Exemplary Organizational Leadership – An Exploratory Study in the light of Prophet Muhammad's (Peace Be Upon Him) Leadership Traits

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Abstract

Leadership has been instilled in humans from the very beginning. When Prophet Adam (Peace Be Upon Him) was sent on earth, Allah SWT (God Almighty) gave him leadership qualities so he could preach and call people towards the right path. This process of sending Prophets in the world kept on going because Allah SWT (God Almighty) wanted to guide people to the right path in order to have success of life and hereafter. The study aims to assess few leadership qualities of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) – Last messenger of AWT (SWT) and see the applications and practicality of those leadership qualities in corporate leaders and managers. Primary data has been collected through semi structured questionnaire on purposive sampling and analyzed using thematic content analysis. The study found five top qualities (communication, positive regard, knowledge, patience and team work) important to become an exemplary and successful organizational leader.

Keywords: *Leadership, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), Quran, Hadith*

JEL Classification: *M10, M12, M14, M19*

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INTRODUCTION

Over centuries, there have been numerous leadership theories put forth by researchers and theorists to unveil different aspects of leadership and its associated qualities and pitfalls. The first such theory to evolve in 19th century was The Great Man theory put forth by Thomas Carlyle. He believed leaders are born and have God gifted leadership traits. They possess qualities that cannot be developed but are in born. He took some great leaders as examples and quoted them in his book. They were mainly; Odin, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Dante, Shakespeare, Luther, Johnson, Rousseau, Burns, Cromwell and Napoleon. (Carlyle, 1840). This theory was opposed by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). He exclaimed that great man or great leaders are a by-product of situations, societies and atmosphere. They get these great leadership qualities due to certain situations and societal changes. (Carneiro, 1974) Then later and over period of 20th and 21st century, numerous other leadership theories were proposed and argued. Then in 1974, Ralph M. Stogdill proposed the "Trait Theory" that suggested some key leadership traits such as: adaptable to situations, alert to social environment, ambitious and achievement-orientated, assertive, cooperative, decisive,

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dependable, dominant (desire to influence others), energetic (high activity level), persistent, self-confident, tolerant of stress and willing to assume responsibility. (Stogdill, 1974)

Keeping above in view, we now look at organizational leadership. Organizational leadership is seen as a two-pronged management approach that benefits a single person as well a set of people at the same time. It is the process of holding someone's hand who is falling and motivating him and finish the marathon. Organizational Leadership is a concept and process through which a person drives people around him to achieve a certain goal and target. Leaders are said to be made not born and that is done by enabling an environment that promotes healthy leadership practice. Various theorists have come up with different theories of Leadership and they advocate their research based on certain parameters and personal attributes. Leadership is learned over time and personal will. Not every manager is a leader, but every leader is a manager. Leaders possess certain qualities that make them stand out from their peers and that is why people working under or around them tend to follow their word and actions. Their knowledge base and the implementation and execution of each task create memorable and positive impact on others and that is the core reason they are called and categorized as leaders.

It is often the case that people don't want to be leaders for fear of rejection. Leaders can rise above this natural fear and lead by the example of adding value to an organization. Managers and leaders are not the same. Leaders possess strategic thinking and not only an understanding of the vision of an organization, but also the ability to effectively carry out and communicate that vision. (Technologies, 2019) There are numerous leadership challenges faced by leaders today and on the other hand, various models are proposed to overcome these challenges. One such model is the five practices of exemplary leadership® model (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The model talks about five aspects to achieve exemplary leadership i.e. Model the Way, Inspire a shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable others to Act and Encourage the Heart.

Leadership of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

The inspiration of choosing the topic came from a published article in Journal of Management Development. The author in this journal discussed Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as an ethical role model for CEOs and said that Prophet Muhammad's character and qualities could give a lot of inspiration to today's CEOs who are leading large conglomerates and corporations and want to leave a legacy behind (Beekun, 2012). Leadership and traits associated with it have been researched, discussed and practiced for centuries. In the 19th century, Great Man theory was introduced that focused and talked about leaders with personal traits such as charisma, wisdom and intelligence to name a few (Carlyle, 1840). This book and the theory were based on exceptional leaders who led their nations and societies to new height of success and prosperity. One name in his booked was of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and how he changed the entire Arab peninsula and people living in it through his exemplary leadership qualities. He set an example of a leader who is thoughtful, wise, humble, modest and exceptionally compassionate.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with his personality and wisdom changed lives of people who used to worship idols and killed daughters on their birth. Till date, world is unable to find a leader whose followers are as loyal and compassionate about his leader as companions

of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been quoted by all famous writers as the most influential leader world ever witnessed. This is the sole reason why the researcher felt the need to explore a few of his leadership traits and compare them with famous leadership theories established in today's world. We can keep on writing about Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) character and how good it is but no words can justify his character.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said:

"God has sent me to perfect good manners and to do good deeds." (Al-Sheha)

Reports by his companions:

"The Prophet (PBUH) did not swear at anyone, nor was He rude, nor did He curse anyone. If He desired to reprimand someone, He would say: 'What is wrong with him, may dust be cast in his face!'"
(Al-Sheha)

"I saw the Messenger of Allah on the Day of the Trench carrying dirt (that was dug from the trench) until His chest was covered with dirt." (Al-Sheha)

"The Messenger of Allah did not leave any gold or silver currency, or a slave, male or female, after his death. He only left behind his white mule, his weapons and a piece of land which He declared as charity." (Mogra, 2020)

In any context, i.e. personal and professional life, 04 leadership characteristics of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) can be adopted by people to have positive and significant influence within and outside their sphere of authority. These qualities would be; Personal Humility, Professional Will, Wisdom and Eye for right talent. There are unlimited qualities associated with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) but we shall focus on these 04 qualities as part of our research and see how they benefit people who are working in leadership roles or wish to be become exemplary leaders in their respective fields.

Personal Humility

As per Jim Collins, leadership has certain levels and supreme level is "Level 5" which has two distinct characteristics i.e. Personal Humility and Professional Will (Collins, 2001). If we refer to the earlier verse of the Holy Quran, we would notice that Allah Almighty has given two attributes to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) i.e. Personal Humility and Professional Will. Quran says:

"The servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say words of peace". (Quran, 25:63)

The above verse depicts one leadership trait of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in its true form whereby he practiced highest level of personal humility in every aspect of life.

Professional Will

Jim Collins's Leadership Level 5 says that leaders need to have professional will in order to take them, their team members and the organization from Good to Great. (Collins, 2001). Again, if we look at the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), we would notice various

examples where he practiced professional will in its true letter and spirit and led his team of companions to greatness in every form.

Wisdom

Quran says:

> *"He is (the One) Who has raised among the unlettered ones a (Prophetic) Messenger from among themselves who recites to them His revelations and purifies them, and teaches them the Scripture and the Wisdom, although before that, they were indeed in manifest error".* (Quran, 62:2)

The unique thing about Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) wisdom was that it didn't come from education or being learned. He didn't study at all and still he was wise enough to take the best decisions in the given circumstances. One incident is a testimony of his wisdom when all tribes in Makkah wanted to install Hajre Aswad – The Black stone. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) asked every tribal head to not fight over this and decided that whosoever comes first the next morning would be given the opportunity to install the stone. Next morning, when everyone gathered, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was there already and he then asked for a large piece of cloth, asked all tribal heads to hold the cloth from corners and installed the stone with his hands. This way, each tribe got the chance to participate in the noble event and no one felt angry or irritated.

Eye for Right Talent

As a leader, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had the eye to identify and pick the right person for the right job. There have been numerous occasions when he chose different people for particular tasks and assignments and every decision of his happened to be right on target. This means that his wisdom led him to identify the best suitable match for every task and position and the result was always positive.

Modern day leadership theories talk about attributes a leader possesses and practices from time to time and in different situations. All these theories ranging from great man theory of leadership to participative leadership theory have various attributes that were present in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which made him enormously successful as an exemplary leader. Today's organizations tend to follow lessons of Jim Collins and his book, Good to Great that says that a great level 5 leader has to have personal humility and professional will. (Collins, 2001). Moreover, wisdom and eye for talent are other attributes specifically associated with great leaders. They are wise to handle every situation and have an eye to pick the right person for the right job.

