

Leadership in Quality Management – An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Quality management is one form of management founded by western thinkers with the aim of fulfilling consumer satisfaction, enhancing production and providing competition for an institution. Therefore, to ensure that quality management achieves its aim, members of the institution ought to play an important role in managing the institution, especially the top management or its leaders. The leaders are responsible for ensuring the smooth launching of the quality management process. The question is how leaders implement their responsibility in quality management. What are the elements emphasised by the leaders in order to ensure quality management is able to achieve the aim of the organization? Do leaders entirely apply Western thinking in quality management when managing an organization? This study intends to analyse the leadership aspect in quality management and answer these questions by using the theoretical method. This study also hopes to establish that quality management is an important element in efforts to enhance the management aspect in an organization.

Keywords: Leadership, Quality Management, Islamic Perspective

1. Introduction

Quality management is a form of management that aims to fulfil consumer satisfaction, enhance production and competition. The idea about quality first emerged in the early 1950s in America mooted by several figures such as Deming, Drucker, Tom Peters and Crosby (Mohd Ashari Idris, 2004). These figures had introduced the management process to all institutions with the intention of enhancing quality and productivity. The question about quality is directly related to the role played by members of an institution as these members function to determine the direction and design of an institution's image. However, the main driving force that determines the effectiveness of quality from a management aspect is the top management or leaders (Auni Abdullah, 2007). Leaders are responsible for managing effective and efficient staff in order to ensure the production of quality products from a management aspect. Leaders need to ensure that they are capable of implementing well the trust laid upon them because the question of evaluating quality does not lie entirely on productivity but on the personality of leaders. Based on the discussion above, there arise several questions. One such question touches on the major aspects that constitute quality management. Another asks how a leader would implement this quality management concept. Would the leader only use common Western concepts regarding quality management? To answer all these questions, the discussion in this study focuses on examining the elements of leadership in quality management by thinkers in the field of management. Overall, the discussion in this study is divided into four main sections. The first section briefly discusses leadership in quality management. The second section discusses leadership characteristics in quality management by Islamic and Western thinkers. The third section shows the analysis related to leadership in management from an Islamic perspective. Lastly is the summary and conclusion regarding the overall discussions in this study.

2. Leadership in Quality Management

Quality management is a form of management that requires a long-term and comprehensive management plan. Hence, this effort needs a main driving force that would be able to set a clear direction for quality in order to achieve the aims of the organization. In quality management the main driving force, which becomes the variable to the entire organisation's structure, is leadership (Michael, 2003). Leadership is the main characteristic that determines whether an organization has a strategic plan. To ascertain the achievement of a high standard of quality, the leaders should be directly involved with planning, leading, implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of the efforts that instill quality in the organization (Kadir Ariffin, 2009).

To enable an organization to achieve a clear aim and vision regarding quality, the leadership needs to ensure that the responsibility entrusted to them is implemented to the best of their ability. The kind of leadership required in quality management is a leadership that has characteristics such as commitment, high level of motivation, being knowledgeable etc. The characteristics are discussed in the following section.

2.1 Characteristics of Leadership in Quality Management

It is important that every leader has leadership characteristics, which is intended to ensure that the management practices implemented by all the organization's members produces quality output. The main characteristic that should be present in a leader is a high level of commitment. A leader should accord a high level of commitment when practicing quality management (Thomas, 2002 and Rushaimi Zein Yusoff, 2005). According to Thomas (2002), leaders should accord a high level of commitment when initiating a positive and continuous process of change because quality management needs structural change in the long term and leaders should be skilled to manage this change. According to Rushaimi Zein Yusoff (2005), leaders need to be courageous and determined to ensure that the organization's vision pertaining to quality is achieved. Nevertheless, he notices that most leaders only show obedience and not commitment when implementing their duties. Commitment should emerge within the leader and it is very important for ensuring that the organization's vision and mission are effectively achieved. Leaders need to transform their commitment towards quality management into reality by clearly formulating the organization's mission, vision and objective (Mumtaz Begam et al., 2010) by initiating systematic implementation. Leaders need to ensure that the formulation of the mission, vision and objective pertaining to quality management is done personally and not delegated to subordinates. These three elements must be clear and understood by all the members in the institution. All the processes that are to be implemented need to be documented in order to facilitate and implement the plans that have been drawn up. Systematic planning is one of the characteristics of capability and ability that should be portrayed by a leader.

