help executives learn and apply tools, methods, and processes that are critical to attaining world-class organizational excellence, was also included in the programme. **"Mind tools"** which teach practical, proven skills which provide high personal effectiveness, good leadership, career success and even happiness was an extra bonus.

Furthermore all programme participants were invited to complete an on-line assessment to identify their Learning Style. Before the programme participants were be able to generate a personalised **Learning Style Report**. This report helped us learn faster and we were able to choose the most effective tools and methods of learning. A learning consultant was available during the programme for personal coaching. MILE believes that executive development should address all four aspects of personal development intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual. The International Medical Centre generously extended an opportunity to all participants to have a medical checkup during the programme. In addition a Gala Dinner was held, with a keynote presentation by a prominent speaker. This event offered participants an excellent platform to network with prominent local/ regional businessmen and senior executives. Field trips were also organised around Medina to historic Islamic sites. These were led by professional tour guides holding qualifications in Islamic History. Participants had the opportunity to discuss and link the insights of Islamic concepts and practices with modern day business management requirements.

Umrah was an optional and complimentary part of the programme sponsored by MILE for Muslim participants during the middle weekend of the program. MILE made necessary arrangements for required attire, transportation, and accommodation needed for the pilgrimage.

6. The Educational Setting for Mile

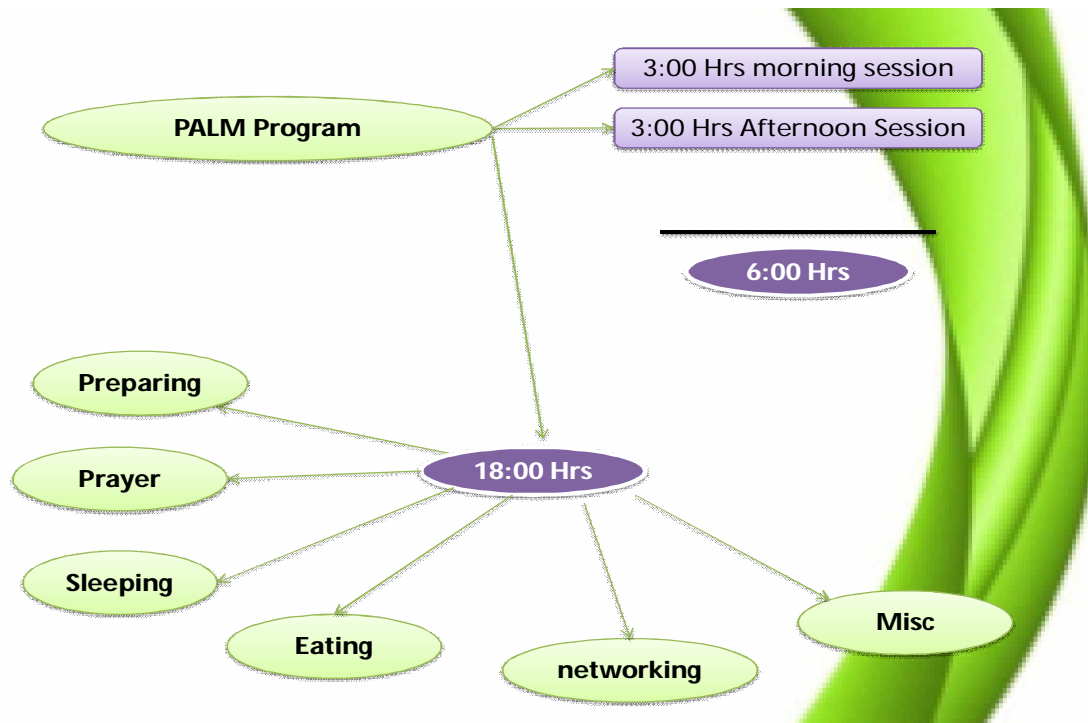
The MILE programme is located is located in Medina – commonly referred to as the Knowledge Economic City (KEC). The Medina Knowledge Economic City was launched by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in 2006. It is located in the Holy City of Madinah, one of the oldest cities in history and a deeply revered site of the Islamic religion. KEC is designed to position Saudi Arabia and young Saudi Arabian entrepreneurs as internationally respected leaders, and to attract and develop talent from around the world. It combines the concepts of Intel Corporation's digital

city, Cisco's smart city, and Microsoft's internet frontier, and is expected to attract a population of 150,000, create 20,000 new job opportunities, and accommodate thousands of visitors in world class accommodations. The city also provides incubators for Saudi IT and small business entrepreneurs who are looking for a competitive environment to grow their businesses and utilise the skilled female talent pool in Medina and provide distance working opportunities. It is also intended to create global opportunities and to provide infrastructure and a talent pool that will facilitate a healthy return on investment for investors and companies doing business there. MILE's location in KEC assists in positioning it to take a leading role in the area's development and in promoting KEC to the global business sector.

