

Knowledge Management and its Impact on Islamic Da'wah: A Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge culture” is part of Islam. Since the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), this culture has been given a priority through the implementation of the “concept of iqra’. Correct understanding of this concept in the Muslim community has contributed to the formation of the “Islamic Civilization”. The emergence of this civilization is partly due to the management of knowledge itself. An analysis of the history of Islamic knowledge has shown that the Muslim community gave priority to knowledge management. The development of institutions of higher learning, known as madrasah, such as ‘Madrasah Nizamia’, the building of complete educational infrastructure, the translation works, the publication of many outstanding books such as ‘Ihya’ Ulumuddin’ by Imam al-Ghazali, the commitment of the government to develop a system of learning and at the same time the active participation of government leaders and the Muslim intellectuals in academic discourses are some indicators of knowledge management. In line with that statement, this paper attempts to explore the issue of knowledge management from an Islamic perspective and its relationship with da’wah. The focuses of this article are the significance of knowledge, the historical background of knowledge management in Islam and finally some suggestions for the development of Islamic knowledge in the Muslim community.

Keywords: Knowledge management, management, knowledge organisation

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge in Islam plays a decisive role in the formation of human civilisation. For instance, the importance of knowledge can be seen in the first revelation of Quran verses, the Surah al-Alaq to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that encourages the Muslims to read and recite. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, upon commenting on the concept of knowledge is of the opinion that Allah teaches us new knowledge at every given moment. Individuals learn new knowledge everyday and mankind discover new knowledge at every phase of their life. This is even more noticeable and crucial in the spiritual development of mankind. Therefore, civilization of a nation cannot be established without the art of knowledge management. Historically, the civilization of Islam witnessed management as an important practice affecting the development of knowledge and Islamic da'wah. Wise management of the knowledge wisely has greatly contributed to the betterment of da'wah Islamiyyah. This article attempts to explore how Islam puts emphasis on the importance of knowledge through good management.

ISLAM AND MANAGEMENT

The word 'management' is derived from the word 'manage', which means 'to handle or direct with a degree of skill'. Therefore, management can be defined as 'the act or art of managing; the conducting or supervising of something' (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1996: 706). This act of management is a prerequisite in human life. To achieve a higher standard of living, man should know how to manage themselves. Whether he/she is a leader of a company or of a state, he/she should be able to manage him/her self, other individuals and his/her company or state wisely. If the leader fails to do so, the system that manages the company or the state will eventually experience a great collapse or suffer from a state of chaos.

Islam as a religion, does not only teach the Muslims spiritual rites like daily prayers (solat), fasting, zakah (alms giving) and pilgrimage (hajj). It also emphasizes the life as a whole- the life of this world and the life of hereafter. Islam encompasses the teaching of Muslims as good managers and leaders. The Qur'an injunction related to the importance of management in human life is as follows:

It is He Who hath produced you from the earth and settled you therein.
(Hud, 11:61)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, upon commenting on this particular verse suggests that in the aspect of creation, man is physically made from earth or clay, and his settlement in this world is a proof of his material existence. Therefore, we must conform to all the laws of our physical and material existence hence; through our life in this world, we may develop the higher life which belongs to the other part of our being our spiritual entity. Through the use we make of our health, of our tilth, of our pastures, of material facts of all kinds, we will develop our moral and spiritual nature.

This signifies that the man has a duty to develop this earth so that the changes can contribute to the betterment of all creations in this world especially mankind. Mankind are considered the best creations above all the other creations therefore, possess competent capabilities to develop the earth. This process (development) needs a kind of systematic act which can be called 'management'.

The Prophet's traditions also have a clear guidance related to the management. The Prophet in one of his traditions regarding management is reported to have said:

God likes the man whenever doing things by performed it the best.