A leader's ability and capability is indicated through the way the leader delivers a message (Raja Roslan, et al., 2008). This is intended to attract the interest of the members of the organization into implementing the plans of the organization. The leader's method of delivery to the subordinates should be a continuous and systematic delivery in the form of a special message, using the institution's website, meetings etc. Through these methods, leaders would have the time to listen and empathize with the employees and their problems related to the issue of quality. According to these researchers, leaders need to maintain a two-way communication with the subordinates, while removing any form of obstacle and building confidence among the subordinates. In this manner, subordinates would have a sense of responsibility and a high level of confidence in enhancing quality from a management perspective.

Besides that, leaders need to formulate an organizational structure that supports quality (Kadir Ariffin, 2009). An organizational structure that supports the efforts to instil quality is a structure that ensures that the duties and responsibilities of the employees are well defined. The leaders should create a structure that defines well the employee's responsibility towards managing the quality system. Although quality is a joint responsibility, the existence of the 'department', 'unit' and 'committee' would ensure the smooth running of quality management. According to Kadir Ariffin (2009), leaders also need to consolidate the institution's operating system, as this would then facilitate the achievement of the institution's aims as endeavoured by its members, which is only possible if all the members of the institution involve themselves completely and have a high level of team spirit.

Leaders should have the ability to create total involvement and team spirit and have the wisdom to instil these two elements in their organization. This could be created by having a high level of team spirit through forming the Work Quality Enhancement Group (WQE) and the Productivity and Services Enhancement Team (PSE) (Chek Mat, 1996). A reward and recognition system should also be created in order to ensure that the employees produce the desired output. In order to create a comfortable working environment among the members of the institution and a high level of team spirit, the leader needs to plan various activities or create a sense of comradeship by holding family outings, sports festivals, knowledge-based activities etc. Thus, through monitoring, training and constant communication, the leaders could indirectly reduce the risk of failure in the quality system and be able to consolidate the employees (Ainon Mohd dan Abdullah Hassan, 2011). Leaders should consolidate the line of employees because quality is not the right of the leaders but also the employees. In order to ensure quality service is produced all members of the institution need to promptly see to the needs and wants of the clients. Each member should possess the characteristics of an employee such as capability (Mohd Ashari Idris, 2004).

To achieve this purpose, each employee must undergo training to increase knowledge, to accept risks and to be confident with his/her capabilities. According to the researcher, it is the leader's responsibility to provide ample chances for the employees to increase knowledge and self-confidence via courses, training etc. This is one way of providing knowledge about quality management systems that could be implemented to enable employees to coordinate and set in motion the quality management system more efficiently. To lead and manage is based on facts, which are authenticated, certified and the most recent. For example, the facts related to client satisfaction show that client complaints are important facts that could be used by leaders in ensuring the excellence of an organization (Kadir Ariffin, 2009). In order to lead based on facts the leader needs to spend ample time and energy in the organization. The leader should be present with the employees when implementing the tasks that contribute towards achieving the best productivity level desired by the client. In this light, leaders could practice the approach called 'Management by Walk-about' (Nor Azila Zainal Abidin, 2013). This approach ensures that leaders get to understand the organization and its clients better and help solve problems more effectively and efficiently. This aspect is important in lending confidence and motivation to fellow employees. It is an ability that balances the needs and wants of all those involved in the organization such as external and internal clients. Leaders need to handle any differences in opinion adduced by the members of the institution (Rushaimi Zein Yusoff, 2005). Therefore, the leader's ability to arrive at a correct and fair decision considering the differences in needs and wants is very important. Leaders need to portray their abilities and credibility related to the core processes of the organization. According to Ainon Mohd and Abdullah Hassan (2011), a leader should be a 'role-model' from a work related aspect, to all the employees, especially when solving operational problems. Thus, by possessing vast knowledge and being highly skilled, a leader should have the wisdom to manage change. Skills could be obtained through training, appropriate exposure, wisdom and past experience.

