

FOCUS ON THE EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD FOR CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN LEADERS

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Abstract

The basic problem of governance in modern society is leadership. Almost all the world nations suffer from poor leadership as the leaders and their leadership styles fall short of the fear of God. In the pre – Islamic period, before the birth of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW), Arabs had their way and manner of administration and governance which might be difficult to locate under any modern form of administration and governance. However, with the advent of Prophet Muhammad who established the first Muslim Government in Medina, things changed. This paper examines some of the leadership principles of the Prophet with the objective of making case for adoption of these leadership styles in the bid to revive the modern society and prevent it from collapse. Historical research method is adopted for the work while data were collected from printed and electronic sources. It concludes by asserting that the harmonious environment of the Muslim community during the reign of the prophet and beyond was a product of the prophet's perfect leadership style. It is therefore pertinent for government in the modern society to borrow from Muhammad's positive leadership traits for the revival of the world.

Keywords: Exemplary, Contemporary, Leadership, Governance, Administration.

1. Introduction

In any form of organized living where people co-exist, there are always laid-down rules and regulations, procedures and order of interaction among the people. In other words, there must be some ways in which administration of the group, family, church, mosque or society is carried out. In the pre-Islamic period, before the birth of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW),¹ Arabs had been governing themselves under the administrative structure based on tribe and kinship. From the birth of Prophet Muhammad, he started showing traits of a great administrator, indeed that of a leader. His entire life was full of virtues and lessons for the modern society, especially the youth to emulate for a better society. In the Holy Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad has been described as a person of great moral character. Indeed he introduced himself as having being sent to refine morality.²

Before his call to Prophethood, Muhammad was known to be of high positive virtues of honesty, loyalty, friendliness, hard work, diligence, intelligence unity and all that can be used to qualify a good fellow. After he received the message of Islam and he started

spreading it, he did so with a genuine sense of humility, patience, Godliness and sincerity. These virtues can move our present society into greatness if they can be imbibed and implemented by the leaders of today. His life in Mecca, when his mission met with strong opposition by the pagan Arabs but Muhammad displayed high sense of patience, endurance and perseverance is worthy of being studied and may indeed serve as a great lesson for our leaders.

Muhammad's later relocated to Yathrib which was renamed as Medina and his struggle to defend his life and those of his followers from the evil plots of the Meccan pagans who pursued him there up to how he established the Muslim Community are all full of lessons for the leaders of today. This paper elucidates Prophet Muhammad's leadership styles and extolled how it excelled all others. It concluded by inviting the contemporary Nigerian leaders to emulate Muhammad's style of leadership to give Nigeria the much sought-after peace and happiness.

2. Definition of Leadership

Leadership literarily means the state or position of being a leader that gives with or in front of a person or an animal to show the way or makes them to go in the right direction.³ Socially, leadership is a process of social influence in which a person influences others to accomplish in objective and direct an organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent.

A Nobel laurel in Medicine, Dr. Farid Muhammad defines leadership as:

Leadership is the ability to see beyond assumed boundaries, and to come up with solution or path that few can visualize. The leader must then project this vision for everyone to see and pursue.⁴

He however classified leadership to social, political, managerial, religious etc; the ultimate goal of all centers round success in all spheres.

3. Concept of Leadership in Islam

In Islam however, leadership is regarded as (*'Amanah*)- trust. It is a sacred position that can solve the problems of humanity, that can guide and lead to the betterment of life and hereafter. Also, Islam regards leader as a person who can lead his followers and humanity a large from destruction to the way of Allah. It is considered as a person who is seriously concerned about human welfare and exposes leadership as physiological contract between the leader and the lead that will try his best to lead, protect and treat them fairly and with justice.⁵

Furthermore, within Islamic context, leadership is referred to as *Khilafah*, *'Imamah*, *'Imara*, *Mulk* etc. Any of the mentioned terms can be used interchangeably to mean leader depending on circumstances and practices. *Khilafah* on its own is from the word *Khalafa*, which connotes vicegerent, successor or head of Islamic *'ummah*. Allah says in

the Qur'an: "And when thy Lord said unto the angel: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy (*khalifah*) in the earth" (Q.2:30). Another verse in reference to Prophet Dawud says: "We have sent thee as viceroy (leader) on the earth, therefore judge right between mankind" (Q.38:26). The word *Khilafah* as a successor of Prophet Muhammad was used by Abubakr in the time of Umar Ibn Khattab as a successor of the man of God.⁶ Allah in the Qur'an refers to leader as an *Imam* when He says of Prophet Ibrahim: "And (remember) when his Lord tried Ibrahim with (His) commands, and he fulfilled them, He said: Lo! I have appointed you as a leader (*Imam*) for mankind (Q.2:124). Other terms like *Amir*, *Malik*, *Shaykh* etc connotes leaders like Emir, Governor, Head of State. The Qur'an refers to them as those charged with authority who should be obeyed. It says: "Oh you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and those charged with affairs among you (Q.4:59).

