
ELEMENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF IDEAL ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Leaders' role is crucial for the socio-political development of a society. Leadership in Islam is focused to do good for the society. Islam sees every human being as a “Shepherd of a herd” and a leader. This is a qualitative study based on analytical approach with an aim to explain the key elements and attributes of Islamic concept of leadership in the light of guidelines provided by the Holy Quran and Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW). Data sources used for this study are mainly secondary and the material has been gathered from the worthy verses of The Holy Quran, Hadith, books, and research articles that are helpful in developing clarity in thinking about different aspects of the subject. Findings of this study reveal that accountability, justice, trust and consultation are four important elements of Islamic leadership. The study also informs that the qualities of an ideal Islamic leader include taqwah, patience, dependence on Allah, knowledge and wisdom, spirit of sacrifice, honoring the pledge, and excellence.

Keywords: Holy *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, Islam, Leader, Leadership, Society

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Introduction

Leadership is about the efforts of a leader to engage and control the behavior of a follower in a particular situation to achieve common goals of the society. It takes effective leadership performance from its followers.⁽¹⁾ Leaders can force their followers to perform with the following strategies: membership, risk of power, influence, authority, and legal claim.⁽²⁾ Leadership is seen as a potential basis and as a priority plan for organizations to gain competitive advantage. So that's why, organizations spend a lot of money for leadership development.⁽³⁾

Leadership involves social interactions and communication practices as well as the process of influencing individuals to achieve organizational goals.⁽⁴⁾ Leadership has great importance in organizing a better and secure human life and it is the process that motivates the individual and society to attain the desired goals.⁽⁵⁾ Therefore, it has a significant function in the progress of a society and state.⁽⁶⁾

Leader's equivalent word in Arabic is "Imam" who is entrusted to perform the administrative duties of a society as well as of state. Leaders are judged by their leadership qualities, including personality traits and the ability to motivate others to achieve certain goals. Quran and Sunnah are the important sources to determine the attributes of an effective leader. The best example for the Muslims to follow is of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) in the affairs of this world and the hereafter, as directed in Surat al-Ahzab:

⁽¹⁾ Abdul Manaf, Halimah, and Ahmad Martadha Mohamed. "Malay business leaders' characteristics and their success in business." *Journal of Governance and Development*, Vol. 10, No. 1, (2014). Pp. 109-135.

⁽²⁾ Western, Simon. *Leadership: A critical text*. Sage, 2019.

⁽³⁾ Day, David V., and John Antonakis. "The future of leadership." *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of the psychology of leadership, change, and organizational development* (2013). 221.

⁽⁴⁾ Northouse, Peter G. *Introduction to leadership: Concepts and practice*. Sage Publications, 2019.

⁽⁵⁾ Ahmad, Rohana Binti, A. M. B. Mohamed, and Halimah Binti Abdul Manaf. "The relationship between transformational leadership characteristic and succession planning program in the Malaysian public sector." *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (2017). Pp. 19-30.

⁽⁶⁾ Omar, Mahyudin, and N. H. Abu Samah. "The basis of leadership in Islam." *Advances in Natural and Applied Science*, Vol. 6, No. 8, (2012). Pp. 1399-1404.

“There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last day and (who) remembers Allah often”.⁽⁷⁾

This verse clearly indicates that those who follow the Prophet (SAW) as the best example will receive Allah's blessings and rewards in the Hereafter. Since, the Holy Prophet (SAW) exhibited highest standards of leadership in every walk of life, the characteristics of an ideal leader are to be found in His Holy personality. Thus, the ideals of "Islamic Management" are to be derived from the life of the Holy Prophet (SAW). However, according to Islamic concepts leaders and followers are made by Allah to facilitate the humans to run the affairs of society. This is very well explained by the Holy Quran:

“Is it they who would portion out the Mercy of your Lord? It is we who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world: and we raise some of them above others in ranks so that some may command work from others. But the Mercy of your Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass”.⁽⁸⁾

Abdullah Ibn Umar (R.A.) described that the Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) said about the leadership in these words:

“Behold! Each of you is a guardian, and each of you will be asked about his subjects”.⁽⁹⁾

As Muslims, we are leaders in various matters of life as we can see in Hadith with the words of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW):

“All of you are shepherds, and each of you will be asked concerning his flock”.⁽¹⁰⁾

A leader can be a follower of someone other leader and a follower can be leader of some people. However, it is determined by Allah that who will lead whom. From the above Hadith, it can be concluded that leadership is a great responsibility and effective leaders are those who serve the community and

⁽⁷⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Ahzab, 33:21.

