

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FOR CONTEMPORARY MANAGERS FROM EARLY ISLAMIC LITERATURE

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Abstract

Islamic literature contains much evidence of the leadership skills of the Prophets of Allāh (pbut) through the ages. Varying situations, environments and cultures to which these Prophets were exposed seemingly parallel seamlessly with the adoption of the most appropriate techniques and styles of leadership needed by them in order to best manage the given situations they were presented with. Prophets such as Nūh, Yūsuf, Mūsa and Muhammad (pbut) thus demonstrated the importance of having the correct management and leadership trait in any situation. In contemporary society, demands on organizations are equally broad leading to the need for the adoption of leadership styles tailored to a similar breadth of situations. Thus, there is a need for researchers to examine various styles and techniques of leadership employed by the Prophets and look at possibilities of transfer of knowledge and skills into the modern world. This research focuses on the qualities required by leaders, how these qualities are articulated and dealt with in Islamic literature and the reasons why certain qualities have been endowed upon certain Prophets. The paper examines a variety of key leadership qualities evident from the Prophets as articulated in the Islamic tradition and draws lessons for leaders in contemporary society.

Introduction

In order to fully appreciate the importance of the Prophets from the perspective of management, it is necessary to first understand the necessity for leadership and the qualities leaders need to demonstrate. Jabnoun (2005) states “*leadership is necessary for the success of any collective.*” The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stated, as cited by Abū Dāwūd, that if there are three embarking on a journey, one of them should be appointed as a leader (Amīr). An example of this can be seen when the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) sent the first migration to Abyssinia and placed Jā’far ibn Abū Ṭālib as the appointed leader of the group. He was famously the spokesperson for them in the court of Al-Najashi (The Negus) and his qualities in speech and communication became evident during that encounter.

It is therefore clear that leadership is an essential element of the organization of the Islamic community as well as an important element in legislation. It is also understood that a centralized leadership be in place, supported by a core group. Roles and responsibilities are then delegated to regional leadership as the nation grows and spreads. This is evident from the example of the migrants to Abyssinia, and further supported by mechanisms for organization during the time of the caliphates, illustrated by the need for regional leadership in North Africa and Spain later in Islamic history (Hourani, 1991).

Existing literature in this field emphasizes that leadership from an Islamic perspective is considered a responsibility and a trust, and cannot be sought. Proponents of this viewpoint often refer to the Hadith cited in Sahih Muslim (Vol. 3, No. 1013). It states, “*Do not ask for a position of authority, for if you are granted this position as a result of your asking for it, you will be left alone and if you are granted it without making any request for it, you will be helped.*” The help referred to is from Allāh. The Hadith is also cited as a proof that people should not seek political office and that this should be by appointment. The system of appointment is dealt with later in this paper.

However, the Qur’ān does detail one exception, the Prophet Yūsuf (pbuh), who asked the king to give him a leadership position over the storehouses of Egypt. Commentators argue that the exception is made for three possible reasons. Firstly, the leadership qualities that Yūsuf (pbuh) possessed were not available in any other person. Yūsuf (pbuh), being a Prophet, recognized that the only possible safeguard against the impending drought that Egypt was facing, would be if he were in charge of the granaries. Secondly, Yūsuf’s (pbuh) integrity was such that he would lead by example in how people should behave in the case of an imminent disaster. Finally, Yūsuf (pbuh) was receiving revelation directly from Allāh and, as such, was able to protect the wheat harvest through additional knowledge others would not have. In this case, he was inspired by Allāh to store the harvest in the ears and not as seed, which would increase the harvest’s durability through resistance to decay.

قَالَ تَزْرَعُونَ سَبْعَ سِنِينَ دَابًّا فَمَا حَصَدْتُمْ فَذَرُوهُ فِي سُنْبُلِهِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ
ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ سَبْعٌ شِدَادٌ يَأْكُلْنَ مَا قَدَّمْتُمْ لَهُنَّ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِمَّا تَحْصِنُونَ

[Yūsuf] said: “*For seven consecutive years, you shall sow as usual and that (the harvest) which you reap you shall leave in ears, (all) - except a little of it which you may eat. Then will come after that, seven hard (years), which will devour what you have laid by in advance for them, (all) except a little of that which you have guarded (stored)*” (12:47-48).

This knowledge was not previously known, coming to Yūsuf (pbuh) by way of inspiration, and has been subsequently practiced to great success in parts of the Muslim world.