Leaders need to possess wisdom in order to manage change (Wan Azmi Ramli, 1990). Changing thinking styles and working regiments in an organization would generally cause resistance from members of the institution. Therefore, before any change on the operating system related to the issue of quality is made, leaders should impart adequate knowledge and exposure to all members of the institution. To establish the involvement of employees in any form of change regarding quality management leaders should first empower these employees (Nor Azila Zainal Abidin, 2013). The empowerment does in no way affect the leadership hierarchy but only aids in mutual sharing of knowledge and opinions so that employees achieve the organization's aim that is related to quality. In order to produce services and products that satisfy the members of the institution, a conducive working environment and atmosphere is very important. Leaders should build a working atmosphere and environment that supports the efforts of quality (Chek Mat, 2003). Leaders are responsible for establishing a conducive environment in the organization with the intention of affording comfort to the employees. According to Chek Mat (2003), employees need encouragement, motivation and recognition to produce products of quality. Through recognition and rewards, employees would be able to enhance their resolve. Hence, leaders need to create and maintain a conducive internal environment for the employees. When in a conducive environment, the employees would indirectly be able to produce ideas, be creative etc. in order to enhance the quality of management.

3. Analysing Leadership in Quality Management from an Islamic Perspective

According to discussions on the characteristics of leadership in quality management, it shows that the personality portrayed by every leader is more focused on values that are not in accordance with Islamic syariat. However, this does not deny the virtues of good leadership characteristics in quality management, which is intended to enhance the quality and professionalism of a leader. Hence, it is seen as incomplete because Islamic principles have not been emphasised and portrayed by the leader. This is because quality management does not depend on the way a leader ensures that a product or service satisfies all parties but rather the focus is on the question of morality, which is anchored on the principles of Islam. Referring to the leadership characteristics that should be found in a leader such as commitment and self-confidence, it is much desired that these characteristics be actually inherent in a leader. However, commitment and self-confidence is considered from an external perspective of the leader only. These two characteristics should be formed from within the individual, such as from a spiritual aspect. The spiritual aspect emerges from within when a leader constantly safeguards his relations with Allah SWT (Ahmad Redzwan, 2000). A leader should have a high level of confidence in Allah SWT and fully understand the teachings of Islam in order to lead the employees based on the al-Qur'an and the Sunnah and always call upon the employees to heed the path blessed by Allah SWT (Asmadi Mohamed Naim, 2003).

Another characteristic that should be given due notice by a leader is the need to clearly elaborate on the vision, mission and objective of the organization. Its intention is to ensure that all the members understand and appreciate the actual aim of quality management. The aim of quality management is very clear, which is to fulfil the wishes and satisfaction of clients. As an Islamic leader, the balance between the spiritual and physical elements must be taken into consideration. The main intention of a leader is to seek the blessings of Allah SWT (Auni Abdullah, 2010). To ensure that the vision, mission and objectives achieved are in line with Islam, the leader should hold in trust the responsibility bestowed by Allah SWT. A leader should possess and practice these esteemed characteristics and this is seen through the words, actions and deeds portrayed by a leader towards his subordinates. Characteristics of leadership such as having meetings, forming organizational structures, giving opinions and accepting views all point towards a good form of management in line with Islam. This could be related to the syura system that was formed during the time of the Prophet SAW. A leader should form the syura system to ensure that every decision is a mutual or jointly made decision (Ishak Mad Shah, 2006). The following is a verse from the al-Qur'an, Chapter as-Syura that touches on the concept of syura in Islam.