What should be noted here is that the concept of conventional leadership and Islamic leadership are not same. The Islamic leadership gives direction for mankind and emphasizes successes here and hereafter while the conventional man made leadership does not grant an ultimate sovereignty and power to a leader.

Leadership, in Islam, is considered to be a trust and a responsibility. A leader is expected to fulfil his obligations to God and discharge his duties to his followers to the best of his ability. Qur'an says: "Allah commanded you that ye restore deposit (covenant) to their owners, and if you judge between mankind that ye judged justly. Lo! Comely is this which Allah admonishes you. Allah is ever Hearer, Seeing (Q.4:58). The major focus of leadership in Islam is doing positive actions for the sake of God and humanity. The Islamic leadership model and the principles associated with it offer a package of exemplary leadership which can open the gate to excellence and achievement. In Islam, a leader is expected to play two primary roles of guardian and servant, as he seeks to guide them towards good and work for their welfare. He is therefore like a servant to his followers.⁷ Event that happened after the death of the Prophet and Abubakar was made his successor, his speech after ascending the throne was full of modesty considered enough lessons for contemporary world leaders he said:

I have been appointed as a ruler over you although I am not the best among you. I have never sought the position nor has ever been a desire in my heart to have this in preference to anyone else... if I don] right you help and obey me, if I go astray set me right. Obey me so long as I obey Allah and His messenger, If I disobey them, then you have no obligation to follow me.⁸

4. Leadership Styles and Qualities

According to Abolarin,⁹ Western scholars have jointly identified a number of leadership styles and grouped them as follows:

- i. **Strict Autocrat:** This is a leader who is stern, strict and acts according to a principle. He does not delegate authority and his group is a one-man show group. Although not necessarily unkind, he acts on the principle that "business is business", "time is money". He usually has a conservative leaning. An upholder of the master-servant theory. He is quite decent to his men, provided they know their position and almost over-generous to loyal subordinates.
- ii. **Benevolent Autocrat:** This leader resembles the strict autocrat but it is restricted and bothered by responsibility towards employees. He wants to do good to employees, not in terms of what they want, but what he feels they need. He is of the opinion that no material improvements are too good or too expensive for the employee and he will do it, only that they have to like what they get.
- iii. **Incompetent Autocrat:** This Corresponds with what is described as Baby Manager. He has plenty of energy and he is domineering. His praise/blame depends on the mood he is at a particular time. He promotes weak people to important decision making cadres in order to make himself powerful. He knows they are weak but denies them responsibility. When he gives an order, he would not consider the time and trouble to be taken to execute the order, he will only give queries for failure to execute the orders. He is completely uncultured and low, tells lies, takes and gives bribes, bullies and takes any measure to help him achieve his goal.
- iv. **Genuine Democrat:** A genuine democrat is a leader who does not think of himself as a special type of man; rather as a member of the group. He never gives orders without giving reasons why; takes subordinates along in planning, informs subordinates of future plans, delegates authority and sees nobody is indispensable, provides an atmosphere for security, thus creating a sense of honesty. Democracy does not mean that there is no discipline. On the other hand, discipline is much stricter than in autocracy. Also, democracy does not mean loss of power in the leader; rather he is more powerful since he has the group behind him. He finds himself as the conductor of an orchestra, rather than a one-man band. He coordinates the work of his subordinates. He realizes that as everybody is disciplined, work still goes on, even in his absence. Employees know what they are doing and why they are doing it; it eliminates pretence in doing work. Authority is delegated right down so that everybody feels secured and takes decision without necessarily obtaining permissions.
- v. **Pseudo Democratic:** Here, the leader pretends to be a genuine democrat but is too insecure to make a success of the pretence, hence ends up being a baby autocrat. The only difference is that when he is in a happy mood, he lets employees know that they are all together.
- vi. **Leiszez-faire Leaders:** The leader here does not manage, but leaves the entire job to his subordinates. A large part of his day, more often than not, is spent on

hospitality to visitors. He is, in fact, a sort of host to the firm, but at the lower level of management. This type of leader cannot be successful. A laissez leader is a man who is given a post due to his technical skill, but, has no authority over his subordinates, so they just muddle up things as if they are virtually leaderless.

