

Review

Islamic leadership lessons from the 9th century based on Ibn Khaldun's MUQADDIMAH

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Abstract

Ibn Khaldun, who lived from 1332-1395 C.E., is a well-known Muslim scholar who enjoys universal fame in modern times as an original thinker. He is held to be the precursor or founder of a number of the human sciences, including the philosophy of history, sociology, psychology, politics, geography, anthropology, and economics. His work, MUQADDIMAH which contains his original ideas and thoughts, is considered a masterpiece on the philosophy of history and sociology. Here, using Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah Case study 4 on General Tahir's letter to his son (d.844 C.E), the authors indicate, draw parallels as well as highlight and examine the core values of Islamic leadership lessons drawn from the 9th century and compare them with the current economic and financial system.

Keywords: Islamic leadership, core values, faith, integrity, self-discipline, loving-kindness, self-restraint.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership can be defined as the process of influencing others to facilitate the attainment of organisational relevant goals and this definition is applicable to both formal and informal leadership position in order to exert leadership behaviour. (Ivancevich et al., 2008). Literature articles written on leadership styles have shown that effective leaders must be pro-active; must be able to accept change; leading and managing change (Low, 2010; 2010a & 2010b). Leadership is the driving force of organisations and it has played an important role in every profit or non-profit organisation, society, and nation. Leaders' capability and behaviour may embody strong ethical values in organisational culture; they change organisational structures by exercising their influence over organisations; they create organisational culture; and they take the initiative for the alteration of

organisations. In practice, leadership is not only a core factor for the execution of administration for management, but also a significant part for the creation of new organisational culture. In other words, leadership is regarded as an essential element or a core value in organisational culture. In this vein, leadership and organisational culture are inseparable. A value is the key belief the individual strongly believes in. (Low, 2002; 2009). Values themselves can be very motivating. (Low, 2005). Knowing values is critical, as it helps one to understand how an individual ticks. (Low, 2006). It can also be said that a value system is a learned organisation of principles and rules to help one choose between alternatives, resolve conflicts and make decisions. A person's total value system is like a '*generalised plan*' or a blueprint the subset of which when activated leads to action. (Hussin, 1996). In sum, this also means that values are one's priorities in life (Low, 2009). Since, values serve as standards that guide the behaviour of individuals in a variety of ways. Rokeach (1973) states that values serve as a standard that guides ongoing activities; and of value as general plans employed to

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resolve conflicts and make decisions. Relative ranking of these values enables one to predict a wide variety of behavior and these values vary among different groups of people in different cultures. Core values are, in fact, a set of values that guide an individual's or organisation's internal conduct as well as one's relationship with the external world.

In this paper, the practitioner-academicians look at leadership core values from the Islamic perspective based on a letter being written by a father during the ninth century (d.844 C.E.) advising his son (the Governor Abdullah bin Tahir) on how to become a good leader according to the Islamic principles. The father, Tahir bin Husin, is one of the generals of the Abbasid Caliph Ma'mun and his son is Abdullah bin Tahir, who was just appointed as the governor of ar-Raqqah, Egypt, and the intervening territory. The letter to his son also demonstrates the loving care of a benevolent father and the father acted as a mentor guiding his son on how to lead his life as a Muslim, and how to manage his daily affairs on governing his subjects. He also stressed the importance of following the guidance of Almighty Allah through the Book of God (the Qur'an) and through the life examples of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. (The Sunnah). In the context of Islamic Management Ethics, this fatherly advice depicts the importance of Islamic leadership qualities during that period and the present and thereafter.

Core Values of Islamic Personality and Leadership

Faith, Integrity and Discipline

On a personal ground, the father reminded his son to discipline himself to fulfil his duty of five times daily prayers in deep sincerity. He also advised his son to use proper chant when reciting the Qur'an, performing the requisite bows and prostrations and pronouncing his profession of faith properly. (Noor, 1999). This, to the authors, means performing the religious faith constantly with dedication and self-discipline. This also resembles an organisation whereby a leader is committed to perform his tasks on leading and managing daily activities. It also means that a leader has to perform systematically according to what he has laid down in his organisation. The phrase, "Leader sets a good example"; "Leader is a Role Model" and "Leader walks the talk" are applicable in this context.