Allah SWT exhorted:

"And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend"

(Qur'an, 42: 38)

Based on this exhortation by Allah SWT, it clearly explains the importance of the syura when making any decision. The expected leadership characteristic that should be portrayed by a leader is to always practice it in every action taken. The leader should initiate collective negotiations with the subordinates on issues pertaining to quality management. The leader cannot ignore opinions adduced by the employees, as this would hinder the smooth process of jointly achieving the objectives. Next, the characteristic related to recognition and rewards that improve the working spirit of employees who manage the quality issue is one form of appreciation for members of the organization, which indirectly builds inter-employee relationship. However, as a Muslim rewards are not a measure that one should focus on when seeking to improve work performance. A matter of greater significance as a Muslim would be the manner in which to implement the trust bestowed by Allah SWT on this earth. The rewards given by humans are on this earth only while the rewards by Allah SWT will be everlasting until the after world.

Allah SWT has exhorted:

"Verily we have honoured the Children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We created with a marked preferment"

(Qur'an, 17: 70)

Based on this exhortation by Allah SWT, HE had explained the form of honor that would be awarded to HIS subjects. The value of the honor awarded by Allah SWT is a kind of honor that has never been awarded to other creations of Allah SWT. This exhortation by Allah SWT is intended to elaborate on the uniqueness of humankind in the eyes of Allah SWT besides providing some awareness on the natural responsibilities of humankind born on this earth. Humankind, being the best of the ummah, should lend priority to the values of religion rather than materialistic values. The evaluation of Allah SWT should be given due consideration and significance compared to the appreciation shown by humankind. Besides that, another leadership characteristic that a leader should have is that of being a "role-model" to the subordinates, especially when involving issues on operations and quality management. As a "role-model", the leader should be able to lead a path blessed by Allah SWT for all the subordinates to follow. The quality of a leader should not only emphasize on the external aspects that involve processes and procedures but should be more vigilant to internal aspects such as building beliefs (aqidah), personality and inter-personal communications (Mohd Yusof Othman, 2000). As a Muslim, the best example of a "role-model" would be the Prophet SAW (Ibrahim Mamat, 2007). The uniqueness, personality and practices of the Prophet SAW must be understood and adhered to by leaders when managing organizations.

Allah SWT had exhorted:

"We have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah"

(Qur'an, 33: 21)

Based on this exhortation by Allah SWT, HE had sent the Prophet SAW as a life-long "role-model" for all of humankind. The Prophet SAW is the best "role-model" for all aspects of life because the approach adopted by the Prophet SAW when leading his subjects covers matters that not only involve life in this world but also matters pertaining to life in the after world (Asma Abdullah, 2007). Hence, leaders need to emulate the Prophet SAW as an example when managing organizations and endorse quality management according to Islamic principles, especially those involving management issues implemented by the leader. In addition, in quality management a leader needs to embrace the principles of al-ihsan. Basically, quality management is closely related to the principles of al-ihsan, which is a principle that gives priority to the good qualities of an individual when safeguarding the individual's personality, inter-personal relations among humankind and relations with other living things (Auni Abdullah, 2007). Leadership that relies on the principles of al-ihsan would always endeavor to enhance excellence in managing the self, society and organization (Syed Omar Syed Agil, 1998). Leadership that implements the principles of al-ihsan would constantly seek the virtues of others and use it in the best way and wisely too (Syed Othman al-Habshi, 1998). This way the leader encourages the employees to implement the responsibility entrusted to them to the best of their ability.

4. Conclusion

From the discussions above it could be concluded that most of the literature on leadership still endorse the Western approach to be adopted by leaders when managing organizations. Hence, although Islamic principles and philosophy pertaining to leadership is different from the Western approach, leaders cannot completely reject studies done by the West. The main issue that should be considered by an Islamic leader is to understand the reason why he was created as the khalifah in this world, which is actually the responsibility of honoring the trust bestowed by Allah SWT. Allah SWT created humankind comprising of three main components, such as the soul (roh), mind (qalb) and the self (nafs) (Syed Omar Syed Agil, 1998). As a servant of Allah SWT, humankind needs to lend priority to these components pertaining to matters of administration and management. Therefore, as a leader, quality management is not based on productivity and working skills alone but also on the humble personality and degree of morality. Hence, when managing an organization, the leader should take into consideration the balance between the spiritual and physical aspects.

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