⁽⁸⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Az-Zukhruf, 43:32.

⁽⁹⁾ Sahih Bukhari, 3.733.

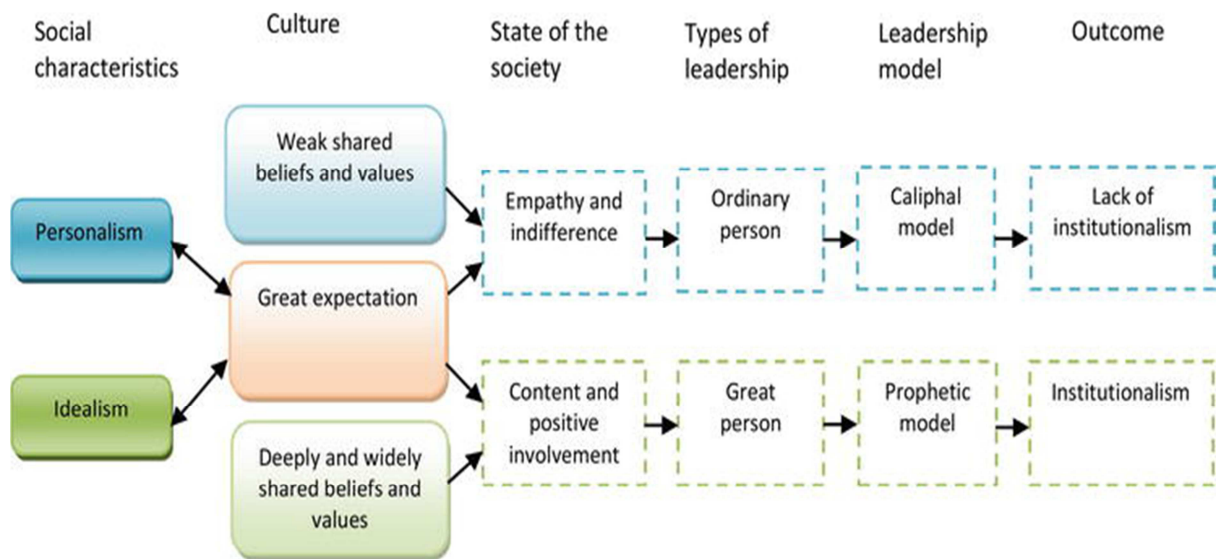
⁽¹⁰⁾ Sahih Bukhari, 893.

society. Effective leaders are simple, truthful, honest, accountable, pious, humble, and they always fear the Allah Almighty.⁽¹¹⁾

Islamic Model of Leadership

Islamic model of leadership developed by Ali (2009)⁽¹²⁾ and Ali & Weir (2005)⁽¹³⁾ that describes two basic types of leaders: ordinary and great. The great persons of a society are raised to ideal leadership roles when the culture of a society is based on deep and widely shared beliefs and values. A good and positive society is the one in which its individual members actively participate for the common good. Such a society is able to bring great persons into leadership roles, who then have the prophetic model of leadership before them to establish the new institutions and strengthen the existing ones.

Figure 1: *Islamic Model of Leadership*



Source: Ali, A. J., & Weir, D. (2005). *Islamic perspectives on management and organization*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Nature of Leadership in Islam

⁽¹¹⁾ Murtadha Gusau, "The Qualities of a Good Leader in Islam", *Premium Times*, February 15, 2019.

⁽¹²⁾ Ali, Abbas J. "Islamic perspectives on leadership: a model." *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (2009). Pp. 160-180.

⁽¹³⁾ Ali, Abbas J., and David Weir. "Islamic perspectives on management and organization." (2005). Pp. 410-415.

