



EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ISLĀM: AN EXPLORATION

¹ODENIYI Ismail Kolawole **PhD** and ²OLANIYI Ismaila Wakeel **PhD**

¹Department of Islamic Studies
Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo
Email: Ismailode08@gmail.com
Tel: 07030341946

²Department of Islamic Studies
Federal College of Education, Iwo,
Osun State
Email: wakeelolaniyi77@gmail.com
Tel: 08034205508

Abstract

Leadership across the globe has increasingly been characterised by violence, misunderstanding, and the politicisation of authority. This situation has contributed to the shortage of effective leaders capable of managing, coordinating, and directing human affairs with fairness and equity. Consequently, this study examines the qualities of effective leadership from an Islamic perspective with the aim of creating awareness of Islam's position on leadership. The paper explores the qualities expected of effective leaders as outlined in the Qur'ān, Hadīth, and relevant historical sources in Islam. A historical research method was employed to achieve the objectives of the study. The findings reveal that Khilāfah (leadership) in Islam originates from Allah, who is the ultimate source of authority and power. Leadership is entrusted to humankind on a temporary basis as an amānah (trust). The study further shows that leadership is a form of service to Allah and humanity, requiring leaders to guide and govern people with fairness and social justice in accordance with divine revelation. Effective leaders are expected to discharge their responsibilities diligently and to the best of their abilities, as failure to do so will render them accountable before Allah in the Hereafter. Moreover, leadership in Islam is not limited to a select few but is regarded as a responsibility shared by all members of society. The paper concludes that although crises are inevitable in human existence, effective leadership remains a vital means of addressing them. It therefore recommends the integration of Islamic leadership principles, such as Muhāsabah (accountability), Taqwā (God-consciousness), Shūrā (consultation), and 'Adl (justice), among others, as essential strategies for addressing contemporary leadership challenges across the globe.

Keywords: Effective leadership, Islamic exploration, Khilāfah (vicegerent), Amānah (trust), Muhāsabah (accountability).

Introduction

Human beings by their nature are social animals, they cooperate for survival and relate with one another to form a group. In any group therefore, there must be somebody to guide that group toward achieving their goals. This explains the necessity of a leader who has a potential to be able to innovate and develop a vision as well as effective communication of the said vision to his followers (group members) who will implement it. Leadership in Islām has its root traced to Allāh (God) because there is no any major concept in the Qur'ān that exists independently of the concept of Allāh (Isutzu, 2004). The concept of leadership in Islām is not only unique but also one of the core teachings of Islām without which religious and worldly affairs of Muslims cannot go smoothly. In essence, the appointment of leader in Islām is fard (a conclusive obligations) so as to prevent ummah from anarchy. Hence, Islamic concept of leadership claims that Allāh (God) is the Supreme Leader and the Divine source of Authority and Power. His bestowal of the divine power and authority on man, on temporary manner, is based on trust (amānah). This means that, a leader is not free to act according to his wishes rather he must act in line with the dictate of Sharī'ah (Allāh's law).

In Islām, a person does not seek leadership. It is entrusted to him because it is a grave responsibility. Moreover, effective leader in the light of Islām must be a good communicator, must be able to motivate and mobilise people and direct them toward the practices of what is Good (al-Ma'rūf) and condemnation of what is Evil (al-Munkar). In Islām, the natural function of an effective leader as representative of the people is to be the servant of people and their leader. He must be able to sacrifice his own interests and comforts for the sake of his followers. Above all, his life style should be exemplary for the people he is leading. In the light of this, this work intends to look at the concept of leadership and effective leadership in Islām. It also examines the qualities of effective leaders citing relevance references from the Qur'ān and Hadīth as well as the relevance Islamic historical account.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Leadership

Leadership is an ability to develop a vision and communicate it to a group of people that will make that vision a reality. It is an art of influencing and inspiring subordinates to perform their duties willingly, competently and enthusiastically for the achievement of group objectives (Drucker, 1954). In another definition, leadership is a relationship through which one person influences the behaviours or actions of other people (Mullins, 1996). The above definitions show that leadership must emerge for any human endeavour that involves groups of people. Al-Talib (1993) sees leadership as the process of moving people in a planned dimension by motivating them to action through non-compulsive means. In the context of this work, leadership is a process whereby a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organisation in a way that makes it more unified and orderly.

Further, Abd-Alla (2017) defines leadership as an art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically toward the achievement of group goals. This definition adds the element of "willingness" in defining a leadership. This shows a difference between successful and effective leaders from the "common run-of managers". It is the willingness of people to follow that makes a person a leader. This explains that leaders cannot exist without followers or subordinates. Meanwhile, there are two types of leadership: the official and the unofficial leadership (Graham & Bennett, 1992). The official leadership is the process of motivating and controlling subordinates to work towards goals which are regarded by the organisation as desirable and possible. The unofficial leadership is the ability of a person to influence the thoughts and behaviours of others. The above two definitions in the context of this work are similar because they both have element of a person influencing other people to accomplish a goal or task.

