



Islamic Perspective of the Followers: A Neglected Aspect in Locus of Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The field of leadership consists of three main parts-leader, follower(s) and situation. Numerous researches had been conducted on the leader in different capacities. The qualities or characteristics, virtues, styles, and types of the leader or leadership had been dealt with extensively. However, little if there are any tangible researches are known about the followers. Therefore this paper aims at looking into the follower as a locus of leadership from Islamic perspective. A leader cannot be emerged without followers and situation. The researchers engaged the qualitative research methodology in conducting this work. In other words, content analysis is directed to the secondary data collected through the library. The finding shows that a good leader should first be a good follower. It also reveals that obedience, honesty and integrity, efficiency, courage, knowledge and wisdom, unity and so on are among core characteristics or qualities of the followers.

Keywords: Islamic Perspective, Leader(s), Leadership and Follower(s)

JEL Classifications: L0, L2, L20, L22, L23

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of leadership is a complex phenomenon, which involves three major elements or components; the leader, the follower and the context or what may be called surrounding situation. The components otherwise known as the locus of leadership (Beekun and Badawi, 1999; Ogunbado, 2012). There should be interaction between these factors. The concept is incomplete, if one is missing. There is no leader without followers; there is no follower(s) in the absence of leader; likewise, there is no leader and followers without the surrounding situation(s), i.e., a goal(s) that they are seeking to achieve.

A leader has been defined as someone who has "ability to motivate others towards the realization of specific goals or objectives" (Bangash, 2000. n. p). It has also been depicted as "an individual in a group who is responsible to direct and co-ordinate activities of the group. Islamically, the leader is also responsible to guide

members in matters of *imān*, *nafs*, *ibadah* and ethics." (Ayub, 1996. p. 78-79) while the follower is defined as "someone who supports, admires or believes in a particular person, group or idea." It is also mentioned to be "a person who does what someone else does or tells them to do" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, n.d.). The situation is the goal or vision they wish to achieve. Wordweb Dictionary (2000) defines it as "the general state of things; the combination of circumstances at a given time." The situation determines the status of the leader and how he or she can adjust his or her style to meet the target of the subordinates or the followers.

Having said that, it is clear that there must be interaction between these elements one cannot stand in isolation. After the introduction, the paper discusses the problem statement, research questions and objectives. It sheds light on who the real followers are and what are the characteristics that a person should possess before he or she could be referred to as an effective follower.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

As it has been clearly shown in the introduction, the components of leadership are three, the leader, the follower(s) and the situation. Many researchers such as Stogdill et al. (1962), Dow (1969), Stogdill (1974), Bass (1990), Maxwell (1995), Northouse (1997), Kousers and Posner (2003) to mention but few have done a lot on leaders' characteristics or qualities from the Western perspective. On the other hand, from Islamic perspective, classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali (1964; 1991), Ibn Khaldun (1967), Al-Mawardi (1996), likewise the contemporary scholars, such as Ayub (1996), Beekun and Badawi (1999), Safi, (n.d) have also written extensively on the quality and characteristics of leadership. However, the aspect of followers and situation are neglected (Kelley, 2008). That is to say, there are very scanty literatures on these components It was said:

Recently, Howell and Shamir (2005) reviewed the literature and conclude that most leadership theories have been simple unidirectional and focus exclusively on the leader's personality and behavior. In the process, the role of followers and the cultural environment that gives rise to the leadership are often neglected (Ali, 2009. p.162).

Based on those empirical evidences, this paper comes into lime light to fill the vacuum, or at least to add to the scanty literature available on the follower(s) as an integral part of the leadership.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper aims to provide answer to the following questions.

- Who are the followers?
- What are the types of the followers?
- What are the qualities of effective followers?

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The paper is set to achieve the following objectives:

- To define and determine who are the followers
- To enumerate and describe the type of the followers
- To itemize and elucidate some qualities of the followers.