Leadership is crucial for building a society, nation and state. Therefore, Islamic leadership drives the development of Islamic society and state.⁽¹⁴⁾ The importance of leadership cannot be disputed because without it, all administrative matters could come to a standstill. Therefore, Islam attaches great importance to the concept of leadership even in small groups.⁽¹⁵⁾ The Prophet (SAW) says:

“When three persons set out on a journey, they should appoint one of them as their leader”

In Islam, leadership is about a trust. The leader is given the task of leading a group of people as well as administering a society. The leader is responsible for his/her every act and accountable before the public or a society.⁽¹⁶⁾ The accountability and trust go hand in hand. There are two stages of accountability and trust. A leader is entrusted by God and is accountable to God for his/her trust. Leaders having the responsibility of serving are also answerable to their people. Leadership is also a collective action.⁽¹⁷⁾ Furthermore, consultation and justice are also one of the basic elements of Islamic leadership.

Elements of Islamic Leadership

Islam is a complete code of life and hence provides solid basis for leadership. Since leadership is an important mechanism to publicize the Islamic teachings or *Da'wah*. Likewise, it is one of the most important instruments for the development of an ideal society based on accountability, consultation, justice, and trust.⁽¹⁸⁾ All of these elements are related to each other.

I- Accountability (Ihtesab)

A leader is first answerable to God and then to the people. The Holy Quran says:

⁽¹⁴⁾ Faris, Nezar, and Mohamad Abdalla. *Leadership in Islam: Thoughts, processes and solutions in Australian organizations*. Springer, 2017.

⁽¹⁵⁾ AlSarhi, N. S., Lailawati M. Salleh, Z. A. Mohamed, and A. A. Amini. "The West and Islam perspective of leadership." *International affairs and global strategy*, 18, (2014). Pp. 42-56.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Fozia, Maryam, Ayesha Rehman, and Ayesha Farooq. "Entrepreneurship and leadership: An Islamic perspective." *International Journal of Economics, Management and Accounting*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (2016), Pp. 15-47.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Abbasi, Abdus Sattar, Kashif Ur Rehman, and Amna Bibi. "Islamic leadership model an accountability perspective." *World Applied Sciences Journal*, Vol 9, No. 3, (2010). Pp. 230-238.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Rafiki, Ahmad. "Islamic leadership: Comparisons and qualities." *Digital Leadership-A New Leadership Style for the 21st Century*, (2020). Pp. 1-16.

“To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth, and whether you disclose what is in your own selves or conceal it, Allah will call you to account for it. Then He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom He wills. And Allah is Able to do all things”.⁽¹⁹⁾

The Holy Quran repeatedly warns and reminds its readers that one day they will be standing in front of Allah for their accountability. For instance, Allah says:

“..... O you who believe! Fear Allah, and let every soul consider what it has forwarded for the morrow (The Day of Judgment), and fear Allah. Allah is aware of what you do”.⁽²⁰⁾

On an occasion, The Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) declared that:

“I am the first one to submit to the will of Almighty”.⁽²¹⁾

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also said:

“If a person dies having cheated the people, he/she was entrusted with, he/she will not smell the scent of paradise”.⁽²²⁾

He (SAW) also noted that it is a great sin for a leader to assign a person who is not qualified on the position while other is more qualified to do the job to him/her.

II- Consultation (Shura)

For an Islamic leader, consultation means to share and exchange the views and opinions for every important matter. An efficient leader is someone who has the quality to discuss every important matter with his followers. Islam also regulates the formal body of power for the mutual consultation in all the matters and affairs of the society and state. So, this is called as “Majlis-e-Shura”. It is evident from history of Islamic leadership that all important decisions were taken and implemented after doing consultations with the followers. The Holy Quran orders the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) for the consultation with others to find out the solutions:

“And make counsel with them in the affair; so, when you have decided, then place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who trust.”⁽²³⁾

⁽¹⁹⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:284.

⁽²⁰⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Hashr, 59:18.

⁽²¹⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-An’am, 6:14.

⁽²²⁾ Muslim, 2000.

III- Justice (Adl)

In Islam, justice (Adl) has great importance. Justice is to give due and equal rights to others. Doing justice is also a moral quality and character of a person. Justice implies that a balance in the allocation of rights and duties is created. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) highlighted the importance of justice in these words:

“There are seven categories of people whom God will shelter under His shade on the Day when there will be no shade except His. (One is) the just leader.”⁽²⁴⁾

This is the responsibility of the leader to ensure rule of law and provide justice to the people. On the day of judgment, Allah will be most merciful and kind with those leaders who have been kind and just to the people. The Holy Quran says:

“..... O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So, follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted”.⁽²⁵⁾

Allah Almighty said in Quran:

“God commands justice and fair dealing.”⁽²⁶⁾

From this verse, it can be concluded that Allah directly commands Muslims to do justice and deal fairly with the fellow human beings.