According to Abd-Alla (2017), six key principles must be mastered to achieve an organization's vision or goals:

- i) Developing a clear vision of the future by imagining inspiring and achievable possibilities, while encouraging others to embrace that vision through shared aspirations.
- ii) Promoting collaboration by building trust, encouraging teamwork, and working toward common goals.
- iii) Empowering others through the delegation of authority, the sharing of power, and the granting of decision-making freedom.

- iv) Leading by example by clearly communicating personal values and ensuring that actions are consistent with those values.
- v) Recognizing and appreciating individual contributions and achievements to encourage excellence.
- vi) Celebrating shared values and successes in order to foster a strong sense of unity and community.

Leadership from Islamic Perspective

Islamic leadership is technically known as *Khilāfah* but when it is invested in a person such a person is known as a *Khalīfah* (Leader). *Khilāfah* (leadership), as an institution, is a divine responsibility of man from inception as contained in Qur'ān 2 āyah 30. The concept of *Khilāfah*, as contains in this āyah, is meant for stewardship, managing the earth, keeping order and implementing Allāh's law, not for leaders to spread corruption, or to carry out mischief on earth. In the light of this, Muslims are charged to ensure the establishment of *khilāfah* and sustain it as witness of Allāh on the Earth. As stated in Qur'ān 24 āyah 55, leadership is to be consciously established and administered by a few chosen righteous believers while every member of the *ummah* are expected to be a critical stakeholder in its practices. The essence of being chosen for the task of leadership is to supervise, sustain and maintain the *khalīfah* through conscious struggle against *shaytān* (devil) and his human cohorts (Abdul-Azeez, 2017).

In Islām, leadership is an *amānah* (trust) from Allāh. In essence, a leader is expected to discharge his responsibility to the best of his abilities, failure to do so will render him liable before Allāh on the Day of Accountability. Islamically, a person does not seek leadership; it is entrusted to him because it is a grave responsibility. Hence, a leader must be a good communicator, must be able to motivate and mobilize people and inspire them to rise above petty preoccupations for the sake of a higher and nobler purpose. He must be able to establish and defend the Islamic norms. He must demonstrate this through personal sacrifice, courage and ability to keep the group focused on the goal. The best most important task of a leader is to implement the laws of Allāh (*Sharī'ah*) on earth. This is the ultimate mission of man as Allāh's *Khalīfah* (vicegerent) on earth which can be achieved in the framework of the Islamic state. The Prophet (S.A.W) offers the best and most comprehensive guide and model to achieve these attributes.

In Islām, leadership is a process of inspiring and coaching the voluntary followers in an effort to fulfill a clear as well as a shared vision. Also, a leader is not free to act as he wishes, nor must he submit to the wishes of any group. Rather, he must act in line with the dictate of *Sharī'ah*. The Prophet (S.A.W) thus combined in his person the authority of the Messenger, a mentor to common humanity, leader of family, head of state, diplomat, commander of the army, and a pioneer to a world social order. The biography of the Prophet (S.A.W), therefore, offers an important lesson in leadership in all facets of life, and it is quite essential model for all Muslims.

Leadership, in Islām, is a trust (*amānah*) and a form of stewardship. A leader is expected to balance Allāh's consciousness (*Taqwā*) with rationality so as to serve the followers efficiently. This is because leadership has its root traced to Allāh (God) which claims that Allāh is the Supreme leader and the Divine source of Authority and power. The Qur'ān laid great emphasis on the universality of His dominion. It also shows His Permanency, Absolutism and Indivisibility. This is contained in so many Qur'ānic āyāt (verses), one of which is as follows:

He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and who has not taken a son and has not had a partner in dominion and has created each thing and determined it with (precise) determination (Q. 25 V2).

In line with this verse, power and authority belong to Allāh (God) alone and that He bestows these power and authority on man in temporary capacity. This leads to the concept of *khilāfah* (vicegerent) which was bestowed on Prophet Adam (A.S.) by extension other prophets and some other children of Adam (A.S.) on earth. In Islām, bestowal of the divine power and authority on man by Allāh (God) on temporary manner is based on *Amānah* (trust). This means that man is entrusted with leadership position by Allāh (God) with a view that he is not going to betray Him in the discharge of all his duties and responsibilities associated with his position.