Further, the qualities leaders need to possess are also essential, since these qualities will form the basis of the vision, effectiveness, function, productivity, development, momentum and growth of a society. This research paper has thus highlighted and analyzed, through example,

numerous important qualities of a leader and given evidence of their importance highlighted by several Prophets of Allāh.

Fitness for Purpose and Trustworthiness

Two such qualities a manager must possess are fitness for purpose and trustworthiness. These are expounded in the Qur'ān which essentially stipulates two criteria for employee selection, the first being strength (fitness for purpose) and the second, trustworthiness. The Qur'ān cites these in two places and in both cases in relation to the employment of Prophets. The first mentioned is the Prophet Yūsuf (pbuh) who was essentially appointed minister of finance, economy and planning, in place of Al-'Āzīz, who was dead at that time, with a portfolio that extended over agricultural strategic development. The Qur'ān states:

قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلَيْمُ

[Yūsuf] said: "Set me over the storehouses of the land; I will indeed guard them with full knowledge" (12:55).

The second is the Prophet Mūsa (pbuh), who, through his kindness to watering the sheep of two women in the Madyan region of the Arabian Peninsula, was employed by their father, believed to be the Prophet Shu'āib (pbuh), to work for him.

قَالَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا يَا أَبَتِ اسْتَأْجِرْهُ إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَنِ اسْتَأْجَرْتَ الْقَوِيُّ الْأَمِينُ

And said one of them (the two women): "O my father! Hire him! Verily, the best of men for you to hire is the strong, the trustworthy" (28:26).

Importantly, the reference for employment came from one of these two women, who had observed the qualities of the Prophet Mūsa (pbuh) at the well, which the Qur'ān highlights as being strength and trustworthiness. The commentary on this statement expounds this word الْقَوِيُّ "Al-Qawi" (strong), stating that it is not limited to physical strength, although that meaning is also valid, but rather fitness for purpose. Thus, leadership is assigned accordingly. This is made clear by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who appointed Abū Bakr as caliph as he possessed the best credentials for this role, having been the right hand man to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) since the beginning of his mission. However, he appointed Khālid ibn Al-Waleed as the military leader for the Muslims, as he demonstrated skills in warfare management and Muāth ibn Jabal as his viceroy to Yathrib, as he displayed qualities as a gifted preacher (da'iyah), and, as previously mentioned, Jā'far ibn Abū Ṭālib as spokesman and Amīr for the migrants to Abyssinia, as he possessed the best communication skills. Thus, it is both necessary for leadership to be assigned to those most fit to carry out a given task and for leaders themselves to recognize the qualities of future leaders and develop them accordingly.

Lifelong Learning

Another quality of leaders is that they must be lifelong learners, seekers of knowledge. Society is a dynamic, living entity and as such, leaders must be adaptive and changing to work most efficiently and productively. This is evident in numerous instances with the Prophets of Allāh (pbuh). This is applicable to both men and women as the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) emphasized the need for both men and women to be engaged in learning stating that seeking knowledge is an obligation on every Muslim man and Muslim woman.

Notably, by way of example, when the Prophet Mūsa (pbuh) was asked by one of the Children of Israel who the most knowledgeable person on earth, to which the Prophet Mūsa (pbuh) replied that he was, since, according to his knowledge, he was the most

knowledgeable, being the Prophet and being imbued with knowledge from Allāh. However, in response to this claim by Mūsa, the man said that there was another man more knowledgeable than Mūsa (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 8, No. 662). Interestingly, Mūsa's response gives a deep and profound lesson to contemporary leaders that the Qur'ān explains.

وَأَذَى قَالَ مُوسَى لِفَتَاهُ لَا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّىٰ أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُبًا

And (remember) when Mūsa said to his boy-servant: "I will not give up (traveling) until I reach the junction of the two seas or (until) I spend years and years in traveling" (18:60).