On another occasion, Quran says:

“..... O you who believe, stand up as witnesses for God in all fairness, and do not let the hatred of a people deviate you from justice. Be just: This is closest to piety, and beware of God. Surely God is aware of all you do”.⁽²⁷⁾

IV- Trust (Amaanah)

Trust (amaanah) has two meanings in Islam: general and specific. In general, it deals with commands and prohibitions in entirety. It is written in the Holy Quran:

⁽²³⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Imran, 3:159.

⁽²⁴⁾ Sahih Muslim

⁽²⁵⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surat An-Nisa, 4:135.

⁽²⁶⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah An-Nahl, 16:90.

⁽²⁷⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Ma’idah, 5:8.

“Truly, We did offer al-Amaanah (the trust or moral responsibility or honesty and all the duties which Allah has ordained) to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it (i.e. afraid of Allah’s Torment). But man bore it. Verily, he was unjust (to himself) and ignorant (of its results)”.⁽²⁸⁾

In specific terms, in the Holy Quran, Allah commands the believers to render trust to whom they are due in the following words:

“Indeed, Allah orders you to render the trusts to their owners, and when you judge between the people to judge with justice. Indeed, Allah excellently advises you with it. Indeed, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing”.⁽²⁹⁾

On the betrayal of trust, Allah warns in the Holy Quran:

“..... O you who have believed, do not betray Allah and the Messenger or betray your trusts while you know (the consequence)”.⁽³⁰⁾

Characteristics of Islamic Leadership

The qualities of a great Islamic leader are primarily derived from the four key sources: The Holy Quran; The Holy Prophet; The Wise Caliphs, and; Pious Followers.

The significance of the character and personality of an ideal Islamic leader is that he/she is the role model for any community, society, organization, state. Leader has great authority and power over other fellowmen. Leader is heart of the Jama’ah. The seven qualities of an ideal Islamic leader include the following:

I. Taqwah

From the view point of Islam, Taqwah and spirituality with good manners and characters is the hallmark of an Islamic leader. This must be done by a continuous devotion to develop: love with Allah Almighty; love with the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW), Sahabah (RA), and Ulamah (Sincere Islamic scholars) and; fear of the accountability on the Day of Judgment.

⁽²⁸⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Ahzaab, 33:72.

⁽²⁹⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Ayah an-Nisa, 4:58.

⁽³⁰⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Ayah al-Anfal, 8:27.

“O mankind! Lo! We have created you from male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware”.⁽³¹⁾

The above verse indicates that there is no racism in Islam. This verse seeks to rid mankind of its major evils that have always caused widespread chaos in the world, namely, because of race, color, language, country, and nationality. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also addressed the “insignificance of racism” in his Khutbah (sermon) on the conquest of Makkah. He (SAW) categorized humans into two “Righteous and Sinful”.

II. Tolerance and Patience (Sabr)

Patience (tolerance) is also an important quality of an Islamic leader. Islam is a religion of tolerance and gives freedom of expression. It helps a leader to do things carefully. Patience helps to overcome of the failures to achieve goals and criticism of the opposition. Allah Almighty loves and praises virtue. Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) is the best example of tolerance and patience for an Islamic leader. Allah Almighty says very clearly about the tolerance and patience in the Holy Quran:

“To every People have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow, let them not then dispute with you on the matter, but do invite (them) to your Lord: for you are assuredly on the Right Way. If they do wrangle with you, say, ‘God knows best what it is you are doing’. God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ”.⁽³²⁾

III. Dependence on Allah (Tawakkul)

Dependence on Allah (Tawakkul) means complete believe and faith on Allah Almighty. Any act, desire, plan, policy as well as strategy to achieve the goals must be within the Islamic values. Depending on Allah for the success of these goals is necessary for an Islamic leader because Tawakkul encourages the leader and also helps in taking the effective decisions. Allah Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

⁽³¹⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Hujurat, 49:13.