5. METHODOLOGY

The paper is purely library oriented research. Qualitative research methodology is utilized in conducting the research. Qualitative data according to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), are data in form of words. Therefore, the data are collected as secondary data gathered from books, journals, academic magazines and relevant websites. The data are analyzed through content analysis approach. The approach gives opportunity to the researcher(s) to analyse large amount of textual information and systematically identify its properties. i.e., words concepts characters sentences and so on (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

6. THE FOLLOWER(S)

According to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, (n.d). a follower is "someone who supports, admires or believes in a

particular person, group or idea." it also defines it as "a person who does what someone else does or tells him or her to do." Wordweb Dictionary (2000) delineates it as "a person who accepts the leadership of another" or "someone who travels behind or pursues another." A follower is said to be an individual who follows another in regards to his or her ideas or belief. It is an individual who imitates or copies other or takes other as a role model. It is also said:

The word followers is a very industrial term connoting subordination, submissiveness, passivity, lacking responsible judgment, and willingness to allow others to control their lives and activities. You, on the other hand, are expecting followers to be active, intelligent, influential, responsible, and involved (Rost, 2008. p. 58).

Furthermore, effective followers are those people to whom a leader can safely delegate responsibility and carry out it resplendently. It has been said that the followers are not homogenous. Therefore, they can be categorized into five.

(1) Alienated followers, those followers are potentially disruptive. They are endowed with ability to think critically and independently but disengage themselves from participation; either because of their previous experience or personal antagonism towards the leader or situation, (2) indifferent followers is the group that cannot or do not want to participate. They are free riders who are perfectly conscious of what is going on, but choose to follow the leader's or their boss's order. They neither think critically nor very active. They are like sheep, very passive and uncritical, (3) yes people followers are active by nature but think neither critically nor independently. They never query leader's action or idea and blindly support him or her, (4) survivors followers, this group is slightest disruptive and generally play safe, they symbolize the greatest part of opportunity. They are dormant and hence, need motivation. The leader has to provide the explanation(s) of what they need to do before it could be done. Above all, they are unwilling to change or give up their ideas or ways of behaving, even when there are good reasons to do so, (5) effective followers are activists. They are eager, energetic and engaged. They have strong feelings about their leaders and groups. They practice self-management and self-responsibility. That is to say, they can be delegated to, and will carry out their task extremely well without supervision. Members of this group are so critical in their thinking without being disrespectful to their leader. Among their attributes is that they never waste their leader's or firm's resources or time (Beekun and Badawi, 1999).

Similarly, Kelley (2008) also divides the followers into 5 which he calls leadership styles. (1) The sheep: The name is taken from an animal sheep who are so passive in its deeds. The members of this group are passive and always look upon the leader to think for them and motivate them, (2) the yes-people: This is the second category. They are given the name because of their attitude. Always agree with the leader, always positive they have no direction or vision of their own. They are at home to be commanded at any time, (3) The alienated: These are the members of an organization that think for themselves, but have a lot of negative energy. They

always have reasons for not obey a command or organizational new policy for “change.” They are so skeptical and cynical about the current plan of action and never propose an alternative. They see themselves as people who have got to stand up against the boss or the leader, (4) the pragmatic followers: The members of this group sit on the fence and see which way the wind blows. They always look into which direction things are going and then join the wagon. They will never front in any decision, (5) the star followers: Members of this group are very active, positive and also think for themselves. They do not always accept their superior, boss or leader’s pronouncement without their independent evaluation of its reliability and sagacity. They give full support to their superior if they agree with his or her decision. Opposite is the case if they are not convinced or satisfied with the leader’s opinion. Individual of this group are often referred to as “my right-hand person or my “go-to person.”

7. QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE FOLLOWERS

7.1. Obedience

The first attribute or quality of followers in Islamic leadership is obedience which is defined as “doing, or willing to do, what you have been told to do by someone in authority” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, n.d.). It also said to be “the act of obeying; dutiful or submissive behavior with respect to another person” Wordweb Dictionary (2000). It is requested of a follower or a subordinate to obey his or her leader or superior, whether during war or peace, likewise in any organization or any given setting.

Obedience is a divine command from al-Qur’an and *Hadith* likewise Islamic history records many instances as far as obedience is concern. Al-Qur’an says:

O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and those of you who are in authority. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination. (Al-Qur’an, *Surah an-Nisa* (4): 59).

On the authority of Ibn ‘Umar, The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) said:

It is obligatory upon a Muslim that he should listen (to the ruler appointed over him) and obey him whether he likes it or not, except that he is ordered to do a sinful thing. If he is ordered to do a sinful act, a Muslim should neither listen to him nor should he obey his orders (*Sahih Muslim*, Book 20, *Hadith* 4533).