If we talk about wisdom, it is imperative for the leader to understand every situation as it arises and come up with a practical solution. On the other hand, they need to ensure that their staff members adhere to the values and ethics of the organization. That is why it is highly desirable for leaders to have practical wisdom in order to make wise decision considering the arising situations and decision that are ethical and sound. (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2011)

When it comes to eye for right talent, a motivational and influential leader has an eye for talent and how that talent is trained, groomed, polished and nurtured to become future leaders themselves. Today's organizations are focusing on global talent management tool to identify and retain top talent. The scientific methods help leaders pick the right people for the right job and assess their competencies from time to time; which helps them in succession

planning and calibration exercises. Furthermore, leaders with eye for talent focus on leading than doing and delegate tasks and assignment to top talent in order to groom them for future positions. They engage the talent at the right level and practice and preach them how to say no, yes and yes if. (Sostrin, 2017)

Character

Quran has spoken about Character in various verses and chapters. We will quote some of the verses here to explain how much emphasis has been put by Quran about Character. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"Respect and honor all human beings irrespective of their cast, color, religion, sex, property, status etc".

(Quran, 17:70)

At one more place, Allah the exalted says:

"Don't show arrogance or bad behavior towards people". (Quran, 31:18)

He also says:

"Do not make fun of other, do not make mockery of others, do not ridicule others." (Quran, 49:11)

Character is what describes an individual. It is the very essence of anyone's existence. Character is what makes a man loved or hated. The attributes associated with character make the man who is he and what he can become. That is why it is to understand how character is developed, nurtured and made exemplary over a period time. It is evident that character is the epitome of leadership development and how leaders polish their very characters and personalities to become great role models and leaders. (Sean & Avolio, 2011)

In this context, let us look at Prophet Muhammad's character and what impact did his character create on people around him. Quran explains Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s character and personality characteristics on many occasions. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"Indeed in the Messenger of Allah, you have a perfect example to follow for people who have strong faith in Allah and the Day of Judgment" (Quran, 33:21). At several points in Quran, Allah speaks about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s character and his personality attributes e.g. truthful, best judge, best arbitrator, honored, immensely noble, forgiving, steadfast, humble, patient, wisdom, role model etc. (Quran, 33:21), (Quran, 33:22), (Quran, 24:51), (Quran, 69:40) and (Quran, Chapter Al-A'raf, 7:199).

These verses suggest that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had a noble character and personality characteristics that made people accept Islam on his hand and follow him with their heart and soul.

Leadership Characteristics

Organizations have managers for each department and function and these managers become leaders of their respective functions and areas. A role model and transformational leader will attract people around him, and they would want to follow him and his ways of working. People want someone to look up to and follow. Leaders having exemplary character and a magnetic personality tend of have qualities like wisdom, personal humility, and professional will, eye for talent, empowering others, listening skills, approachability etc. These are inherent or practiced skills and traits leaders possess. It is therefore important for a leader to self-reflect and see how he is behaving with others and how well or worse he is handling situations. One study suggests that an exemplary leader should have 23 attributes

that reflect a 6-pronged model comprising of traits like wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. (Sosik & Cameron, 2010)

Leadership Theories & Models

Leadership has been the epitome of human race ever since its inception. Prophets were sent down by Allah SWT (God Almighty) to lead humans and preach them to come to Allah and leave the deviated path. Allah gave these prophets leadership qualities like patience, resilience, humility and honesty. These and many other attributes helped them call people towards the right path and lead from the front. 20th century saw emergence of various leadership theories and every theory spoke about different aspects of leadership style, attributes and what kind of characteristics leaders should have to become exemplary leaders in their fields.

Great Man Theory

Great man theory presented by Thomas Carlyle spoke about inborn qualities of a leader and how charisma, intelligence and wisdom lead a man to become a leader and a great man to be followed and looked up to. The theory was presented with some influential personalities and characters of the human history such as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Muhammad, Shakespeare, Luther, Rousseau, Pericles, Napoleon, and Wagner. Carlyle proclaimed that these men had inborn leadership attributes which made them leaders in their respective fields, and they had thousands of followers and devotees. (Carlyle, 1840)

However, this theory was majorly criticized by Herbert Spencer and the criticism formed the basis of further development on leadership in the 20th and 21st century. He opined that people mentioned by Thomas Carlyle were result of political, social, religious and economical outburst and that they were only successful in those situations and eras.