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) emphasized the relationship between knowledge and the need for travel, advising the seeking of knowledge even it meant traveling to China. Thus, Mūsa's (pbuh) thirst for knowledge and willingness to travel to seek it out is clear. Mūsa (pbuh) thus embarked upon a difficult and arduous journey to find this more knowledgeable person so that he could learn from him. Having eventually found this man, whose name is given as Al-Khidr, he proceeds to receive instruction, through a series of profound events occurring along a physical journey, about fairness, equity, justice and patience, expounded in detail in Surah Al-Kahf. The lesson for leadership here is clearly evident. In order to succeed, it is imperative that continuous improvement and lifelong learning in an atmosphere of humility and recognition of one's inherent limitations be fundamental in running any organization. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) further articulated the need for lifelong learning saying, "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave." Further evidence of the aspect of humility is further mentioned in the same story, where once Mūsa has found Al-Khidr, he says:

قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَىٰ هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُعَلِّمَنِي مِمَّا عَلَّمْتَ رُشْدًا

Mūsa said to him (Khidr) "May I follow you so that you teach me something of that knowledge (guidance and true path) which you have been taught (by Allah)?" (18:66).

The story of Mūsa (pbuh) here, gives an account of the importance of gaining knowledge from a teacher or scholar. Another mechanism for attaining knowledge is reading. The first revelation of the Qur'ān given to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) states "اقرأ" or "Read!" (96:1). Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) statement "Whoever teaches ten of my followers to read will be set free" was an invitation to learned non-Muslim prisoners of war to educate their Muslim captors.

However, knowledge is not synonymous with wisdom according to Islam. When the Qur'ān states:

وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمْنَاكَ مَا يَشَاءُ

...and Allah gave him [Dawūd] the kingdom and wisdom, and taught him [knowledge] of that which He willed... (2:251).

The distinction between wisdom and knowledge is deliberate, indicating that wisdom is the ability for a person with true leadership potential to apply his knowledge into fruitful action towards an articulated goal or mission. However, the word wisdom precedes the teaching of knowledge, indicating the former is gifted to a person as an inherent quality whereas the latter is acquired through learning. One example of this is the case of the two shepherdesses. Two women were out shepherding with their children in tow. A wolf attacked one of the children and mauled it to death. Both women, however, claimed the living child to be their own. The judge happened to be Dāwūd (pbuh), who ruled, according to the law at the time that the custody of the child belongs to the older of the two women. However, when the women left the courtroom, Dāwūd's son, Sulaimān (pbuh), who was also a Prophet, enquired of the two women as to what had transpired in the courtroom. Upon learning the fate of the child rested upon merely the age of the two women, Sulaimān (pbuh), in a surprise move took out a knife and said he would cut the child in two and give them both half a child in a bid to arrive at a

more equitable resolution. The younger of the two women immediately said that the child belonged to the other woman in an effort to save the child. Sulaimān (pbuh) thus rightfully concluded that such a heartfelt and immediate response could only have come from the child's true mother, and thus gave the child to the younger woman. Hence Sulaimān's (pbuh) ability to apply wisdom is evident and gives a lesson to leaders that they need have the ability to "think outside the box" in problem-solving, rather than merely applying the law.

Knowing your Followers

In addition to the knowledge a leader possesses, and developing that knowledge through a desire for continuous self-improvement, leaders must also have knowledge of those they lead. The Prophets amply demonstrate this. The Prophet Sulaimān (pbuh), for example, was a king and great military leader, whose leadership extended over a nation and a vast army, is highlighted in the Qur'ān as noticing the absence of a single bird, a hoopoe, from a military line-up.

وَتَفَقَّدَ الطَّيْرَ فَقَالَ مَا لِيَ لَا أَرَى الْهُدُودَ أَمْ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَائِبِينَ

He inspected the birds, and said: "What is the matter that I see not the hoopoe? Or is he among the absentees?" (27:20).

The illustration of a commander over a huge force noticing this absence is a significant lesson for leaders being well acquainted with those they lead. It is common, particularly in hierarchical organization structures for the CEO (or equivalent) to be only familiar with the Board of Directors. This is indicative of a corporation that lacks compassion for the workforce, as highlighted by the example of Sulaimān. It is noteworthy that he indicated his awareness of those who had also apologized for their absence in the above verse ("Or is he among the absentees?") as this is synonymous to contemporary meetings, often with the first item on agendas being "apologies for absence". This serves to exemplify the leader's responsibility, accountability and conscientiousness towards his subordinates.