It is also recorded that Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) says:

Obey your rulers (Caliph) whatever may happen, for if they bid you do anything different to what I have thought you, they shall be punished for it and you will be rewarded for your obedience; and if they bid you do anything different to what I have thought you, the responsibility is theirs and you are free from it. When you meet Allah (on the day of judgment) say, “O Lord, thou didst send us Prophets and we obeyed them by

Thy permission, and you set over us caliphs and we obeyed them by Thy permission, and our rulers gave us orders and we obeyed them by Thy permission, and our ruler gave us order and we obeyed them for Thy sake.” And Allah will answer, “Ye speak the truth; theirs is the responsibility and you are free from it (Quoted in Khan, 1998. p. xv).

Also Abu Huraira narrated:

That he heard Allah’s Apostle saying, “We are the last but will be the foremost to enter Paradise.” The Prophet added, “He who obeys me, obeys Allah, and he who disobeys me, disobeys Allah. He who obeys the chief, obeys me, and he who disobeys the chief, disobeys me. The Imam is like a shelter for whose safety the Muslims should fight and where they should seek protection. If the Imam orders people with righteousness and rules justly, then he will be rewarded for that, and if he does the opposite, he will be responsible for that” (*Shahih al-Bukhari*, Book 4, Vol. 52, *Hadith* 204).

It is also reported:

On the authority of Nafi, that Abdullah b. ‘Umar paid a visit to Abdullah b. Muti’ in the days (when atrocities were perpetrated on the people of Medina) at Harra in the time of Yazid b. Mu’awiya. Ibn Muti’ said: Place a pillow for Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman (family name of ‘Abdullah b. ‘Umar). But the latter said: I have not come to sit with you. I have come to you to tell you a tradition I heard from the Messenger of Allah (May peace be upon him). I heard him say: One who withdraws his band from obedience (to the Amir) will find no argument (in his defense) when he stands before Allah on the Day of Judgment, and one who dies without having bound himself by an oath of allegiance (to an Amir) will die the death of one belonging to the days of *Jahillyya* (Period of ignorance) (*Shahih Muslim*, Book 20, *Hadith* 4562).

Effective followers pay allegiance and obedience to their leader in order to reach their common interest. However, disobedience to the leader may lead to disaster. For instance, the followers’ lack of adherence to the order given by the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) in the battle of Uhud leads to the tragedy (Haykal, 2008). To prevent such disaster and state of anarchy whereby the lawless will prevail, disobedient is divinely discouraged. It has been narrated on the authority of ‘Auf b. Malik that the Messenger of Allah (May peace be upon him) said:

The best of your rulers are those whom you love and who love you, who invoke God’s blessings upon you and you invoke His blessings upon them. And the worst of your rulers are those whom you hate and who hate you and whom you curse and who curse you. It was asked (by those present): Shouldn’t we overthrow them with the help of the sword? He said: No, as long as they establish prayer among you. If you then find anything detestable in them. You should hate their administration, but do not withdraw yourselves from their obedience (*Shahih Muslim*, Book 20, *Hadith* 4573).

Also, it has been recorded (through a different chain of transmitters) on the authority of Ibn Abbas that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) said:

One who dislikes a thing done by his Amir should be patient over it, for anyone from the people who withdraws (his obedience) from the government, even to the extent of a handspan and died in that conditions, would die the death of one belonging to the days of *Jahilliyya* (Period of ignorance) (*Shahih Muslim Book 20, Hadith 4560*).

7.2. Honesty and Integrity

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, (n.d.). defines the former as "truthful or able to be trusted and not likely to steal, cheat or lie;" and the latter as "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change" or "the quality of being whole and complete;" "correspondence between word and deed." Both words are normally used as synonym and a times used separately. "Character" is another word often used interchangeably with the former two words. Character is defined as "the particular combination of qualities in a person or place that makes them different from others." In Islamic perspective as well as in conventional leadership, honesty and integrity are highly required and regarded as core characteristics of a good follower. Integrity implies that there should be correlation between the follower's word and deed. After pledging to obey the authority of the leader, the follower should honestly follow him/her. Doing contrary to the pledge is against the professional. Al-Qur'an chastises those who act contrary to their saying: "O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do" (Al-Qur'an, *Surah al-Saff* (61): 2).