Trait Theory

People are either born with certain qualities or they develop them over time with different experiences in life. Trait leadership theory talked about these qualities and attributes. It talked about the attributes such as adaptable to situations, alert to social environment, ambitious and achievement-orientated, assertive, cooperative, decisive, dependable, dominant (desire to influence others), energetic (high activity level), persistent, self-confident, tolerant of stress and willing to assume responsibility. It also spoke about various skills that are required to become a character centered leader. These include; Clever (intelligent), conceptually skilled, creative, diplomatic and tactful, fluent in speaking, knowledgeable about group task, organized (administrative ability), persuasive and socially skilled. (Stogdill, 1974).

Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory

Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard developed a leadership theory in the decade of 1970 and early 1980s. Paul Henry is the author of famous book Situation leader and Ken Blanchard is author of best-selling book named One Minute Manager. Their theory or leadership model fell under the category of contingency theory and majorly spoke about 04 pronged strategies to leadership. It also suggested that leadership has two strong pillars i.e. leadership style and the maturity level of people who are being led by the leader. They further suggested that any leadership style could easily be derived from four basic behavioral attributes i.e. Telling, Selling, Participating and Delegating. And the entire framework revolved around these basic behavioral attributes. (Hersey & Blanchard, 1970)

Path-Goal Model

Path Goal model presented by Robert House talks about a leader's role and how he can motivate his team and staff members as a group by following certain guidelines. These include that groups and individuals should be rewarded on their achievements so they can get motivated and others can take example out of it. It also speaks about the fact that leaders should give directions and clarity of objectives to his colleagues and subordinates. And he must also ensure that the team has all the right tools and resources to perform to the best of their abilities and there are no hindrances while trying to achieve their targets, goals and objectives (Dixon & Hart, 2010)

Charismatic Leadership Theory

Charismatic leadership theory emphasizes on the fact that leaders tend to have charismatic personalities and that is how they attract people around them. It says that charismatic leaders have this quality of attracting people towards them with their charisma and not by virtue of their formal authority. (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993)

Task Oriented Behaviors

Task orientated behaviors were always part of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s life and leadership style. His planning, delegation and clarity in assigning roles was immaculate. He picked the right person for the right job and made sure that he gets all the right tools and resources to perform the assigned task. In modern times, task-oriented behaviors are targeted towards ensuring that objectives of the organization are met competently through people working in the organization in different departments, units and with various tools and resources. The idea of task-oriented behavior is to have a regimental effect on work patterns and get the most optimum outcome in the end. (Yukl, 2012)

The objectives of this study are to explore the traits that are necessary to adopt in order to become an exemplary and successful organizational leader and what kind of leadership style is being practiced in today's organizations and to find a link with four leadership traits of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

METHODOLOGY

This is the qualitative research and the objectives are achieved using thematic content analysis. Primary data using non-probability purposive sampling through self-developed semi-structured questionnaire has been collected from seven practitioners from the field of leadership development and executive coaching. In total 07 interviews (see Table 1) were conducted from respondents (R1 – R7) in order to collect required data for analysis and non-Muslim leadership gurus were interviewed. They were interviewed through semi structured questions designed to understand their perspective about leadership qualities, styles and attributes. They weren't given specific questions regarding Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his leadership traits.

Table 1: Demographic information of the Respondents

S. No.	Field of Practice	Country	Years of experience	Gender	Religion
R1	Leadership Development & Executive Coaching	Canada	25	Male	Jew
R2	Leadership Development & Executive Coaching	Canada	18	Female	Christian
R3	Leadership Development & Executive Coaching	USA	22	Female	Christian
R4	Leadership Development & Executive Coaching	Sweden	15	Female	Christian
R5	Leadership Development & Executive Coaching	India	08	Female	Hindu
R6	Leadership Development & Executive Coaching	Singapore	25	Female	Atheist
R7	Leadership Development & Executive Coaching	Holland	13	Male	Jew

The propositions are extracted from four traits and elements of this study (professional will, personal humility, wisdom and eye for talent).