Leadership does not take into account tribe, race or geographical boundary as a determinant of appointment or fitness into the post. This is because the entire human race emanated from one single source and other variations are



just means of identification (Q.4:1). This summarily means that any one is entitled to be a leader in Islām when he possesses the necessary requirements for the position without regards to the race, colour or tribe.

The role of a leader in Islām is to guide and control the activities of a group towards shared goals or objectives of service to Allāh (God) and humanity in line with the dictate of Sharī'ah. This means that all leadership activities in Islām be it secular or religious are service to Allāh (God) in particular and humanity in general and that Sharī'ah serves as a define law that guides the leaders and the followers in their daily activities. According to Qur'ān 21 āyah 73, appointment of a leader is an obligatory act in Islām. Leaders are exemplars to the led, they are to guide people to the right path based on divine revelation not personal whims. In the commentary of this āyah, Allāh appointed prophets such as Lūt, Ishāq (AS) among others as leaders. They were inspired to uphold righteousness, established regular salāt, pay zakāt and worship Allāh sincerely. Apart from this verse, Prophet (S.A.W) is also reported to have said:

... when three persons set out on a journey, they should appoint one of them as their leader (Riyād as-Salihīn : 960).

The society cannot exist or function well without leaders. When three Muslims are on a journey, they are required to select one of them as a leader. This is because lack of leadership is anarchy. Hence, leadership should aim at excellence in all endeavors. This is because, the Prophet (S.A.W) taught Muslims that excellence is a pillar of Islām and must manifest in whatever a Muslim does.

Moreover, the Islamic approach to leadership is that every Muslim is a leader in his own way. Leadership in Islām is not the responsibility of a few selected people. It is the responsibility of everybody and everybody shall be queried on how well he discharged that responsibility. This is in line with the following Hadīth;

Abdullāh Ibn Omar reported the Apostle of Allāh (S.A.W) as saying: Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible of his flock. The Amir (ruler) who rule over the people is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock; a man is a shepherd in charge of the inhabitants of his household and he is responsible for his flock; a woman is a shepherdess in charge of her husband's house and children and she is responsible for them; and a man's slave is a shepherd in charge of his master's property and he is responsible for it. So, each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock" (Sahīh al-Bukhārī: 7138).

Effective Leadership from Islamic Perspective

Effective leadership is the ability to successfully influence and support a team or group of people. It is an ability to inspire, guide and motivate the led toward achieving common goals. An effective leader is the one that the followers rely on for guidance and inspiration. An effective leader in Islām is someone or a leader that has ability to influence and support a team to achieving a targeted goal or vision. He must be able to do this through clear vision, strong commitment and integrity. He must be a visionary thinker, a strong communicator and being open to new ideals. These are the qualities displayed by all the prophets sent by Allāh, Prophet Muhammad inclusive. The outbursts of violence or misunderstanding in any community suggest the absence of an effective leader who will refine, organise and manage his followers' knowledge, resources and emotions. There is no period in Islamic history when human beings did not experience violence, chaos and unrest, what usually brings succor is an effective leadership. An effective leader from Islamic view is essentially a teacher and a coach (Abdul-Azeez, 2017).

Prophet (S.A.W) showed the best example of this by managing the persecution of the ummah by the pagan Quraysh for thirteen years in Makkah. During this period, he did not only arrange the proper movement of the most vulnerable among his followers, in two batches, to Ethiopia but also carefully arranged the migration of his companions into the city of Madīnah in the year 622 CE. Moreover, he was able to manage the intellectual, psychological and physical terrorism of the Jews, Christians, and pagans for ten years in Madīnah. The end product of this was treaty of hudaibiyyah and later conquest of Makkah in the year 632CE. Abūbakr also put down the terrorism of the apostates soon after the death of the Prophet (S.A.W) as the khalīfah while Umar (the second caliph) kept the ummah busy with ideals, firmness, justice and sound initiative that produced development (Rahim, 2001).

Umar bin Abdul Azeez of Umayyad dynasty was also known in Islamic history for an effective administration of the Ummah (Hitti, 1984). This shows that crises are inevitable but effective Islamic leadership is the panacea to stem or eliminate them. Hence, an effective leader is not free to act according to his wishes rather he must act to implement Allāh's law on earth. In essence, apart from implementing Allāh's law, he must try in his capacity to guide, protect and treat his followers with justice and equity.

Qualities of an Effective Leadership in Islām

There are lots of qualities that are expected of an effective leader which include: conforming moral and values, highly ethical, honouring integrity, honesty and trust, has vision, full of respect, passion, commitment, compassion, justice, kindness, forgiveness, courage, love, deep listening, inspired and inspiring, authenticity, multi-dimensional, and amendable to change (Marques, 2010). In line with these qualities, effective leaders are those that can drive improvements in team work, quality and safety, and innovation (Greenfield, 2007). A leader in Islām must possess a number of qualities some of which are as follows:

i) **Accountability (Muhāsabah):** This is one of the qualities of an effective leader in Islām. Muhāsabah conveys an image of trustworthiness, reliability, credibility and dependability. It also connotes constant self-evaluation that is, evaluating one's interactions with others to ensure fair treatment. Hence, an effective leader must be accountable in his disposition to his followers. Leadership is a sacred trust where leaders are accountable to both Allāh and the followers.

