A review of Islamic perspectives on leadership.

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Abstract

Islamic culture encourages and supports a rich and complete way of life, with guidance, both spiritual and secular, provided for every facet of the devotee's life.

The Qur'an and the *Sunnah* are the two sources for the Islamic concept of the role of the leader. The Qur'anis the holy book of the religion of Islam, and the *Sunnah* describes the exemplary life of Prophet Mohammad, largely understood through narration of his words and deeds – the *Hadeeth*.

The Holy Qur'an is universally honoured by Muslims, who identify passages that are pertinent and influential to their lives.

Leadership is a tenet that is highly emphasized in Islamic life and is embodied in the pillar of accountability. Indeed, the Prophet Mohammad in the Hadeeth states: '*each of you is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects' (Saheeh al Bukhari: 212)*.

This form of multi-level leadership is highly encouraged in Islam.

The operational principles that should be applied by Muslim leaders include the exercise of justice, fulfilment of trust, observance of righteousness, perseverance in doing what is right, and honouring promises(Beekum, 1999).

The model of Islamic leadership has four dimensions: Consciousness of God, Competency, Consultation, and Consideration (The 4C model).

Introduction

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The Holy Qur'an is the universal text honoured by Muslims of all sects, who are able to identify passages that are significant, pertinent, and influential to their lives.

Leadership is a tenet that is highly emphasized in Islamic life and is embodied in the pillar of accountability. Indeed, the Prophet Mohammad in the Hadeeth states: '*each of you is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects' (Saheeh al Bukhari: 212)*, implying that, even at a personal level, we are responsible for and accountable to whatever and whoever is under our care.

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We review the Islamic perspective of leadership and how it compares to modern leadership theories, highlighting similarities and differences.

The Nature of Leadership In Islam

Leadership in Islam is based on the principle of trust *(Amanah)*. The leader is trusted to lead a group and is accountable to both the group members and to God.

To be able to fulfil this trust, humans are gifted with the ability to learn –from the beginning of creation, Adam was created as a vicegerent on earth and was accordingly instructed, *'Note that occasion, when your Lord said the angels: I am going to place a vicegerent on earth' (Qur'an -Surat al baqarah [2]: ayat 30).*

The concept of trust in leadership is expected at all levels of leadership within the Islamic cultural dimension – the ruler, who has authority over people, is a guardian and is responsible for them; a man is a guardian of his family and is responsible for them; and a servant is a guardian of his master's property and is responsible for it.

This concept of *shared leadership* unifies the organization into a team.

Trust and accountability go in tandem. Islam emphasizes accountability to God and to the people who one has been trusted to lead. *'If a person dies having cheated the people s/he was entrusted with, he will not enter paradise'* (Muslim, 2000).

Upon acceptance as the first Caliph after the death of the Prophet Mohammad, Abo-Bakr famously stated, *'I have been made your leader, and I am not better than any of you. Support me if I do well and correct me if I do wrong'* (Al-Salabi, 2001).

Accountability is further emphasized in the Holy Qur'an (Surat- banee israeel [17]: ayat 13-14): *'And every man's fate, We have fastened on his neck: on the Day of judgement we shall bring out for him a scroll that he will see spread wide open (13), "Read your scroll! You will suffice this day as a constant reckoner against you (14)."'*

Modern theories of leadership also emphasize the concept of accountability in the dispensation of leadership.

As stated by Fitzpatrick, *'leadership entails a dynamic relationship based on mutual influence and common purpose between leaders and collaborators in which both are moved to higher levels of motivation and moral development as they affect real, intended change'*(Fitzpatrick, 2012).

From the modern perspective, leadership is a process that entails influencing an organized group towards achieving a common goal (Northouse, 2018).

Likewise, this perspective is shared in the execution of Islamic leadership.

Islamic Leadership Principles
A. Types of Leadership

Servant leadership

The Prophet Mohammad decreed, as stated in the hadeeth, that *'the leader of the people is their servant'.* This concept of servant leadership is a prophetic tradition and emphasizes the importance of the dedication and honesty of leaders in serving their followers (Muslim, 2000).