This is a snub towards those who neglect to fulfill their promise. *Hadith* also supports this, emphasizing that dishonesty is one of the three signs of hypocrites (*munafiq*). In order words, a follower is a *munafiq*, if he or she acts in contrary to his/her saying. It was recorded that:

There are three signs of a hypocrite: Whenever he speaks, he tells a lie. Whenever he promises, he always breaks it (his promise); if you trust him, he proves to be dishonest. (If you keep something as a trust with him, he will not return it)." (*Shahih al-Bukhari*, Book 1, vol, 2 *Hadith* 32).

7.3. Knowledge and Wisdom

An effective follower like an effective leader must be a knowledgeable and a person of wisdom, who knows how to get things done. Knowledge is defined as "understanding of or information about a subject which has been obtained by experience or study, and which is either in a person's mind or possessed by people generally." While wisdom on the other hand, is said to be "the ability to use your (one's) knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgments" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, n.d.).

Knowledge is translated in Arabic language as *'ilm* while wisdom as *hikmah*. The two are closely interrelated and at the same time, slightly differ in their connotations. Almost everybody can acquire knowledge through study and hard work; but wisdom can only come through an inner enlightenment and by seeking sincere guidance from Almighty Allah.

Furthermore, a follower is expected to be knowledgeable and well informed. A person cannot be a functioning member of his

constituency or community if he or she lacks knowledge and wisdom.

7.4. Courage

Courage is defined as "a quality of spirit that enables you to face danger or pain without showing fear" (Wordweb Dictionary, 2000). According to Mohamed (2006. p. 275), "courage is a quality of the soul, it's heart's strength against shock and composure when experiencing fear." It is said to be a mean between the two extremes: Foolhardiness and cowardice. It is a fundamental characteristic of effective followers. The earliest followers in Islam are credible, honest and courageous. Therefore, they established themselves as independent, critical thinkers whose knowledge and wisdom are dependable. Followers should be courageous to support the leader and contribute anything needed for the success of the leader and the organization, which is eventually success of the situation at hand or their vision. Followers or subordinates should develop courage to assume responsibility without waiting for orders from the leader or superior. This is highly necessary especially in a factory or company.

On the other hand, courageous and effective followers are more apt to unapologetically conflict with leadership and less likely to be intimidated by hierarchy and organizational structure. In other words, followers should be courageous enough to challenge the leader or group's decision that could threaten the common interest. Doing so, is a way of self-protective, though it may sometimes seems as a risk. Followers should also build up courage to participate in any transformation requested to enhance leader-follower relationship, which consequently will boost business, organization, or society's performance (Chaleff, 2008).

Bashir bin Sa'ad (r.a) was a courageous follower during the 'Umar's (r.a) regime. He was bold enough to tell 'Umar that they will straighten him as they do with their arrows if he fails to properly perform his duties as a leader (Kandhlawi, 1985). Islamic leadership encourages the followers to be courageous whether males or females. A female companion showed her courage when women's interest was about to be tampered. 'Umar (r.a) was suggesting the quantity of dowry to be fixed and which should not be. the woman then stood up and courageously told 'Umar (r.a) to fear Allah, and not trespass. Then, the woman's objection was accepted (Khan, 1998). During the course of a public meeting, when some people openly criticized or spoke up their mind as in the previous examples, some of the audience thought that the criticisms were harsh but the Caliph responded, "It is the duty of the leader and followers to listen to each other and to voice out their concern." He added, "When followers do not participate and provide input, they are not contributing something useful. And we are not useful if we do not consent to their contributions" (Ali, 2005. p. 135).

7.5. Willingness to Assume Responsibility

Not only should the leader willingly accept his position, the courageous followers must also be willing to assume the responsibility. Heeding to this virtue, followers will not wait for the leader to give directive or provide for their security before they act. Followers should search for or create opportunity to fulfill their

potential and maximize their value to their group, organization or society. Followers should initiate value-base action to enhance both groups' external and internal activities.