The good practice of Prophetic management witnessed the success of his da'wah mission to all mankind. Both Qur'an injunction and Prophet's traditions provide 'life by management' guidance for us in conducting our life.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGEMENT IN DA'WAH

Da'wah literally means invitation. In relation to Islam, da'wah is an invitation to the way of Allah. Dr. Abd al-Karim Zaydan (1976: 5) for example gives the meaning of da'wah as "the call to Allah" which is in line with the aforesaid definition. This is clearly mentioned in the Qur'an:

And who is fairer in speech than he who calls to Allah and acts righteously and says:
"I am a Muslim?"

(Fussilat, 41:33)

The practice of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) witnessed that da'wah should be propagated wisely through a systematic approach (proper management). The Sunnah (tradition/way) of the Prophet's da'wah shows us how da'wah was implemented through a good act of management. Stages of the Prophet Muhammad's da'wah proved that the Prophet was able to manage da'wah wisely. There are many evidences from the Prophet's Sunnah of da'wah implementation which signify the importance of management in da'wah. For example, according to Amin Ahsan Islahi (1978: 77), the Prophet used to visit the chieftains of Mecca and Taif in person to present the truth to them; he would also visit the tribal chiefs who visited Mecca for Hajj (pilgrimage), at the head of their tribes, wherever stationed, to offer Islam to them; he would send his representatives to some of the tribal chiefs should he not be able to meet up with them personally. After the Hudaibiyah Treaty (Sulh al-Hudaibiyah), for instance, the Prophet sent preachers and letters to various countries inviting the kings and rulers to Islam (al-Mubarakpuri, 1995: 350-359). This particular approach of da'wah could be viewed as a strategic approach to da'wah done by the Prophet. Relatively, the implementation of da'wah in this modern era should be managed well in order to ensure that the society accept da'wah thus, the negative image of Islam today could be eliminated.

RESPONSE OF ISLAM TO KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Before highlighting the response of Islam to knowledge management, it is worth to discuss briefly the current understanding of management and knowledge management. This is particularly important as the discussion on the Islamic views of the knowledge management will be based on the analysis of the modern concept and understanding.

Management, according to Fayol is "a collection of principles, rules, methods, and procedures tried and checked by general experience" (Daniel A Waren, 2005: 213). It means that in management, there are certain criteria and procedures to be followed in order to achieve the objective of any organization. Fayor has also listed fourteen principles in management " (Daniel A Waren, 2005: 215):

1. Division of work.
2. Authority.
3. Discipline.
4. Unity of command.
5. Unity of direction.
6. Subordination of individual interests to general interest.
7. Remuneration.
8. Centralisation
9. Scalar chain.
10. Order.
11. Equity.
12. Stability of tenure of personnel.
13. Initiative.
14. Esprit de corps.

When it comes to ‘knowledge management’, there appear to be some questions worth noted: are all the principles mentioned by Fayor being practiced by the Muslim community of today? Are there any differences between the Islamic approaches and the Western perspectives on management? What is knowledge management? What are the criteria of knowledge management? How to manage knowledge? What is the impact of knowledge management on human lives?

Generally, the components of knowledge management are the product, the process, the policies, the workers, the managers and the output or the form of product. In the context of knowledge, the manager or the workers have to know the nature of their knowledge is. This is particularly essential as by knowing this nature, all workers will know what kinds of tools that are needed in processing the knowledge. This will determine the quality of their product. This is what is stated by Dale in discussing the importance of managers knowing the right tools in generating the knowledge for the purpose of productivity. According to him,

Managers in a knowledge organization acutely sense that the major basis for economic growth and profitability lies in developing future managers who know how to guide an organization in the acquisition and use of knowledge.