The propositions developed are:

- Professional Will is essential to become an exemplary leader in an organizational setting.
- Personal humility is imperative in becoming a role model for others in an organizational setting.
- Wisdom is a must-have ingredient to lead by example and set a direction for others in an organizational setting.
- Eye for talent is crucial to build great teams and lead them as a role model in an organizational setting.

DISCUSSION

Using thematic content analysis (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013), this study focuses to explore leadership traits are required to become an exemplary and successful organizational leader and 04 leadership qualities of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) applicable in the organizational perspective. Four leadership traits of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are studied from his life i.e. professional will, personal humility, wisdom and eye for talent. These elements are then gauged through in-depth interviews and form the basis of codes and themes' identification. The answers provided by interviewees during interviews are audio recorded and transcribed for extraction of codes and themes against four elements as they are critical to our study's propositions. A pragmatic view of the thematic analysis is given in figure 2.

Figure 2. Thematic Map after Analysis
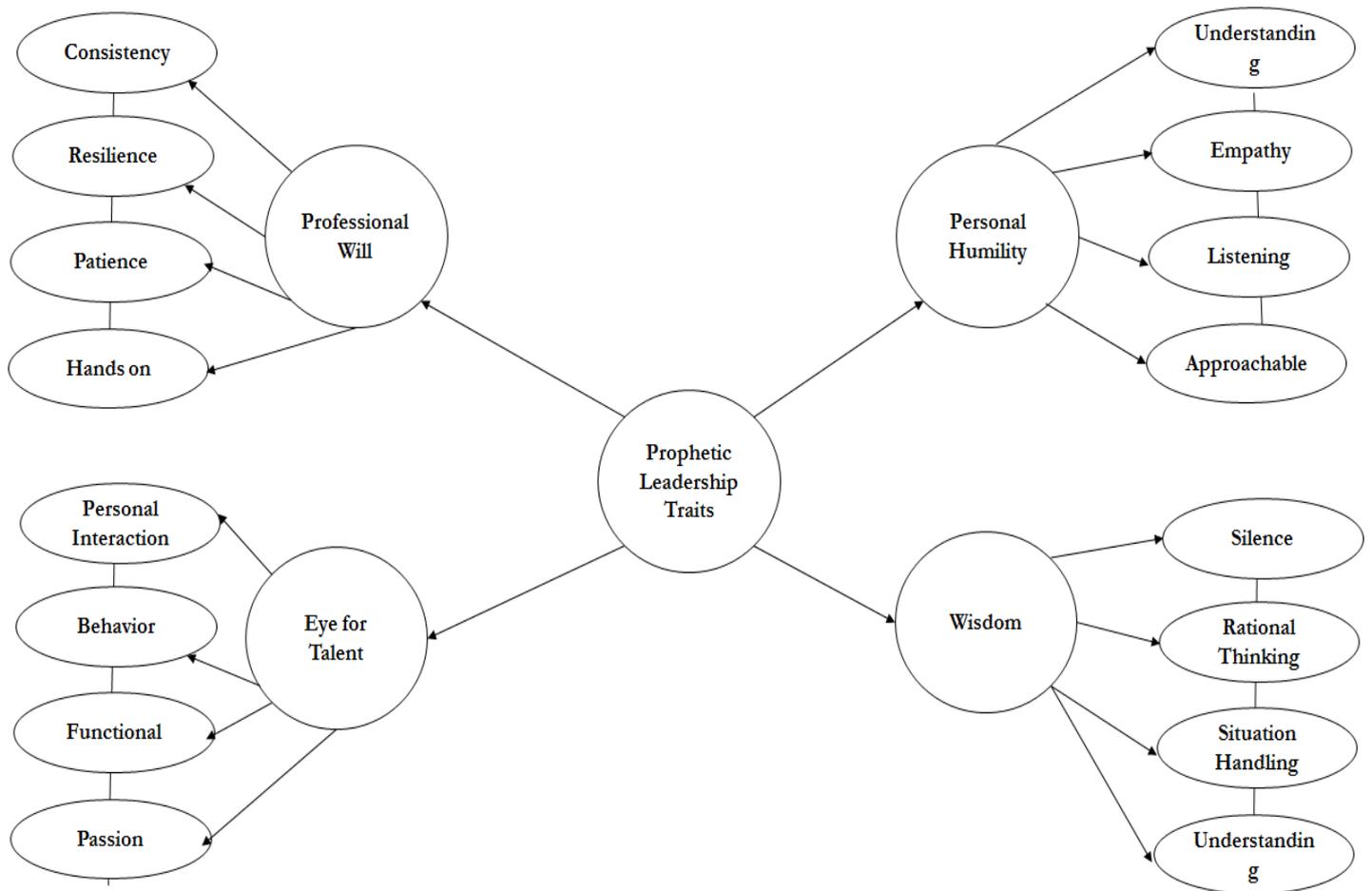
Source. Compiled by Authors