7. The Duration of the Daily PALM Programme

The Palm programme extends over 18 hours per day. This does not, however, mean that we were involved in work or lectures for 18 hours. The programme, as mentioned previously, was holistic and included time for meditation, education, exercise, eating and miscellaneous activities. Figure 3 portrays aptly the day's events.

Figure 3: The Daily Duration of the MILE Programme



8. MILE and Our Leadership Development

When we arrived for the MILE programme, we were executives who were simply thrust into centres of power in our respective organisations. The senior executives of our organisations believed that we had the necessary qualities to succeed in leadership positions. Generally, leaders are expected to move into these roles while influencing the direction of their company. We suddenly realised that in terms of our own education and training we were seriously lacking. As leaders, we made the assumption that because of our prior experience and learning we could succeed. In a sense this was a false assumption, especially given that our training until now was based on a Eurocentric approach. We began to question the very essence of our being. We realised that in addition to the continuing demand for the skills and expertise to drive greater effectiveness, innovation and efficiency, today's corporate sector challenges demand strategic, responsible and ethical executive leadership. We realised our own inadequacy and definitely needed holistic training. The MILE programme offered us that opportunity and we are sincerely indebted to our sponsors. We provide herewith the benefits of studying at MILE. We:

- Gained a broader insight of up-to-date corporate and public sector fundamentals;
- Developed a keen understanding of value creation in corporate and public sector environment;
- Increased our confidence to make better, more informed decisions at a national level;
- Developed quality improvements for tangible results;
- Learned how to design, develop, and deploy high performance accountable services;
- Able to Identify, evaluate, and disseminate best practices for information technology issues;
- Developed a leadership philosophy that is keeping with our values, expectations of our team, and our most critical leadership objectives;
- Used our emotions more intelligently for successful interpersonal relationships and greater productivity from our team;
- Created increasingly interoperable, responsive and cost effective governance by bridging the gap between strategy and mission success;

- Were able to network internationally with peer groups and benchmark skills and experiences;
- Enhanced our leadership skills, increased our confidence and self-awareness;
- Learned more from the general trends, benchmarks and global best practices from high performance corporates and governments of growing economies;
- Learned more from the regional successful role models that have been managing transformation and in a rapid changing environment; and finally
- Learned about what it is to be God-fearing, humble and selfless.

Indeed, we are fortunate to have been given an opportunity to attend the MILE programme and broaden our spiritual, cultural, physical and academic existence. We feel empowered.

Conclusion

The holistic model of business in this particular trip and conference in the holy city of Medina, in Saudi Arabia, was exemplified in all facets of engagement, by the everlasting spirit of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH), which distinctly emerged in the blending of the spiritual and physical existence. It invoked that the values of the Great Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who is omnipresent and one must live by these divine values. This was personified and encapsulated by his honesty and integrity, currently overlooked in business schools the world over. It is in this holy land of Saudi Arabia that the Prophet of Islam received the revelation of the holy Quran. A holy book together with His teachings has influenced more than 1.6 billion people of the world and perhaps many more that make up about one quarter or twenty five percent of the world's population. It was here that he came into contact with Bibi Khadija (RAW), a woman older than Himself, the owner of a number of caravans plying her business across Saudi Arabia and other distant hostile territories. She invited the Prophet to join her in her flourishing and very successful business and trade, and asked Him to be the custodian of her business ventures. She asked him to join her because she saw in the Prophet (PBUH) qualities of outstanding leadership, impeccable behavior, a serene humbleness, and outstanding manners, unparalleled business acumen and leadership qualities that saw many follow Him unwaveringly. He was an apostle of peace who later took control and virtually ran a Holy State through the edicts of the Quran and the concepts of Shariah law. He later married Bibi Khadija (RAW). This is testimony of the all embracing fact that the holy Muslim cities of Medina and Mecca, together with the conduct and leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) some 1400 years ago, show us the lessons that can be learnt from the holy Quran. The experience at MILE and particularly in the Holy City of

Medina instilled in us a sense of tranquility, peace and a desire to learn. Our experience in Saudi Arabia was indeed the edification of a third kind.

We are hopeful that the organisers of the Medina conference will explore the real possibility of imbibing other religious holy lands as possible venues, such as Varanasi in India, the holy city of Hindus, in Tibet the holy land of Buddhists and the Dalai Lama, in Japan where peace and the discipline of the Shinto's prevail, in China where the wisdom of Confucius reigns supreme, and in South Africa where multitudes gather in the holy land of Barnabas Lekganyane, in Morija of the Limpopo province. It will foster unity, greater understanding in all facets of life and business opportunities including the development of holistic leadership qualities. It will spur new dynamics and foster new business paradigms that address a compromised world we live in. It will most certainly edify the Saudi Arabian experience of the third kind, in various Afro-Arab-Asian destinations and possibly bring about a much desired new world view to business management and leadership. The Saudi Arabian organisers must be commended for their new approach. It was an experience to be savored and spoken of for many years to come. Thank you most sincerely for the life-changing experience.

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