On another occasion, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) visited Al-Ṭā'if to try to preach his message to the townsfolk. However, they rejected him and tried to humiliate him by chasing him out of their town. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) took shelter from them on a nearby farm. The owner of the farm recognized him as they were from the same tribe, Al-Quraish, so he sent his slave with a plate of grapes to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Even though he was bruised, battered and bleeding from his encounter with the people of Al-Ṭā'if, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was gentle and focused in his conversation with the slave. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) enquired as to his name. The slave replied saying that his name was Addas. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) responded saying, "Where are you from, O Addas!" Here is a lesson for leaders. Not only is he gentle, even having suffered at the hands of the people of Al-Ṭā'if, but the quality of remembering those you lead by repeating their name when first you meet them is again clearly recognizable. This is a common tool for recalling the names of people and is taught around the modern world as to how leaders are to engage their followers. The slave replied that he was from Ninevah (see Glossary of Terms). The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) responded saying, "The town of Yūnus ibn Mattah?" The slave was flabbergasted. Arabs were not familiar with Biblical characters, nor their Prophets, let alone their places of residence. Therefore, Addas enquired how he knew of the man, Yūnus ibn Mattah. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) replied saying, "He was a Prophet and I am a Prophet, and we are brothers." The slave recognized that this is no ordinary man with such a manner and intimate knowledge of his homeland and its people. Thus Addas immediately began kissing the hands of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and began to weep.

Thus, the utilization of tools for remembering those you encounter, their names and their faces is an important lesson in leadership. Such a characteristic builds confidence and

motivates those that are led, and inspires them to expand their participation beyond merely their job specification, into a sense of ownership and empowerment through stake holding in the corporation to which they belong.

One final example is that of Ka'b ibn Malik. When he entered Makkah, Al-Abbās bin Abdul Muttalib, the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) uncle, introduced Ka'b to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) for the first time. Al-Abbās knew Ka'b as the latter was a resident of Yathrib and Al-Abbās used to frequent the city on business. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) enquired, "Who is this man?" to which Al-Abbās replied, "This is Ka'b ibn Malik." The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) retorted, "The poet?" Al-Abbās replied in the affirmative. Ka'b later said that the fact the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) knew him was the most precious gift that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) could have given him. Thus, Ka'b was impressed by the leadership quality that his leader possessed of knowing of him, even though they had never even met.

Thus, the ability for a leader to remember the names and faces of those they lead is an important quality that can be learned from these examples as well as maintaining decorum and a gentle tongue even during moments of great stress and adversity. The lesson for leaders is that in so doing, their followers have greater admiration for them and are more motivated in participating in the community that is being led, be it society at large, a corporate environment or even a family unit.

Professional Development of Employees

In addition to having a close knowledge of those you lead, even in a large corporation, Deming (1982) states, "*A good leader is one that makes many leaders.*" This emphasizes that one of the qualities of leadership is to direct energies towards the development of those you lead. The age-old premise that the customer is always right does not hold in an holistic sense, as the good leader is the one who focuses on his employees. Consequently, a motivated workforce will have better customer relations (Hicks, 2004). This can be manifest in many forms, for example, concern for the professional development of your employees, showing your employees that you take an active interest in their activities, demonstrating that you have confidence in their abilities, or even assisting in their duties. From the Prophetic examples, we see many cases of this. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) assisted the Muslims in the building of Masjid-e-Nabawi in Madīna, by helping to carry bricks, illustrating his leadership quality of participating with his followers in their duties. Furthermore, he was always optimistic in the potential of his followers, stating, "*Whosoever said people are in loss is either the most lost among them or one who caused them to be in loss*" (Muslim). He further said, "*The best before Islam are the best after Islam if they learned*" (Bukhari and Muslim), thus recognizing the inherent capabilities of people irrespective of their religion.

Vision

Any organization must have a vision – a positive image of what it can become and an articulation of the path towards that goal (Landsberg, 2004). This was demonstrated in the Prophetic tradition. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), for example, at the lowest point of his mission, his expulsion from Makkah and migration to Madīna, still articulated a vision for the conquest of Islam over a large part of the known world. He said to Surāqah bin Mālik bin Ju'shām that the day will come when he (Surāqah) would be wearing the braces of the Emperor Kisro, the leader of the Persians, the superpower of that age. Surāqah was the man who tried to capture the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) during the migration, but was foiled by the repeated collapsing of his horse on approaching the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The prophecy of the bracelets did happen during the caliphate of Ūmar ibn Al-Khattāb, when the Muslims were reigning over more than one third of the known world at that time.