(Zand, 1981: 5)

In relation to the knowledge organisation, according to Dale E. Zand, there should be at least three main features existing in any knowledge organisation. The first criterion is the ratio between knowledge workers and production workers increases. The second criterion is the relationship between knowledge workers and production workers improves. According to Dale, it had been in practice “in the past that the knowledge workers were supported by the production workers. This reverses. The production workers are increasingly dependent on the output of the knowledge workers.” The third criterion is knowledge will become an important factor in creating a competitive environment. The nature of the environment will determine the future and quality of product (Zand, 1981: 5). This means that knowledge becomes a parameter in determining the quality of any firm product in the future.

In order to ensure that the criteria of knowledge organisation are met, there are four aspects that should be taken into consideration by managers (Zand, 1981: 6-7):

1. Finding and disseminating knowledge that already exists in the organization
2. Acquiring and creating new knowledge
3. Converting knowledge to profitable products and services
4. Managing people who work with knowledge

Let us now discuss the Islamic views on knowledge management. One question that is worth noted here is: Does Islam ignore this aspect or does Islam inspire its followers to manage knowledge systematically? A survey on historical accounts provides us a clear answer or evidence that Islam gives a top priority to knowledge culture. Here are some important evidences of how the Muslims put a great emphasis on knowledge management:

Teaching Practices

During the Prophet Muhammad's time – The purpose of raising the Prophet is nothing significant compared to the purpose of teaching him hence, it is not surprising when the Prophet remarked in one of his traditions that he had been brought up as a teacher. The Qur'an also supports this statement (al-Imran, 3:164). The Meccan and Madinan periods witnessed the Prophet's practices in knowledge management. He gave full efforts in disseminating knowledge so that all forms of ignorance (jahiliyyah) can be removed from the society either in Mecca or Medina. With regard to the Meccan period, Hamidullah (1939: 53) suggests that the most important event identified with this period is the appointment of scribes by the Prophet to take down regularly whatever was revealed to him, whose copies multiplied quickly. He further comments that during the period of Madinah particularly after the hijrah, the Prophet immediately made the time for supervising the work in eradicating illiteracy in spite of enormous preoccupations in connection with defensive and precautionary measures (Hamidullah, 1939:53). The Prophet also used mosques as venues to educate people. Therefore, the mosques during the Prophet's time as indicated by Dr Sayyid Matlub Husayn, became an educational institution. During the Friday sermons, according to Husayn, the Prophet used to teach the Muslims the Book and the wisdom. After every prayer, he would sit in the mosque for sometime, not only to settle disputed affairs, but also to impart knowledge through interpretation remove any form of suspicions in the minds of the believers. The initial training opened a way to the development of different branches of knowledge such as Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, Qasas al-Anbiya' and history.

These facts clearly prove that the Prophet had properly managed the knowledge for the sake of da'wah. As such, it is important for the Muslims of today to manage knowledge wisely in order to ensure that the da'wah Islamiyyah will be disseminated effectively to mankind.

Period after the Prophet – The period after Prophet, especially during the time of the Abbasid Caliphate, shows many evidences related to teaching practices. Halaqah al-Ta'lim (study circles) formed the familiar pattern of the teaching practices. This kind of practical method of teaching according to Ahmad Shalaby (1973: 43), normally took place in mosques, teachers' houses, book stores or other places. Teaching practices at this time can also be seen in the designation and implementation of the educational curriculum. During this period, there seems to be no evidence of dualism being practised in the educational curriculum. The teachings of religious subjects were treated as equally important as that of academic subjects.

Infrastructure

The Islamic institutions of higher learning during that time were fully equipped with facilities for students and academicians. The basic infrastructure such as lecture halls, libraries and laboratories were built by the government for the teaching and learning process to take place effectively. It is interesting to note that the Islamic institutions of higher learning at that time had even offered free stationery such as pen and ink, meals, hostels and scholarship to the poor (Mehdi Nakosteen, 1964:67).