After conducting the interview, top 05 leadership qualities are found to be common. As per the input from the interviewees, communication, positive regard, knowledge, patience and team work are important qualities and very much required to become an exemplary and successful organizational leader.

Top 05 leadership qualities identified during interviews are directly or indirectly related to 04 leadership traits of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explored in this study:

Communication: This trait is commonly associated with all four traits i.e. professional will, personal humility, wisdom and eye for talent. Communication includes listening, writing and speaking and how well you connect with your audience and convince them.

Positive Regard: This trait is directly related to humility and wisdom. The more your give positive regard to your team members the more they honor you for your humility and wisdom.

Knowledge: This trait is directly related to professional will and eye for talent. When you know your job you will be determined to get the desired results with complete dedication. Moreover, subject knowledge would enable a leader to identify right people for the right job and groom them as and when required.

Patience: This trait is directly related to professional will, personal humility and wisdom. Patience is about understanding others and listening to them before passing a judgment. It requires a lot of practice but enable a person to be wiser with a positive mindset.

Team work: Teamwork is directly associated with professional will and eye for talent. Exemplary leaders take their team along and give them credit for the success. They also know the important of working in and with teams and never act as lone rangers.

Table 2. Relationship between 04 Traits and Top 05 Leadership Qualities

S.No.	Leadership Traits	Leadership Qualities
1	Professional will	Communication Knowledge Patience Team work
2	Personal Humility	Communication Positive Regard Patience
3	Wisdom	Communication Positive Regard Patience
4	Eye for Talent	Communication Knowledge Team work

This study also explored the match between leadership traits and leadership styles (see Table 2) being in practice as per input received from the interviewees. All interviewees mentioned different styles leaders' practice while leading their teams, projects and tasks. It is imperative to understand that they do follow a set pattern unknowingly and we will see how their style encompasses leadership traits mentioned in this study.

Table 3. Leadership Styles

S. No.	Leadership Styles
1	MBO (Management by Objective)
2	Participative
3	Supportive
4	Situational
5	Delegation

Table 3 illustrates that all the leadership styles practiced have traces of four traits i.e. professional will, personality humility, wisdom and eye for talent. All these styles have direct and/or indirect relationship with four leadership traits of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Thematic analysis is used to carry out individual analysis of each of the propositions. And every observation made during this study suggests that each trait mentioned in this study is essential and important to become an exemplary leadership role model in an organizational setting. If people are willing to adopt these traits, they could become better working professionals and human beings. Each trait plays an important role in adding value to their personal leadership style.

CONCLUSION

We took inspiration from the work of Rafik Beekun and in his study titled *Character centered leadership: Muhammad (p) as an ethical role model for CEOs* (Beekun, 2012). The aim of our study was to explore and understand some important leadership traits required to become an exemplary and successful organization leader and try and study leadership styles being practiced in today's organizations. The study's central theme was focused on four leadership traits of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and how they match with the required leadership qualities to become an exemplary and successful leadership role model in an organizational setting.

Considering above proposition and themes identified during the interviews, plus the previous study done by Rafik Beekun; we found direct and indirect link of qualities required versus qualities exhibited by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a leader. This suggests that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) can also be considered an organizational and corporate leader other than being seen as a religious or spiritual leader. These findings are also backed by another study (Jamil, 2015).

This study is a humble attempt to bring Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the limelight as an organizational leader and that his leadership qualities can be adopted to become an exemplary and successful leader in an organizational setting. This further gives future researchers an avenue to further explore life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a corporate leader and maybe propose a leadership model based on his life and leadership qualities.

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