It should however be noted that there is no specific leadership style that is applicable to all situations. Instead, what a leader portrays is a function of variable of environmental and organization factors. It is pertinent therefore for us to examine what really are the qualities that may combine to make a good leader who will be able to attain and sustain an acceptable societal or group cohesion.

Abolarin, quoting Ogunbamirin identified some personality and motivational traits that may be consistently held to be indicators of good leadership.¹⁰

They include:

- i. Innovativeness: the characteristic of forward looking
- ii. Eloquence: the quality of persuasiveness in speech
- iii. Wisdom: element of character that enables one to distinguish wise from unwise, and ability to know and apply spiritual truth
- iv. Fairness: quality to be just, equitable and decent
- v. Patience: the quality of being patient
- vi. Tactfulness: ability to deal with people in a sensitive manner
- vii. Stability and restraint: quality of firmness and consistent
- viii. Humor: the quality of being amusing
- ix. Desirability: quality to be suitable
- x. Maturity: the state of being mature
- xi. Role Model: to possess attitude or character worthy of emulation

5. Leadership Qualities of Prophet Muhammad

In Islam, certain qualities are attached to leadership position such as *Iman*. A leader must be a believer in the core Islamic beliefs and must be a true Muslim. Also, maturity and soundness of mental and physical condition are very essential. In addition, permanent residence within the territory where he governs and sincerity of purpose are required for a leader in Islam. He must be conscious of Allah's presence fearing Him at all times. *Adl* (justice) is one of the fundamental precepts of Islam and essential characteristics of a leader while *As-Sabr* (patience) or tolerance together with wisdom and accountability are ingredients of a good leader in Islam. It emphasizes that Islam attaches greater importance to personal qualities before a person can be appointed as a leader. A leader who possesses all these qualities can be described as a genuine democrat.

As it may be concluded that the success of Prophet Muhammad as a leader is a product of God's divine intervention on his mission as a prophet, it will be relevant for us to draw some examples of these principles as his leadership actually towed the path of Genuine Democrat. Some of such principles include:

- i. **Courage and Determination:** The incidence of the Cave of *Thaur* where Prophet and Abubakr hid so that the Meccan pagans pursuing them would not find them is a vivid support of his strong courage and determination. As Abubakr was showing apprehension, the prophet was quick in assuring him that God was with them and would not allow those polytheists to see them. The Qur'an, says:

If you do not help the Prophet, God will, as He supported him at the time when the unbelievers drove him away. He was only one of two. When these two were alone in the cave, he (Muhammad) said to his companions: "Do not grieve, for God is with us". Thereupon, God bestowed on him the gift of inner peace, and sent to his aid, forces which you did not see. He brought the word of the unbelievers utterly low, while the word of God remained supreme. God is Mighty, Wise (Q.9:40).

- ii. **Knowledge and Wisdom:** Possessing the qualities of knowledge and wisdom at a higher level places a leader in a position where he will command respect among his followers. A leader should distinctively possess these two qualities to succeed. The holy prophet Muhammad – the leader of the Muslim community was found to be an epitome of wisdom and knowledge, even before his call to Prophethood. This was demonstrated when Prophet Muhammad settled the placement of *Hajarul-Aswad* (Black Stone) - in the current place in the wall of the *Ka'bah*. Clans of Mecca could not agree on which of them should have the honour of the Black Stone in its place. Ibn Ishaq explained how Muhammad settled the matter when he writes:

They (clans of Mecca) decided to wait for the next man to come through the gate and asked him to make the decision. That individual happened to be the 35-year-old Muhammad, five years before his Prophethood. He asked the elders of the clans to bring him a cloth and put the Black Stone in its centre. Each of the clan leaders held the corners of the cloth and carried the Black Stone to the right spot. Then Muhammad himself set the stone in place, satisfying the honour of all the clans.¹¹

- iii. **Justice:** Fairness and equitable dispensation among the followers make a leader to stand out as just and considerate. Holy Prophet Muhammad displayed his high spirit of fairness as he related freely with the Jews when he assumed leadership of the first Muslim government in Medina. Also the way he dispensed justice on a woman who came from a distinguished and noble Muslim family who committed theft without allowing the woman's famous background to influence him showed an exemplary way he led his people.