In the concept of Islam, we are indebted to Allah for his best creation of human beings (95:4). Therefore, we are the servant of Allah. One in debt has the obligation to surrender to Allah and therefore, submission to Allah is a must for each human being. This led to the reason that performing daily prayers to Him is of paramount importance for the constant remembering of Allah. The father also advised his son to constantly seek for Allah's

guidance. He said in his letter that, "In all your affairs, try to get in touch with Him, and you will always enjoy his favour". Prayers, as Allah said in Qur'an, "restrains from sins and evil".

The father further advised his son to "let people come to you to pray together with you, and perform the prayers at the proper times and with all their rites, perform with the mention of Allah". This is an alignment (Tawhid /Iman) to the principle of Islam that, "there is only one God" and is also exemplified in the Islamic management ethics that a leader sets a good example to his fellow people to align and to abide to the rule of an organization.

Dignity

The father warned his son not to succumb to deceitfulness and levity in any enterprise he engaged in and that his son should uphold the value of dignity. He said, "Control you yourself and do not get angry. Prefer dignity and mildness". This advice is valuable to our youth as anger is a serious disease and its impact is far reaching. The Prophet Muhammad prescribed a remedy for the person in a state of anger, instructing him to sit down or lie down until (s)he cools off.

Giving (Wealth Distribution)

The father assured his son that generosity is one of best things for a human being to practice. On the subject of wealth distribution, his father said that the treasures that his son would accumulate for the government should be spend on good causes such as improving the living standard of his people and protecting and supporting the unfortunates. His father would like to see his son investing his wealth towards the welfare of his people so that the common people prosper and ultimately building up Islam and the Muslims. He encouraged his son to distribute the land tax justly, fairly, equitably and generally amongst those to whom it belongs in order to gain their friendship and to achieve general satisfaction.

In doing so, Islam laid down two objectives (Shafi,1968):

(1) To establish a practical system of Islamic economy without using any compulsion or force, allows every individual to function in a normal way so that his activities may be more fruitful and useful.

(2) To eradicate the concentration of wealth so that wealth will be circulating in the society and the distinction between the rich and poor should be narrowed.

In spirituality, if his son did as what his father said then the divine favour will always be with him. In return, his son will be able better to levy and collect the land tax from his subjects that experience justice and kindness from him. Similarly, in the context of Islamic management ethics, if a leader cares for the wellbeing and livelihood of

his or her subordinates, the grateful subordinates will be motivated to achieve good performance in order to pay back for the leader's kindness.

Moderation

The father advised his son to apply the principle of moderation in everything he did. He said that, "There is nothing more clearly useful, safe, and in every way, better than (moderation)". He wanted his son to have planned moderation for it is the right guidance for achieving success and that success will lead to his happiness.

Numerous statements have been recorded in both the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet that encourage moderation in food and drink. "And eat and drink and waste not. Truly, Allah Loves not the wasteful" (7:31). This Ayat from Quran is comprehensive in its Islamic guidance about sustenance. God has allowed us to enjoy food and bounties of this life which at the same time He has forbidden waste and extravagance.

However, in the world of today, mass production and mass customization of products for many centuries by man has resulted in over usage of earthly materials leading to an imbalance world ecosystem. The excessive carbon dioxide emission and the global warming result in the earth's "green house effect" leading to the melting of the ice caps (North and South Poles) and even of Mount Everest as well as various disastrous phenomena such as the Fukushima nuclear disaster in the present time. Take another example, in 2004 Tsunami, recent earthquakes in many countries namely China, Indonesia and Taiwan; Typhoons (happenings in South East Asia region) and Hurricane (in many other places such as New Orleans). These happenings, to the authors' mind, are the consequence of human greed and the over exploitation of the earthly resources. Hence moderation is the key success factor to prevent human sufferings and for the future generation to achieve happiness in this life and thereafter.