In the Qur'ān, the word Hisāb (account, reckoning or audit) is repeated in several verses to intimate Muslims of the inevitability of the ultimate accountability to Allāh (God). One of these āyāt (verses) says:

Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it (Q. 99: 7-8).

In Islām, the word Hisāb (account) is used to positively influence the performance of a leader and also to create a sense of willingness to act in a righteous manner. Moreover, the practices of accountability in leadership will promote good value, ethics and integrity in the leader and the led.

ii) **God Consciousness (Taqwā) and Righteousness:** An effective leader must be righteous in his character and must be God conscious. God Consciousness is a self-accountable characteristic which has the potential to shape the behaviour of a leader. God consciousness encourages righteousness and also promotes check and balances on the part of the leader such that he is honest in his disposition to his followers. In Islām, righteousness infuses a culture of honesty, trust and confidence, straightforwardness and co-operation between the leader and the led. In line with these two qualities, the Qur'ān encourages Muslims as follows:

O you who believed, fear Allāh and speak words of appropriate justice. He will (then) amend for you your deeds and forgive you your sins (Q. 33:70-71).

iii) **Consultation (Shūrā) and Accessibility:** Shūrā is a process of consultation, discussion, dialogue as well as collective deliberation before making a decision. Leadership requires consultative approach to decision-making so as to foster unity among his followers. An effective leader should continuously involve his followers in decision making and must not set a barrier between him and the led. He must always seek their suggestions in all significant matters through consultation and see to their wellbeing. He should avoid autocracy and dictatorship in his dealing with them. He should rule the people in consultation with them upon the conduct of their affairs. The Qur'ān making reference to the early Muslims says:

...their matters are settled through Shūrā (consultation) among them... (Q. 42:38).

In line with the above verse, Shūrā is aimed at building a consensus that will benefit both the leader and the followers. Hence, effective participation of people in decision making create a healthier and conducive atmosphere and deter conflict between the leader and the led.

iv) **Justice ('adl): 'Adl Justice is the foundation stone of Islām.** A leader is expected to make justice his watchword without discrimination among the led and must balance it with compassion and mercy. An effective leader is expected to operate fairly and with justice especially among his followers. The Qur'ān says;



And when you testify, be just even if it concerns a near relative. And the covenant of Allāh fulfill... (Q. 6 v.152).

In line with this verse, Islām discourages all forms of injustice, inequality, exploitation and oppression by the leader. An effective leader from Islamic perspective must not deprive his followers their God given right and he must fulfill his obligations towards them. Further on this, he must be able to establish absolute justice for all his followers.

v) **Promotion of what is good (al-Mā'ruf) and condemnation of what is Evil (al Munkar):** An effective leader must be an embodiment of the virtuous, the wholesome, and the noble. He must be a promoter of virtues and the bitter enemy of vices. This is necessary because the entire followers have trust in on him and he will be accountable to Allāh (God) on how well he led them. Further, he must be responsible for promoting good qualities and curbing any incongruity which may expose himself and his followers to evil. In essence, it is the duty of leaders to invite his followers to do all that is good and right and to prevent them from all that is evil and wrong. The Qur'ān says:

And let there be (arising) from you a group of people inviting to (all that is) good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and it is they who are the successful." (Q. 3 v.104).

In line with this verse, the main job of a leader is to bring out the best in those whom he leads and to transform society such that it can be habitable for all and sundry. In doing this, he must use his power for the establishment of all that is right and the elimination of what is evil.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper having defined the concept of leadership, explained the Islamic basic principle of leadership which stipulates that one can assume leadership position in Islām when he has possessed the basic requirements that match such position irrespective of the race, the colour and the tribe he belongs to. Further to this is that, leadership is a service to Allāh (God) in particular and to humanity in general while the Sharī'ah serves as a divine law that guides both the leader and the subordinates in carrying out their duties. The paper also looked at the qualities of effective leadership in Islām, which include and not limited to Muhāsabah (accountability), Taqwā (God consciousness) and 'adl (justice). It then concluded that the appointment of the leader, be it spiritual and mundane, must be based on genuine merit which must include knowledge, practical wisdom, efficiency, honesty, integrity among others. The paper then recommended that leaders should take a clue from Islamic perception on qualities of leadership.

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