This was further corroborated by his declaration thus: "Indeed, by God, if Fatima, daughter of Muhammad were to steal, her hand would be amputated".¹²

- iv. **Mercy and Gentleness:** Against the general belief that merciful and gentle people may fail as leaders, Prophet Muhammad's leadership style in combining authority and power with mercy and gentleness demonstrated a big success in leadership of the Muslim community. The story of an old woman who was helped by Muhammad to carry her luggage, but who confided in Muhammad that she was leaving the town because of one magician who had just come named Muhammad (not knowing that it was the man carrying her luggage she was complaining about) gives a vivid demonstration of these virtues. Muhammad listened to her patiently and when they got to where they were going, he declared to the old woman that he was the man because of whom she was fleeing the town. The woman instantly accepted Islam.¹³
- v. **Fraternity and Brotherhood:** The spirit of mutual consultation and unity germinating from fraternity and brotherhood which characterised the relationship among Muslims under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad accounted largely for Muhammad's successful governance of the Muslim community. The directive to people by Allah to run a consultative government like that of Muhammad is confirmed in the Holy Qur'an thus: "... and whose affairs are a matter of mutual counsel..." (Q. 42: 38) A vivid demonstration of Muhammad's consultative leadership style was the decision taken to dig a trench round Medina to counter the attack of the enemies suggested by Salman Al-Farisi during the prophet's discussion with them. The plan ultimately proved completely successful¹⁴.
- vi. **Patience and Endurance:** A good leader must be ready to endure difficult situations and should be patient with his followers. Patience and endurance are indeed inevitable qualities of a good leader. In respect of these qualities, Allah says in the Glorious Qur'an: "And we appointed from among them leaders giving guidance under Our command so long as they persevered with patience and continued to have faith in Our signs" (Q.32:24).

The leadership qualities exhibited by the Prophet worthy of emulation by the world leaders of today made the great historian W. Montgomery Watt, in his work, Muhammad at Medina declared as follows:

Muhammad's example was the best application of Islamic civilization as elaborated in the Qur'an. One readily remembered how Muhammad extended his fraternity to all men within distinction. In Mecca he regarded himself as his fellows absolutely at par in poverty and suffering. Indeed, he assumed the greater share of privation and suffering for their sake. When he emigrated to Madinah, he established this fraternity between the *Muharijin* and *Ansar* so firmly that he granted the privileges and obligations incumbent upon real blood relationship to all.¹⁵

Also, extolling the leadership qualities of Muhammad, George Bernard Shaw in his work, "The Genuine Islam" wrote:

I have often wondered upon the faith of Muhammad because of its wonderful vitality. It is to me the only religion that meets the challenges of the modern world. I have studied him, the wonderful man, and in my opinion, far from being an anti-christ, he must be called the saviour of mankind. If a man like Muhammad were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in such a way that will give it the much-needed peace and happiness. I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today.¹⁶

6. The Leadership Model of Muhammad

Since the birth of Prophet Muhammad in Mecca, his leadership qualities started being noticed. He lost both parents at a tender age. He therefore grew up as an orphan. The way and manner in which he comported himself are worthy of emulation by the youths of today who become orphans like Muhammad in the early stages of their lives. Greater lessons as a role model exist in the life of the noble prophet of Allah as he grew. His message of Islam and preaching monotheism 'deafened' the ears of his tribes, the Quraysh who eventually offered the worst opposition to him and his few earliest followers. Meccans, especially, the Quraysh¹⁷ opposed Muhammad because they felt he wanted to turn them away from their idols (gods) in order to seize political power and become cheaply popular. Muhammad, knowing that his noble mission was ordained and ordered by Allah's divine instruction was not at all dissuaded by the opposition he met, but he became strengthened by it and continued with greater vigour. Thus he was fearless, tactical and desired.

As Muhammad continued to spread the message of Islam and gather more followers, opposition turned to oppression against him and his team. They were opposed, oppressed and molested in many cruel ways to the extent that it came to a point when they decided to embark upon a holy flight (*Hijrah*) to Medina¹⁸. Thus Muhammad exhibited courage and sincere wisdom. The administrative prowess he displayed by in planning and implementing the *Hijrah* of his group are noteworthy and can serve as good examples to be applied to modern situations. After Muhammad's relocation from Mecca (his birth place) to Medina, the Meccan antagonists did not stop their oppression, but continued with their aggression and they pursued him and his followers to Medina to fight them. How Muhammad reacted to this unwarranted provocation will inform our discourse in the ensuing paragraphs.

