

A Comparative Study of Ethical Leadership Principles: The Prophetic Model and Contemporary Leadership Ethics

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Abstract

With a growing awareness and concern about corruption, abuse of power, organizational misconduct, and loss of public trust in institutions around the world, the study of ethical leadership has emerged as one of the most prominent fields of study in the discipline of leadership. In modern theories of leadership, integrity, accountability, fairness, transparency and servant leadership are considered to be key values of a good leader. The ideas have become well known in the field of management, and organizational study, but the example of the Prophet (saw) is a complete and everlasting example of ethical leadership, which is over 1400 years old and predates modern concepts. In this research the author critically analyzes the principles of ethical leadership found in the Prophetic model (Uswah Hasanah ﷺ) and contrasts them with the ethical leadership in the modern era. The study reflects on, through qualitative and analytical research, the important ethical issues such as integrity, justice, accountability, consultation, compassion, service and moral responsibility. Prophetic model combines ethical behaviour with spiritual responsibility, social responsibility and social welfare, providing a more comprehensive understanding of ethical leadership. The study concludes that the Prophetic leadership paradigm is still very pertinent to the current leadership challenges and can play a great

role in the discussions on ethical governance and leadership of today's organizations.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Prophetic Leadership, Uswah Hasanah, Islamic Leadership, Servant Leadership, Leadership Ethics, Organizational Ethics, Moral Leadership

Introduction

Leadership is a basic aspect that helps to form societies, institutions, organizations and civilizations. Leadership has been shown to be important in social stability, political success, economic development and cultural advancement throughout the history. But the lack of ethics in leadership can result in corruption, injustice, exploitation and societal deterioration. Thus, the study and practice of ethical leadership has become a major focus of research and practice.

A lot of leadership failures have occurred in the 21st century in political, business, and social institutions. A series of financial, misuse of authority, unethical corporate practices and political scandals have given impetus to the scholarly research on ethical leadership. The importance of effective leadership is growing and it is suggested that in addition to being technically competent, leaders should have good moral character and ethical commitment. In Islam leadership is not only a managerial role or a position of command. Actually, it is considered as Amanah (trust) given by Allah. A leader is held accountable not only to society but to God as well. This understanding is a key difference between Islamic leadership and other forms of secular leadership. Prophet Muhammad's (saws) life is the epitome of ethical leadership in Islam. His leadership brought about a unified and cohesive tribal community with a strong sense of morality. His behavior was honest, just, merciful, humble, consultative, accountable and service-oriented towards humanity. The Qur'an depicts him as the perfect example for those who believe:

Yes, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for all those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and remember Allah frequently. (Qur'an 33:21).

The Qur'an teaches that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is a perfect model for the people of the world:

In fact, in the Messenger of Allah, you have an excellent example for those who have faith in Allah and the Last Day and remember Allah frequently. (Qur'an 33:21)

This verse is the basis for making the Prophetic personality the universally accepted model of guidance, including social, moral and leadership dimensions. Even more so the relevance of Uswah Hasanah ﷺ is increasing in this age where the leadership is being tested at a global, national and organisational level. Prophet Muhammad (saws) embodied qualities of leadership that are truly useful in today's society, for example: justice, consultation, mercy, humility, honesty and accountability.

This study is intended to critically explore the ethical basis of leadership based on Uswah Hasanah (Rasulullah (saws)) and in comparison nowadays. It aims to examine the ethical vision of the Prophetic model that brings together moral excellence, social responsibility and spiritual awareness, and to see how it can be applied to leadership issues of today. This research aims at comparing the ethical bases of the contemporary leadership theories and the ethical principles for the Prophetic model, looking at both the similarities and the differences and bringing them together in the consideration of the issues of leadership in today's world.

Literature Review

In the last 30 years, the topic of ethical leadership has received a lot of attention in organizational studies. Brown, Treviño, and Northouse argue that ethical leadership is manifested in personal behavior, interpersonal ethics and ethical decision-making.