Seeking for Advice and Continuous Learning

On the subject of continuous learning, it is very important for his son "to consult jurists frequently" and "learn from men of experience and intelligence who are understanding and wise". Avoidance of friendship with "extravagant or stingy people" would help his son not in receiving wrong advice and hence not being influenced to think and to do wrong deeds. "Sit down often with scholars and seek their advice and company" he said. The father advised his son to consider noble people who are advanced in age and who have sincere intentions to be his adviser. He also stressed that, "Select them for your service and be benevolent toward them."

Syura (Consultation)

Is the prime form of decision-making, and in doing so the Qur'an calls upon all Muslim leaders to consult those who are affected or more knowledgeable and well-informed about the issue at hand. Hence, Syura is a methodology employing mutual consultation amongst leaders and followers in matters of importance, particularly when the nature of the problem is critical and warrants a judicious solution (Al-Naquib al-Attas, 2007; Naceur, 1994).

In the business world of today, most corporations would not encourage consultation process to help them in their decision makings because they seem to have no time in catching up with fast changing world due to the information explosion. They would rather focus on rapid business growth with projected expectation of significant profitability on the short term basis. Regrettably, in the midst of the global financial crisis, the worse unemployment since the Great Depression, US corporations continue to offshore jobs and to replace their remaining US employees with lower paid foreigners on work visas. It is also true that the off-shoring of jobs, the bailout of rich bankers, and war deficits are destroying the value of the US dollar.

Foresight

The father advised his son that before making his decision on any task, it is worthwhile for him to consider the outcome of the result. If he foresaw that the result would be healthy and sound, then it would be wise to proceed with the project. If not, further consultation with people of great insight, knowledge, and experience about the matter was necessary. The authors feel that in any decision making in business, it is worthwhile to have a wider view of the subject matter and to have an appropriate risk management of the project before implementing it.

Understanding The Meaning of Sin

"Avarice is the first sin that man commits against His Lord that the sinners is disgraced." said his father. Thus, God says in the Qur'an: "Those who are preserved from their own avarice are, indeed, generous." Many sins that were spelled out in the letter and that his son should be aware of and refrained from them as illustrated in table1.

Table-1 shows some examples of sins that an Islamic leader should be aware and refrained from.

The authors agreed with the father that any sin as illustrated above is bad for the organisation behaviour of a corporation. The leader should set a good example for his organization and discourage everybody from committing sin. In the modern world whereby the previous American President, Bill Clinton, committed sex

Table.1 Examples of Sins that an Islamic leader should be aware and refrain from

| | |
|---|---|
| Do not consider any sin lightly | Do not break a promise |
| Do not support an envious person | Do not fear pride of others |
| Do not pity a sinner | Show no anger |
| Do not connive with an enemy | Do not be ostentatious |
| Do not trust calumniator | Do not walk arrogantly |
| Do not rely upon a deceiver | Do not justify a stupidity |
| Do not conclude a friendship with an immoral person | Do not neglect your search for the other world |
| Do not follow a seducer | Do not waste your day in finding fault |
| Do not praise a hypocrite | Do not close your eyes to an evil doer |
| Have contempt for nobody | Do not seek the reward of other world in this world |
| Do not refuse a poor petitioner | Do not take any forbidden property |
| Do not try to improve a worthless person | Do not be a wasteful spender |
| Pay no attention to buffoons | |

scandal in the 1990s can be said to be a bad example of being a leader of the American people.

Islamic Management Ethics (Naceur , 1994).

Working for the Day of Judgement

With regard to work, the father asked his son, “to apply yourself to thinking of your resurrection and the place where you will be going, as well as to the things that will be your concern and for which you will held responsible.” This is, to the authors, the basic principle of the Islamic work ethics which is of a self reliance and a self-regulatory process because “on the Day of Judgement, God will protect you and save you from His retribution and painful punishment.” In this letter, the father strongly stressed that through religion (Islam), man’s knowledge of God and respect for Him grows with God’s help, and his son would attain the highest rank in the other world.

Trusting One’s Subjects or Followers

The father stressed the importance of trusting the people who works for his son and that his son should not form any bad opinion on his subjects before discovering the real matter with them. For in Islam, “it is a crime to suspect innocent persons and to have a bad opinion on them”.