Willingness to assume responsibility will prepare the followers to do extra or additional undertakings in order to serve the group and concurrently unburden the leader. They stand firmly in their area and do anything suitable for the success of their mission. Followers support their leader and accept the decision even though it may be difficult as long as it serves or paves the way for the success or achieving the vision (Dixon, 2008). Khalid bin Said, the fifth male to accept Islam was a good example of the followers who showed his willingness to assume responsibility. He was the first to pronounce his willingness to carry on Jihad in Syria under the leadership of Abu Bakr (r.a). He also served as a trusted lieutenant of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) in Yemen before he returned to Medina (Al-Attas and Wan Daud, 2007).

7.6. Competence and Self-management

The key to being an effective follower(s) is the competence in one's field, capability to think by one-self, capacity to self-manage the task ahead of him or her, exercise control and independence to work without close supervision. They do not buy into the hierarchy of the organization; therefore, they perceive themselves neither as subservient nor powerless. They master skill that will be useful to their organization and even possess higher performance standards than required.

Effective followers are those people to whom a leader can safely delegate responsibility, and execute it marvelously. They are the people who are competent to anticipate the needs and prepare the means to meet them. They are good judge of their own strengths and weakness, and they contribute well to the organization. Islam really encourages such followers for the betterment and successful of the organization, firm or society.

7.7. Efficiency

According to Wordweb Dictionary (2000) is "the ratio of the output to the input of any system" or "skillfulness in avoiding wasted time and effort." Ogunbado and Al-Otaibi (2013) emphasize that Islam demands efficiency and perfection in every its adherents deed. It is a quality requires in a follower or subordinate in any given organization. An effective subordinate should be effective or able to accomplish his mission without wasting time, effort and fund. Allah says that He loves dexterous and efficient workers which in this context can be called "the followers." Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) always preaches to his followers to be efficient in their undertakings be it religious or worldly, minor or major. It has been recorded that Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) said: "Allah has ordered to complete every action in a better way, when you slaughter (animal) do it in a best way, so everyone of you should sharpen his knife, and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably" (*Sahih Muslim*, Book 21, *Hadith* 4810).

7.8. Unity

Unity is defined as "an undivided or unbroken completeness or totality with nothing wanting" or "the quality of being united into one" (Wordweb dictionary (2000). It is a quality

that is expected from followers in Islamic leadership. Muslim followers must remain united in order to achieve their common objective(s). "United we stand divided we fall." If there is unity, a heavy task will be easily implemented. Internal fragmentation and division weakens an organisation. On the contrary, unity stabilizes an organization and helps in realizing its objectives and goals. Al-Qur'an forbids division and encourages Muslims to unite. It says:

And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allah's favor on you, for you were enemies of one another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His grace, you became brethren, and you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His Ayat clear to you, that you may be guided (Al-Qur'an, *Surah Al-Imran* (3):103).

Ibn Khathir in explaining this verse cited the following *Hadith* to buttress his explanation, and the *Hadith* is very accurate or appropriate in this contest.

It pleases Allah for you to acquire three qualities and displeases Him that you acquire three characteristics. It pleases Him that you worship Him alone and not associate anything or anyone with Him in worship, that you hold on to the rope of Allah altogether and do not divide, and that you advise whoever Allah appoints as your leader. The three that displeases Him are that you say, 'It was said,' and, 'So-and-so said,' asking many unnecessary questions and wasting money (Ibn Khathir, 2003, Vol. 2: p. 230).

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A tree cannot make a forest. The leader alone cannot stand in leadership filed, It has to be with other components, the follower(s) and the situation. Reviewing the existing literature in the field, shows that many researches had been conducted on aspect of the leader while there is deficiency in other two components. This paper, then sets to cover aspect of the follower in general and from Islamic point of view in particular. It gives variety of follower's definitions and the types. The paper shows that obedience to the leader, superior or ruler is very crucial in Islamic leadership. Honesty and integrity are highly required from the followers in any given firm or organization. A follower or subordinate should be courageous, knowledgeable and wise in order to make him or her effective follower. Willingness to accept the responsibility is not only the characteristic of a leader but also of the follower. An effective subordinate should be efficient in his deed and member of the given association, organization, firm or society should unite together as one in order to achieve their common aims and goals. These are some of the characteristics of a leader.

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