Muhammad's entry into Medina brought to a gradual end to the former administrative structure of the people which was based on tribe and kinship. Prophet Muhammad

established his own community called the *Ummah* over which he used the Islamic administration. The outstanding difference is that the *Ummah* was based on religion and not on kinship.

The idea is nowhere given theoretical expression but it is everywhere implied or assumed: it is at first implied when the *Ansar* accepted Muhammad as a messenger from God. If Muhammad is a messenger, there must be a message; and a message in turn, implies that God is giving directives to the *Ummah* in the practical affairs of life. In many matters of principle, Muhammad did not act on his own accord, but merely announced what God commanded. Thus, God is the Head and Director of the *Ummah*. In the constitution, the security enjoyed by members of the *Ummah* emanates from the guarantee of security from God.¹⁹

Muhammad's administrative appointment shows that he was a Genuine Democrat because it illustrates the nature and extent of his power. In theory, he is simply the foremost of a number of equal allies. His primacy comes from his office as prophet and from the fact that many of the allies undertook to obey him. The men whom he sent to perform various functions were not officials of an impersonal state, but 'agents' of Muhammad, doing what he was formally entitled to do or what his personal influence allowed him to do. They probably worked more by persuasion than by coercion.²⁰

The second measure Muhammad took was to build mosques where Muslims gathered five times daily to worship God to purify themselves from the manifestations of idolatry and polytheism. They were also bases for their religious leaders and areas for congregation. Muslims would consult together about various issues and made life decisions. The mosque was also a place where judgments were made by Muhammad regarding conflicts between Muslims.²¹

The next measure taken by the Prophet in Medina was to create a comprehensive system of fundamental laws. The duties of each person were made clear within this framework; this treaty clarified the boundaries of power and the responsibilities of all positions in the community. The role of the prophet in the social structure was defined. Social group – both Muslim and Non-Muslim became aware of their responsibilities, both inside and outside the Islamic community.

7. Prophet Muhammad as Role Model for Contemporary Nigerian Leaders

In the foregoing paragraphs and sub-headings, attempt has been made to examine a few styles of leadership. It is pertinent for us in this summary to point out that the trait theory of leadership which assumes that leaders are born, but not made, is the theory that describes Prophet Muhammad's leadership. However, a glance at the provision of the leader seeking the needs of his group and endeavouring to provide them makes us to see Muhammad as a blend of the two theories. As we brushed through the style of leadership, it will be seen that Muhammad unequivocally belonged to the Genuine Democrat style of

leadership. Astonishingly, all the qualities of a good leader listed in one of the foregoing paragraphs are possessed by Prophet Muhammad. Little wonder as he was innovative, eloquent, wise, fair, patient, tactful, stable, restrained, harmonious, desirable, matured and indeed, a role model. The Glorious Qur'an speaks: "You have indeed in the Apostle of Allah a beautiful pattern of conduct for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the final day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah" (Q. 33:21).

The life of Muhammad in Mecca was characterized by patience, endurance, and perseverance in the face of all antagonism and oppression by Meccan pagans; while in Medina, the holy prophet, while establishing an Islamic government fought back the attack. Sure and certain about his mission, he had no problem defeating the pagans in all the wars of defense he was forced to fight against them. Apart from his known virtues as a seer endowed with wisdom and states manhood, skillfulness and good administrative prowess to confirm that he was not only admired by adherents of the Islamic faith, but by all and sundry, certainly, this man would have been an exemplary leader and governor as suggested by our topic.

8. Conclusion

As posited in the opening of this paper, it has been obviously proven that Muhammad is an exemplary leader. As a Genuine democrat, borrowing a leaf from the trait and leader behaviour theories, Muhammad established an Islamic government where love, unity, co-operation and fraternity were well displayed. In terms of taking power and establishing governance, the Prophet continuously acted upon moral principles. By no means did he attempt to use deception or violence, the two common means employed by dictatorial oppressors in modern politics. Honest, friendly and logical discussions were the Prophet's methods in spreading his ideas. We would like to reiterate that the leadership qualities of Prophet Muhammad offer a completely virtuous one worthy of emulation by the contemporary world leaders. If we therefore form the habit of "doing it the Muhammad way", the world will witness and experience greater peace, progress and happiness.

Endnotes

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