Furthermore, this vision must be achieved through goal-directed leadership. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, *“If the hour comes and one of you has a seedling, then he should plant it”* (Bukhari).

Responsibility

Another quality leaders possess is one of responsibility for those they lead. The greater the leader, the greater this responsibility extends. Covey (1989) expounds the concept of *“circle of concern”* and *“circle of influence”* indicating that a true leader is one who focuses upon his circle of influence, which consequently results in an expansion of his influence into areas of concern. Paradoxically, a leader who focuses upon his concern will see his influence diminish. This therefore argues that leaders are not “complainers” but rather proactive, positive and optimistic individuals. The great leader thus has a proactive sense of responsibility for those he leads. Ūmar ibn Al-Khattāb, for example, lived in Makkah during his caliphate and, though not a Prophet, stated that he feared that a donkey that breaks its leg in Iraq is his responsibility if the road were not paved safely.

Training

These qualities of leaders being seekers of knowledge, possessing wisdom and exercising responsibility must be facilitated through the right training and preparation from an early stage. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, *“All of you are shepherds and all of you are responsible for his flock”* (Bukhari). Thus, leaders are not only Prophets, presidents of nations or CEOs of international corporations, but rather a father is a leader, as he is responsible for his family, a mother is a leader, as she is responsible for her children and an Imam, or any religious minister, is a leader, having responsibility for the religious needs of the community.

It is noteworthy that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stated that all Prophets, including himself, were shepherds prior to becoming Prophets. On the face of it, this profession seems bizarre and inconsequential for a Prophet to be involved with, but a careful analysis reveals great merit to this vocation in relationship to the leadership skills he will need at a later stage. In fact, being a shepherd provides important training for those aspiring to take up a leadership position as all Prophets did.

The role of a shepherd is essentially to graze his sheep, look after their welfare, and ensure a safe environment for them. The shepherd is thus in a leadership role being charged with responsibility for his sheep. The nurturing of his sheep is thus related to the development of the flock and is synonymous with concern a corporate leader has for ensuring the safety, health, well-being and professional development of those he leads.

Further, the shepherd’s flock comes under external threat. Most potent amongst these is the wolf, whose ability to launch a successful attack on the flock is almost solely dependant upon the effectiveness of the shepherd in allaying such an offensive. Interestingly, the physical viewpoint of the shepherd is brought to bear upon this situation, as the shepherd stands significantly taller than his flock and his ability to scan the entire area for the external threat is significantly broader. Thus, the shepherd, like the person in a position of leadership must be ever vigilant to external threats and exercise his greater breadth of knowledge and experience to a synonymous effect. The leader must develop himself so that he can metaphorically see beyond those he leads and safeguard his corporation from external threat through a wider perspective. Additionally, the wolf most commonly devours the stray sheep, as that is the one easiest to attack. The shepherd is thus responsible for maintaining a unified and gathered

flock. This is synonymous with the need for leaders to maintain the collective workforce, in terms of vision, motivation and direction.

The lifestyle of a shepherd is also of great interest. A shepherd spends countless hours in uncomfortable surroundings, bearing all types of weather and environment, including difficult terrain and is likely to eat simple food since he can only go out with the flock with whatever he can carry, limiting him to essential things. All this personal sacrifice is made with the goal of rearing a flock. Similarly, the leader must behave in a selfless manner if he is to be successful. Great leaders have always been hardworking, displaying selflessness and sacrifice to the betterment of those they lead. In military terms, great army generals such as the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), are those that are the first to step onto the battlefield and the last to step off. Similarly and synonymously, in contemporary leadership, the presence of the corporate leader should reflect this, for example through arriving to the office first and leaving last. He should certainly not develop a “bean-counter” culture of clocking in and out as this is by comparison de-motivating, but rather the leader is ever-vigilant, available and present, particularly in impending crisis.