Brown and Treviño (2006) contend that ethical leaders inspire their followers by demonstrating fairness, honesty, trustworthiness, and ethical behavior. Likewise, Northouse (2022) states that ethical leadership fosters respect, service, justice, honesty, and community building.

Servant Leadership, as presented by Robert Greenleaf, is a theory that states that a good leader's focus should be on the needs of followers, not personal

interests. There are many similarities between this theory and Islamic teachings on leadership as service and not domination.

Another dimension of transformational leadership theory is moral influence, which involves building a vision, values, and ethical manner to inspire followers. But critics say that transformational leadership doesn't always offer clear ethical guidelines for assessing leadership behavior.

In contrast Islamic scholarship believes in leadership in a moral and spiritual manner. Islamic leaders, like Beekun, Badawi and Ali, have stressed that the basis of Islamic leadership lies in Tawhid (the belief in the Oneness of God), justice, accountability, consultation, and serving humanity.

While interest in Islamic leadership studies is growing, there is considerable lack of comparative studies looking into the relationship between contemporary ethical leadership theories and the Islamic leadership model of the Prophet (saws). The aim of this study is to fill that void.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in two key theories.

Firstly, Contemporary Ethical Leadership Theory which focuses on ethical behavior's, moral decision making, fairness and accountability in organizations. The second foundation is the Prophetic Leadership Model based on the Qur'an, Sunnah and the biography of Prophet Muhammad (saws). This model integrates moral elements and at the same time stresses spiritual responsibility and social duty. The study assumes that the effectiveness of leadership cannot be fully appreciated without the ethical aspects. Hence, the ethical leadership is used as a main analysis lens in the examination of the theories and the Prophetic model.

Ethics in Leadership in The Prophetic Model

Integrity and Trustworthiness (Al-Amanah)

One of the qualities that is widely known as an effective leader is integrity. Trust is considered as the basis of effective relationships between leader and follower by contemporary scholars. Even before he became a prophet, the people of Makkah already knew Muhammad ' as "Al-Amin" (The Trustworthy). He was known for his integrity, even among his detractors.

Trustworthiness was not just a personal quality, but an attribute of good leadership that had a bearing on his mission in the public eye. The Prophet was not like many of the leaders of today who rely on institutional authority, but he was one who acquired authority through moral credentials and exemplary character. His example proves that moral authority can be a more effective force than the force of law.

Justice and Fairness

Justice is one of the most central issues in the context of Islamic leadership and in the theories of ethical leadership in the contemporary context. Justice is one of the things repeatedly ordered in the Qur'an for the believers:

Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence and giving to relatives' (Qur'an 16:90).

The Prophet (saw) was always fair towards all people, irrespective of their tribe, class, or family or something else. His well-known statement about his daughter Fatimah shows his unbiased justice: If Fatimah, daughter of Muhammad, stole, then I would cut off her hand. This is a recognition of the need for equality before the law and freedom from favouritism in relation to true ethical leadership.

Compassion and Mercy

The importance of emotional intelligence and empathy as a leadership trait is becoming more of a focus in contemporary leadership studies. In the Prophetic model, however, the gift of empathy is extended to include fullness of mercy.

The Qur'an says that the Prophet Muhammad (saws) is:

"A mercy for all the worlds" (21:107).

He was not only merciless towards his followers, but also his enemies, children, women, the poor, the minorities and even animals. His leadership was grounded on a principle of respect for human dignity and human welfare.

Consultation and Participatory Decision-Making (Shura)

Participation and stakeholder engagement is a key feature of modern democratic leadership. Likewise, Islam encourages consultation by the principle of consultation (Shura).

The Qur'an encourages believers to live in consultation with one another (42:38).

The Prophet (saws) often sought their opinion on issues of politics, war and society. He followed the majority opinion even though he did not like it at the battle of Uhud. This is an indication of the value of collective wisdom and participation in good leadership.

Humility and Servant Leadership

Humility was one of the most amazing qualities of Prophetic leadership. He was the head of state, the military leader, the judge and the spiritual leader, but he never acted arrogant, he did ordinary things, helped his family, and got along with people without getting uppity.