⁽³²⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Hajj, 22:67.

“And will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever places his trust in Allah, Sufficient is He for him, for Allah will surely accomplish His Purpose: For verily, Allah has appointed for all things a due proportion”.⁽³³⁾

In the above verse, it can be said that always believe and trust on the Allah. only Allah has a power to support and guide in our difficult times. Allah Almighty clears in the Holy Quran that “Tawakkul is not an option rather a requirement”. In this regard, Allah says:

“...And put your trust in Allah if you are believers indeed”.⁽³⁴⁾

IV. Knowledge and Wisdom (Ilm wa Hikma)

Proper Knowledge and wisdom are the basis of effective leadership. A leader must express his or her commitment and dedication towards the goals, mission, targets, and objectives of the Islamic community. It is the duty of every Muslim to seek knowledge.

V. Spirit of Sacrifice

Sacrifice means putting one's personal interest behind the interests of others. This is an act of faith that helps to distribute the material possessions to the needy people for the sake of Allah Almighty. For the leader, it is necessary that he or she always ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of Allah Almighty.

VI. Honoring the Pledge

The Quran commands the believers to honor their pledges in these words:

“Honor your pledges: you will be questioned about your pledges”.⁽³⁵⁾

It is very clear that people negligent of honoring and fulfilling their pledges and promises will have to answer on the Day of Judgment.

“And those who keep pledges whenever they make them”.⁽³⁶⁾

In the above verse, Allah Almighty has told us that those who fulfill their pledges are beloved to Him and they are the truthful and righteous people. It is also clarified that true upright believers are those who fulfill their promises, pledges,

⁽³³⁾ Al-Qur'an, Surah At-Talaq, 65:3.

⁽³⁴⁾ Al-Qur'an: Surah Al-Maaida, 5: 23.

⁽³⁵⁾ Al-Qur'an: Surah Al-Isra, 17:34.

⁽³⁶⁾ Al-Qur'an: Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:177.

agreements, deeds, and pacts. Such people are close to Allah as described in the following verse:

“And those who honor their trusts and their contracts”.⁽³⁷⁾

The following verse of Surah Aal’ Imran Allah states that Allah loves those who respect their promises:

“Indeed! Allah loves those who keep their pledges and are mindful of Him”.⁽³⁸⁾

VII. Ihsan

Ihsan in Arabic means excellence and perfection. The verb for Ihsan is *Hasona* which means to become good. Ihsan implies a higher level of awareness about God. In the Holy Quran, Ihsan means doing the best. The Holy Quran says:

“Those who believe and do righteous good deeds, there is no sin on them for what they ate (in the past), if they fear Allah (by keeping away from His forbidden things), and believe and do righteous good deeds, and again fear Allah and believe, and once again fear Allah and do good deeds with Ihsan (perfection). And Allah loves the good-doers”.⁽³⁹⁾

The Holy Quran further says:

“Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded”.⁽⁴⁰⁾

The Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) asked Muslims to make their best efforts while carrying out a task. He (SAW) said:

“God likes those who excel in doing their tasks”.

Conclusion

To understand the leadership and what makes an effective leader, one needs to examine the abilities and intentions of the leaders; what motivates followers and the interplay of power, ethics and leadership. Further, effective leadership can be measured not only by the material benefits received by an organization, but also by its short-term and long-term social impact on its stakeholders and society

⁽³⁷⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Mu’minun, 23:8.

⁽³⁸⁾ Al-Quran: Surah Aal’ Imran, 3:76.

⁽³⁹⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah Al-Maaida, 5:93.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Al-Qur’an: Surah An-Nahl, 16:90.

in general. Effective leadership is that which fosters human development through proper participation and involvement of followers in a better way. The ultimate objective of effective leadership has to be to build an accountable and efficient management in an organization. Effective leadership has also to work for the realization of popular aspirations of the organization. The aspirations have to be based on a sense of realism and dynamism. For an Islamic society, leadership has a central role to manage the affairs of the society and state. Accountability, justice, trust and consultation are four important elements of Islamic leadership. The study also informs that the qualities of an ideal Islamic leader include taqwah, patience, dependence on Allah, knowledge and wisdom, spirit of sacrifice, honoring the pledge, and excellence.