Communication

A leader must be a good communicator, an example being the communication skills of Jā'far ibn Abū Ṭālib, discussed earlier. Different leaders through history have possessed various communication tools. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), for example, communicated his message beyond Arabia by means of eight letters he had written and sent to eight leaders, including the empires neighboring Arabia, inviting them to Islam. The letters included one sent with Jā'far to Al-Najāshi, who embraced the new faith. Further, letters were sent to: Muqawqas, Vicegerent of Egypt, who reacted by politely rejecting the message it contained and sending gifts for the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh); Chosroes, Emperor of Persia, who reacted angrily and tore the letter to shreds; Hercules, King of the Byzantines, who famously ordered Abu Sufyān to inform him further about the man, Muhammad, who had sent the letter; Mundhir bin Sawā, Governor of Bahrain, who informed his subjects about the letter, informing them that if they wished to follow the message they may do so and if not, they should pay the Jizya tax; Haudha bin Ali, Governor of Yamāma, who accepted Islām, on condition he be given a position in the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) government, a request rejected by the latter; Hāritha bin Abi Shāmir Al-Ghassāni, King of Damascus, who furiously rejected the message, and; Jaifer, King of Oman and his brother, Al-Jalandi, who both accepted the message (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1996). These letters give important leadership lessons, since their recipients were so diverse and had a variety of beliefs, attitudes and mindsets. Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), in addressing different individuals, used a variation in tone. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), instructed the King of Oman to accept Islam, or he would declare war against them. In contrast, the letter to Al-Najāshi focused on the monotheism of Islam to counter Christian doctrine of the divinity of the Prophet Īsā (pbuh). Thus, a leader needs to communicate orally and textually, in an appropriate manner with the receiving audience.

The Prophet Mūsa (pbuh) is another example that illustrates the need for excellence in communication. As he suffered from a stutter, he asked Allāh to appoint his brother Hārun as a Prophet and representative for the Muslims in the presence of the Pharaoh. Thus, the Prophet Mūsa (pbuh) recognized his own limitation in oral communication as well as having an understanding of the need for a leader, or his representative, to have excellence in this skill.

Patience

A leader must be patient and forbearing. The Prophet Yūsuf (pbuh) is one of the best examples of this from the Islamic tradition. Uniquely, his story is given in a single chapter of the Qur’ān, which details his biography in a chronological approach, a reporting method not seen elsewhere in the Qur’ān. The question thus arises, why does Allāh go to the extent of giving his life story in such a detailed narrative, set out chronologically, but not for other Prophets? The answer lies in the lesson for leaders – a leader must be patient through adversity as Yūsuf (pbuh) was, so Allāh wants to give a comprehensive account of leadership qualities found in Yūsuf (pbuh) through the adversity he faced and how his approach led to ultimate success. Allāh states,

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

“And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to the patient ones” (2:155).

His patience extends through trials, which include attempted murder, being separated from his parents from a young age being sold into slavery, being wrongfully accused of a crime and imprisonment on false pretenses. However, his patience paid dividends, ultimately being absolved of his crimes and being put in a leadership role in Egypt, working closely with the king and saving Egypt from the terrible effects of a famine and eventually being reunited with his family. Thus, the sequence of tests and ultimate victory is highlighted through a chronological narrative.

The leadership lesson is thus that a true leader has patience and does not retaliate to injustice with injustice and is forbearing and wise. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) received the revelation of this chapter during his “year of grief” when his first wife Khadijah bint Khuwailid as well as his paternal uncle Abū Ṭālib ibn Abdul Muttalib both died. This is significant as they were both his supporters, the former not only as a wife but also as a financial supporter, Khadijah being a wealthy merchant from Makkah (Randeree, 2006), and the latter being from amongst the social elite in Makkah, whose position prevented any harm from coming to Muhammad (pbuh). As such, the story of Yūsuf (pbuh) was a source of strength in adversity for Muhammad (pbuh) reminding him as well as believing followers up to the present day to reflect on the qualities of Yūsuf (pbuh) and apply them to our own lives. Yūsuf (pbuh) did not wallow in self-pity, which many would do, but rather took a proactive approach and thereby affected positive change from the “inside-out” by working on his circle of influence throughout (Covey, 1989).

Role Models

Great leaders have the quality of being a role model to those they lead. For a Muslim, their greatest leader is also their greatest role model, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). His characteristics as being a person worthy of being followed is articulated in the Qur’ān which states,

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

“Indeed in the Messenger of Allah [Muhammad] you have a good example to follow for him who hopes in (the Meeting with) Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much” (33:21).

This verse not only indicates that he is a role model, but presents a reason for that, and that is that he sets an example worthy of being followed. Thus the personality and character of a leader is important, not his position within an organization. The Qur’ān further states,

أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ

“Enjoin you piety and righteousness on the people and you forget (to practice it) yourselves?” (2:44).