In spirituality, Satan, the enemy of Allah, would try to gain entry to any human’s affairs (since we are the Khalifah-Vicegerent of Allah). He will cause one so much grief on suspecting people around oneself that it would disturb the pleasure of one’s life. Having a good opinion of others would give strength and rest that one would be

competent enough to handle one’s affairs to one’s satisfaction. Consequently, when people noticed, “your good (religious attitude), they will respect your rule and reverence for your government. They will be friendly and trust in your justice”.

Similarly in an organization where a leader distrusts his subordinate, a lot of energy and time would be required to check and balance the employee’s outputs and sometimes it is a time consuming process of which conflict management has to be employed for further remedial action. A trustful leader would empower and motivate his subordinates to perform diligently without hesitation and doubts.

Taking Personal Charge of the Business

In addition to have good opinion of the men around him and his kindness to his subjects, the father encouraged his son to be responsibly making enquiries and investigating all affairs of his business including taking personal charge of the business of his officials, protecting his subjects and looking after the things that sustain and benefit them. These dedicated checking of the situation would reaffirm him on the actual status of the affairs so that he can further improve and better the business.

In spirituality, his son is bestowed with the Governor’s task and responsibility by Allah, he must have pure intentions and paid special attention to improving himself as a person for he will be held responsible for his deeds, that he will be “rewarded for his good deeds, and punished for his evil deeds.”

In modern day businesses, quality control on the process of the business, and internal and external audits are very essential for the transparency and reliability of the business. In theory, a good corporation would reflect

the performance of a leader with his compensation package. If the company business is performing well, the leader would be credited with rewards and if the company is performing badly, most benefits would be refrained from him. But in practice, the credit crunch in 2007 resulted in many big corporations facing bankruptcies, however, when the US Government bailed them out with financial aids, the executives took the opportunities to pay themselves with compensation package which did not reflect with the poor performance of the corporations. This kind of behaviour is unethical and in contradictory to the Islamic management ethics.

Executing royal authority

With regard to authority, the father advised his son to show kindness to his subjects as Allah has been benevolent to him. In his letter, he said to his son that, "You should know that royal authority belongs to Allah..." In order to carrying out his duties, his son has to let his intention be with God and that his certainty of Him is sincere. With a compassionate heart, his son has to perform his duty for the interest of his people according to the guiding principle of Allah.

In the business world, the executives are hired by the corporation to run the business and whatever the decisions they made are for the interests of the owner (the shareholders and investors). The highest authority is the business owner. The interests of the most business owners are to maximize profit for them, and in most cases; the employees' welfares are not considered and are neglected. For example, low pay, poor living standards, child labour and others are very common in many large corporations. However, in the Islamic management ethics context, all human beings are held responsible to do good deeds for the God Almighty pleasure and not the business owners.

Executing Justice and Punishments

The father advised his son to respect and to favour those who live by the jurisprudence, Islam (religion) and the book of God (Qur'an). He said, "For the best ornament of man is judicial interpretation of the faith; search for it, admonish others to follow it, and obtain knowledge of how one can get close to God." To the author's thinking, application of justice and punishment according to the Shariah's law is of great importance for the father also said that, "Do not be swayed from justice according to your likes and dislikes, either on behalf of a person close to you or on behalf of one remote from you." The father strongly recommended that Religion (Islam) is the leader and guide to everything that is good. When his son applied punishment, it is of great importance that his

action is guided by the well-known tradition (Sunnah) and that he should kept away from innovation and doubts. The father said, "Allah has made it your duty to be just to them, to see it that His rights and punishments are observed in connection with them..." Consequently, his son should not disregard or postpone punishments for it would spoil his reputation of being a just governor. Furthermore, the father forewarned that, "God will punish you in connection with the duties He has placed upon you (if you do not take care of them properly). He will make them your concern and hold you responsible for them and reward you for (good deeds) you have done or (the evil deeds you have) not done.