The Prophet Mohammad, long before his period of prophet-hood, earned the nickname 'al-ameen' – meaning "the trustworthy", as he fulfilled the key aspects of servant leadership in his dealings with his compatriots, placing service before self-interest.

The Qur'an praises selfless altruistic people: *'And give then (emigrants) preference over themselves, even though they were in need of that' (Qur'an-Surat alhashr [59], ayat 9).*

The concept of servant leadership in its current modern context highlights the relevance of role-modelling (Greenleaf, 2002), which is exemplified by the leadership style of the prophet: *'For you, in the prophet, is a good role model' (Qur'an -Surat ahzab [33]: ayat 21).*

Transformational leadership
'We have not sent you except as a mercy to mankind' (Qur'an -Surat ambiyaa [21]: ayat 107).

Islamic leadership encourages identifying a vision and fostering the acceptance of group goals articulated as a vision built on the principle of justice. *'O believers! Stand firm for justice and bear true witness for the sake of God' (Qur'an -Surat annisaa [4]: ayat 135).*

Aspects of transformational leadership include articulating a vision and fostering group goals. Transformational leadership utilizes values, attitudes and behaviours, such as altruistic love, hope, and vision, to persuade followers and increase their sense of divine endurance, resulting in positive organizational outcomes.

Level 5 is the highest level in the hierarchy of executive capabilities. A Level-5 leader blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will (Collins, 2006).

A Level-5 leadership model emphasizes personal humility, modesty, integrity, courage and patience to measure the quality of a leader. These traits have long been the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Mohammad and are taught for his followers to emulate.

A transformational leadership style is in the preferred Islamic tradition of leadership, and this is exemplified and indeed demonstrated by how the Prophet Mohammad transformed the society in which he lived through inspiration, motivation and intellectual stimulation.

Transformative leadership combines the best elements of transformational, charismatic, Level-5 (leaders' humility and resolve), principle-centred (adherence to values and principles), and servant leadership.

Ethical leadership
Consultation, justice, and freedom of thought to be the main principles of Islamic leadership. The framework for a moral basis of ethical leadership in Islam is centred on the willingness to submit to the Creator.

Indeed, doing one's best (*Ihsan*) is an important aspect of the moral responsibility of Islamic leadership.

Situational leadership
The situation and its circumstances are important factors that affect the leadership process. The Prophet appointed different types of leaders in different situations and contexts, according to their ability and experience. The Islamic model of situational leadership places an emphasis on four qualities: skill, trust, knowledge, and piety. In this dispensation, the Islamic model also mentions additional characteristics of followers, such as trust, flexibility and understanding.

The Islamic model is comparable to the modern model of situational leadership in which the leader adjusts the style of leadership to fit the development level of the followers that s/he is trying to influence (Hersey, 1984).

   B. Leader-Follower relationship

The relationship between the leader and the followers is shaped by the consultative nature of leadership in Islam (*shura*). The leader is encouraged to collaborate and engage with followers with integrity, knowledge, and good judgement.

This model of leadership is comparable to the modern concept of participative leadership, which invites input from all its subordinates (Huang, 2010).

Leadership is thus a shared process that results in the empowerment of subordinates (Srivastava, 2006). Transformational leadership theory also emphasizes the shared process, whereby leaders mobilize their followers through 'idealized influence' (charisma), inspirational motivation, strong performance motivation and effective articulation of a vision (Bass, 1994; Bass, 2006).

C. Characteristics of Leaders

The two basic characteristics that a Muslim leader should have are integrity (righteousness) and ability (competency required to execute the assigned task). The circumstances in which either one of them overrides the other is situational, although ideally both should be present.

Intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability are the traits that are associated with effective leadership in modern leadership theories (Northouse, 2018).

Conclusion

A transformational approach to leadership inculcates the Islamic philosophy of servant leadership. The leader's vision and authenticity create a growth mindset and creativity among all of the team members, which allows for transformation for the better.

Transformative leadership that combines charisma (idealized influence) with inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration [4 I's] moves followers to outperform expectations and surpass their self-interest for the good of the organization.

The dimensions of the model of Islamic leadership of Consciousness of God, Competency, Consultation, and Consideration motivates a leader-follower relationship that transcends self-interest and performance that is answerable to God.

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