Thus, a leader displays a high standard of character worthy of being followed and foremost in this quality is to be a person whose words are reflected by right conduct. The Qur’ān further states,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ

“O you who believe! Why say that which you do not do?” (61:2-3).

The Prophet Yūsuf (pbuh), for example, reportedly ate only half a meal a day, even though his position was second only to the king and, as such, he would have had access to opulence on a scale unavailable to others. Yet, due to the impending famine, he had ruled that Egypt should consume only a small part of its agricultural resource for a fixed period and store the remainder until the famine, at which time it could be used (12:47, quoted earlier). He therefore led by example and practiced what he preached, so to speak.

In a similar vein, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) exhibited the same quality during the embargo against the clan of Banū Hāshim. The companions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) complained to him of hunger and raised their clothes to expose a stone tied to their bellies. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) responded by raising his clothes and showing he had two stones on his belly, illustrating that he was leading by example. REF

Consultation

Another quality is consultation. Leaders must consult with those they lead in order to form a coherent opinion and have confidence in their decision-making. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is instructed in the Qur’ān to consult those around him and deal with them gently,

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ
فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

“And by the Mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you; so pass over (their faults), and ask (Allah’s) Forgiveness for them; and consult them in the affairs. Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah, certainly, Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him)” (3:159).

Thus, consultation requires a soft approach to nurture obedience, motivate, and inspire followers. In a corporate context, this is synonymous with empowering a stakeholder, where participation is encouraged from all levels. This is evident in methodologies such as Total Quality Management (TQM), Change Management and Configuration Management, as well as Suggestion Systems, all of which are aimed at continuous improvement through consultation and employee participation and empowerment. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is further cited as having consulted with his wives, famously in his decision not to make pilgrimage in the year of the treatise of Al-Hudaibiyah.

Correct Judgment

This quality is further connected to the importance of listening and, in particular, hearing both sides of an argument. An example is the Prophet Dāwūd (pbuh), to whom appeared two angels in the guise of men. One of them claimed he had one sheep and the other, who had significantly more sheep, had done him an injustice by talking him into giving his sheep to the other. Dāwūd (pbuh) answered by telling him to give the sheep back.

وَهَلْ أَتَاكَ نَبَأُ الْخَصْمِ إِذْ تَسَوَّرُوا الْمِحْرَابَ
 إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَى دَاوُدَ ففَرَغَ مِنْهُمْ قَالُوا لِمَا تَخَفَ خَصْمَانِ بَغَى بَعْضُنَا عَلَى بَعْضٍ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تُشْطِطْ وَاهْدِنَا إِلَى
 سَوَاءِ الصِّرَاطِ
 إِنَّ هَذَا أَخِي لَهُ تِسْعٌ وَتِسْعُونَ نَعْجَةً وَلِيَ نَعْجَةً وَاحِدَةً فَقَالَ أَكْفُلْنِيهَا وَعَزَّنِي فِي الْخِطَابِ
 قَالَ لَقَدْ ظَلَمَكَ بِسُؤَالِ نَعْجِكَ إِلَى نَعْجِهِ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْخُلَطَاءِ لِيَبْغِي بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ إِنَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ
 وَقَلِيلٌ مَّا هُمْ وَظَنَّ دَاوُدُ أَنَّمَا فَتَنَّاهُ فَاسْتَغْفَرَ رَبَّهُ وَخَرَّ رَاكِعًا وَأَنَابَ

“And has the news of the litigants reached you? When they climbed over the wall into (his) private room. When they entered in upon Dawud, he was terrified of them, they said: "Fear not! (We are) two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other, therefore judge between us with truth, and treat us not with injustice, and guide us to the Right Way. Verily, this my brother (in religion) has ninety nine ewes, while I have (only) one ewe, and he says: "Hand it over to me, and he overpowered me in speech." [Dawud] said (immediately without listening to the opponent): "He has wronged you in demanding your ewe in addition to his ewes. And, verily, many partners oppress one another, except those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and they are few." And Dawud (David) guessed that We have tried him and he sought Forgiveness of his Lord, and he fell down prostrate and turned (to Allah) in repentance” (38:21-24).