In today's business world, the Asian crises (1999) and the credit crunch (financial crises in 2007), show examples of the large investment corporations' irresponsibility and injustice in dealing with their business activities. When the US Governments' attempt to bail them out from their financial problems, the executives of the large corporations took the opportunity to enrich themselves by claiming their compensation packages (huge amount of money) instead of using the money to helping out the unemployed and aiding the falling economy because of the corporations' business failures. The authors feel that the executives in their leadership were in full authority to do bad deeds and were not accountable for the bad performance which resulted in the bankruptcies of large banks and trading companies. This behaviour is in contradiction to the Islamic management ethics in which proper punishment should be applied to people responsible for bad deeds.

Performing a Task diligently

In daily activities, it is very interesting to see that the father encourages his son to, "always ask your lord whether you should do a particular thing. Finish the work you have to do today and do not postpone it until tomorrow." The father said that accumulation of many days' undone work would eventually "make you ill". We agree wholeheartedly on this fatherly advice for this behaviour would help one to reduce work stress that is very common in this modern day, and completing work each day would contribute to the well-being of an individual as well as the good performance of an organization.

Keeping one's promise by fulfilling one's agreement

The father advised his son that if he has promised to do a certain good deeds for his people, he should keep his promise and fulfil his agreement. He wanted his son not to tell lies for he said that, "Lying is the beginning of crimes and falsehood and calumny their ends".

Table 2. Characteristic of An Islamic Leader

| An Islamic Leader should possess the following: | |
|--|---|
| Core Values of Islamic Personality and Leadership | Islamic Management Ethics |
| Faith; integrity; discipline; dignity; giving (wealth distribution); moderation; seeking for advice and continuous learning; foresight; understanding the meaning of sins and refrain from them. | Working for the day of judgement; trusting one's subjects or followers; taking personal charge of the business; executing royal authority; executing justice and punishments; performing a task diligently, keeping one's promise by fulfilling agreement; communicating with subjects or followers; spending fruitful time with his officials (coaching and mentoring) and treating his subjects well. |

Communicating With His Subjects or Followers

The father wanted his son to be kind and helpful to his subjects especially to the weak. His son should maintain close contact with good, righteous and honest people and also kept in touch with the blood relatives. It is very important for him to be humbled and that he allowed people to see him so that people could see his friendliness and "smiling countenance".

Spending Fruitful Time with His Officials (Coaching and Mentoring)

The father advised his son to spend fruitful time with his officials who served him in the office as well as those who served him at his residence. He said, "Lend your ear and your eye, your mind and your intellect, to the things of that sort he presents to you. Go over it again and think it over."

In the business world, the leader should have patience to listen to his employees so that the difficulties faced by the subordinates can be discussed and hopefully solved together.

Furthermore, with all the information he gathers from his subordinates, a true leader is likely to be able to reason, judge and perceive. At the end of the day, a leader would empower his subordinates to do a good job while at the same time to maintain a fair amount of supervision.

Treat his subjects well

To have strong support from his subjects, the father said, "Supervise the registers and contracts of the soldiers. Augment their salaries. Give them a good livelihood, and God will thus remove their indigence". He assured his son that he would find success, well being and prosperity with God's will.

In sum, an Islamic leader should possess the core values of Islamic personality and leadership and he should also practice Islamic management ethics. Table 2 shows the characteristics of an Islamic leader.

CONCLUSIONS

Islamic leadership encourages leaders to practice the value of faith, integrity, self-discipline, self-restraint, loving-kindness and giving; leaders are also encouraged to refrain from sinful acts and live life in moderation. In this paper, the authors describe a benevolent father who is a good role model for his son in advising him to do the right things according to the guiding principles of Islam. Referring to the Prophet Muhammad's leadership paradigm, the father stressed very importantly the dual role that his son should adhere. They are:

(1) how to be a good Muslim as a servant of Allah (A believer).

(2) how to be a good leader as a Khalifah-Vicegerent for Allah (by applying the Islamic Management Ethics) (see also Appendix 1).

The authors feel that in this modern world, if all the people can adopt the concept of Tasawwur Islam (Islamic worldview) in their daily livings, the whole world will be a peaceful, prosperous and safe place to live in now and hereafter.

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Appendix 1: Tasawwur Islam (Islamic Worldview)