His statement: A people's servant is its leader. This mirrors a Servant Leadership theory that is very similar to today's. The Prophetic approach, however, is different from the models of servant leadership in today's world because of its emphasis on spiritual values and accountability to God.

Accountability before God

One of the most unique traits of Prophetic Leadership is Spiritual Accountability. Today's ideals of responsible leadership focus on the responsibilities to the public, the opinion, the stakeholders and the laws. These mechanisms are significant but can be problematic at times of poor supervision. Accountability before Allah is an extra dimension added to Islam.

The Prophet (saw) taught that every leader will be asked about his followers. This is a belief that establishes an internal moral mechanism, without requiring external oversight. The comparative analysis of contemporary leadership ethics will be practiced.

Areas of Convergence

The Prophetic model shares similarities with several ethical principles that are part of contemporary leadership theories. Both focus on honesty, fairness, integrity, responsibility, service, trustworthy, and respect human dignity. They agree that ethical conduct increases the effectiveness of the organization and contributes to its continued success. They both agree that role modeling and

moral influence is crucial in leadership. Many of today's ideas about ethical leadership are based on universal moral values, as revealed by these similarities.

Areas of Divergence

Although there are many similarities, there are also significant differences. In general, current moral leadership is based on secular philosophy, organizational efficiency and social norms. The ethics requirements may differ from one culture to another and from one institution to another. Prophetic leadership, on the other hand, is based on God's revelation. Moral values are deemed to be objective and universal, not socially constructed. Additionally, the leadership theories of the modern world generally emphasize the result of the organization, while Prophetic leadership emphasizes both the result of the organization, and the spiritual well-being. The Prophetic model also focuses more on shaping moral character, purifying the self and taking responsibility for the person before God.

How the prophetic model of leadership is relevant today

There is a wide range of ethical problems in the modern world such as corruption, misuse of power, polarization, inequality in economic development, environmental issues, loss of faith in institutions, etc.

- The Prophetic leadership model provides solutions to these challenges.
- Trustworthiness is its focus, and it can reinforce the credibility of institutions.
- It is dedicated to justice, which could help to strengthen governance systems.
- It can encourage the participation of everyone in decision making because of its consultative approach.
- Its caring spirit can help to build a sense of community.

Above all, the principle of accountability to God can produce leaders who are ethical even in the absence of external accountability systems. This makes the Prophetic model of administration very relevant today in the fields of politics, education, business and community development.

Conclusion

By comparing and contrasting ethical leadership principles with those of Uswah Hasanah (saws) and those of modern day leadership ethics, it is clear that ethics is the bedrock of sustainable and effective leadership. Modern theories of leadership have made important contributions to the understanding of ethical behavior, and the organizational responsibility, the relationship between leaders and followers, but the Prophetic model provides a more comprehensive and multidimensional model, incorporating the moral, social and spiritual aspects. Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ leadership is an example of the values of service, responsibility and accountability that are essential to good leadership. His principles of honesty, justice, compassion, humility, consultation, and trustworthiness are timeless and universal ethical principles that are relevant across all cultures and throughout history. Many of the concepts of leadership today which overlaps with the Prophetic model are such as servant leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership and ethical leadership. The Prophet's (saws) approach to serving others, acting with integrity, fostering fairness, and valuing human dignity are examples of principles that we still see in practice today, but were first practised by the Prophet (saws) centuries ago, long before they became the subject of formal study in leadership theory. But, the Prophetic leadership paradigm is not limited to the current ethical theories, it also adds divine accountability. Normally the modern leadership concept is focused on accountability towards institutions, laws and society, but in Islam it also includes accountability towards Allah. This spiritual factor fosters the development of internal moral awareness, helping leaders to be ethical even in the absence of external oversight. In a time of leadership failures, corruption, social injustice and loss of faith in institutions, the Prophetic model offers valuable insights for the formation of leaders who are not only competent but also morally responsible. The way ethical excellence, social welfare and spiritual awareness are woven together in Uswah Hasanah ﷺ forms a one-of-a-kind and universal model of leadership.

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