Thus, what Dāwūd (pbuh) realized was that he had neglected to hear the other man’s side of the story before proclaiming his view. The element of surprise is also telling, as leaders often rush to judgment rather than considering issues in a more timely and thoughtful manner. In this case, it was not required of Dāwūd (pbuh) to respond and judge the case immediately. The Qur’ān articulates this event highlighting the error of Dāwūd (pbuh) and stating that Allāh corrected Dāwūd (pbuh) in his mistake. In this event is a lesson in leadership, since it highlights the importance of both hearing two sides of an argument and further expounds upon the quality of learning from ones mistakes and recognizing that consciously evaluating our mistakes enhances our knowledge, wisdom and character.

Decision Making

Often, leaders are put into positions where decision-making is tested to the limit. In such circumstances, the consequences of a poor decision are likely to have repercussions in relation to the mission at hand. With regards to the Prophets, their mission of preaching a message of monotheism to nations largely steeped in ignorance and idolatry was all the more challenging. The example of Rukāna is interesting here. He was a famous undefeated wrestler from Makkah who loathed the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), so, in order to humiliate him, he challenged him to a wrestling bout, betting one hundred sheep to the winner. Here is a leadership decision-making dilemma. If the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) were to accept the challenge from a professional wrestler and lose, it would be of great embarrassment to the Muslims, who were small in number and a weak group at that time in the city of Makkah. However, if he were to refuse the challenge, he would be seen by all, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as being a weak leader. Essentially, it seems as though Rukāna has put the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) into a no-win situation. To the astonishment of the crowd however, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), described as a man of average height and build, accepted the challenge of the giant Rukāna, and so they began to wrestle. After some time, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) managed to pick up Rukāna and slam his body on the ground. Phased by this, Rukāna came once more into the battle, attacking the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) with all his ferocity. Once again the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) picked him up above his head and threw him to the ground. Rukāna conceded that Muhammad is no ordinary man. No professional wrestler in Arabia had ever gotten the upper hand against Rukāna and, to his credit, Rukāna acknowledged the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as a Messenger of Allāh, accepted Islam and paid the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) one hundred sheep as his winnings.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) graciously returned the sheep to him, though the bet had taken place prior to the abolition of gambling. The message to leaders is thus not to shy away from adversity or difficulty as your followers will respect you more for at least trying. Further, the leader who is unafraid (and steps into the proverbial ring) will find the strength to overcome adversity and, as such, may even win when the odds are stacked against him. However, this does not detract from making intelligent decisions. As stated earlier, Mūsa (pbuh) was not gifted in speech, so did not try to overcome the Pharaoh without the aid of his brother, Hārūn (pbuh). Thus, a balance is needed in leadership between taking on challenging situations and exercising your inherent expertise whilst recognizing your boundaries and limitations.

Appreciation of Diversity and Multiculturalism

In modern management, leaders must possess knowledge of the growing diversity in the global business environment. This can be manifest in terms of cultural, ethnic, regional or gender diversity, with a leader needing to exercise an inclusive approach to leadership. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) demonstrated both knowledge of this and acted in a manner that clearly favored inclusion. One such example is the changing of his dialect to that of the regional dialect of whom he was speaking to, which he commonly did when addressing visitors to Madīna.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined fifteen qualities a contemporary manager must possess and has illustrated that the Prophets of Allah (pbuh) demonstrated all these qualities by way of example to humanity. The paper further suggests that more research is needed in order to fully understand and appreciate the contribution made by the Prophets in the areas of leadership and management.

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Glossary of Terms

Dāwūd	The Prophet often translated as David
Īsā	The Prophet often translated as Jesus
Madīna	The city of migration and burial place of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), often transliterated as Medina. Full title is Madīna Al-Munawarra (City of the Enlightened Prophet)
Makkah	The birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) often transliterated as Mecca. Full title is Makkah Al-Mukarrama (City of the Generous Prophet)
Masjid-e-Nabawi Muhammad	The mosque of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Madīna
Mūsa	The Prophet often transliterated as Mohammed
Mūsa	The Prophet often translated as Moses
Ninevah	A town in northern Iraq, known today as Mosul and believed to be the Biblical and Qur'ānic hometown of the Prophet Yūnus (pbuh)
Nūh	The Prophet often translated as Noah
pbuh	Peace be upon him
pbut	Peace be upon them
Shuaib	The Prophet of the Madyan region
Sulaimān	The Prophet often translated as Solomon
Yūnus ibn Mattah	The Prophet often translated as Jonah, son of Ammotai
Yūsuf	The Prophet often translated as Joseph