Library plays a decisive role in the education system. The Islamic Caliphs especially of the Abbasid period, such as the Fatimid and the Ummayyid in Cordova had established libraries for the benefits of both students and teachers. The Library of Baitul Hikmah during the period of Ma'mun for instance, had a study corner and a literature corridor specially designed for scholars to do translation works (Shalaby, 1954: 96-97). The Fatimid Abbasid in Cairo had spent lots of money to buy books in various fields and subjects such as history, literature, religion, philosophy, mathematics, geography, and chemistry.

Government Commitment/Support

The development of Islamic education is also determined by the government's involvement. As far as the history of Islamic education is concerned, the government played an important role in the implementation of the education system. The government used every possible means and gave full support to all educational activities. The establishment of schools and universities, the financial aids and moral supports are the evidences of the government's active involvement in developing the Islamic education.

Taking al-Mansur and al-Ma'mun as examples; due to their deep interests in knowledge, they had invited scholars to undertake translation works. They translated books and manuscripts of various fields such as logic, medicine and astrology into Arabic. Al-Ma'mun for example, established the Baitul Hikmah which was also equipped with a library and rooms for academicians and translators (Rauf, 1995: 48). The existence of Baitul Hikmah is considered to be the 'trade mark' of the excellence of Islamic institutions of higher learning in the Medieval Period. The involvement of the government in supporting educational activities and patronising them had established a reputable image of the Muslim countries as the best centre of higher learning in the eyes of the world. Harun Khan Sherwani (1942: 37-38) is of the opinion that this kind of governmental support had led Baghdad during the Abbasid period to become the most excellent intellectual centre. Concerning this, he suggests:

This was perhaps the resplendent period of the Abbasid Caliphate, and the lasture of Harun epoch couple with the progressive and highly erudite atmosphere of Ma'mun reign, that had made Baghdad the centre "not only of the Muslim world but of the world at large". The state was then the home of intellectual giants as the traditionists Bukhari, the historian Waqidi, the legalists Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, one of the four great imams of Sunni jurisprudence, the Shi'ite imam 'ali ar-Rida and the poet Abu Tamam, besides such non-Muslims as Hunain b.Ishaq al-'Ibadi and Jurjis b.Bakhtishu, both of whom were prominent in making the Greek system of medicine known to the Oriental world.

A meticulous survey of the history of Islamic education and its practices also witnessed the active involvement of the rulers in 'intellectual discourses'. It was a normal practice

for the rulers to offer their palaces as the venue for conducting intellectual discourses. Scholars from various fields were invited by the rulers to the palaces. The active involvement of the rulers and scholars in intellectual discourses had greatly contributed to the growth of Islamic Civilization especially in the field of knowledge.

Publication of Academic Research

Knowledge according to Islam needs to be delivered for the betterment of mankind, both individually and collectively. Therefore, hoarding knowledge is criticised by Islam and considered as a sin. In relation to this particular issue, publication is regarded as one of the effective ways in disseminating knowledge.

History shows that the development of knowledge management in Islam had led to the publication of many books which greatly contributed to the growth of Islamic civilisation and human civilization as a whole. Here is the list of the several outstanding books produced by Muslims scholars:

1. Al-Umm (The Mother or Root of Knowledge) Muhammad Ibn Idris, better known Imam Shafi'e (150-204 A.H)
2. Kitab al-Siyar wa al-Maghazi (Book on the Prophet's Biography & Battles) by Muhammad Ibn Ishaq (151 A.H)
3. Al-Kharaj (Taxation/book on public finance) by Abu Yusuf (185 A.H)
4. Asrar al-Kimya' (Secrets of Chemistry) by Jabir Ibn Hayyan (200 A.H)
5. Tabaqat al-Kubra (The Large Classified Biographical Work) by Muhammad Ibn Sa'ad (230 A.H)
6. Al-Madinah al-Fadilah (Virtuous City) by al-Farabi (255 A.H)
7. Al-Qanun (The Law/book on Medicine) by Ibn Sina (370-432 A.H)
8. Ihya Ulum al-Din (Revivication of the Religious Sciences) by al-Ghazali (451-505 A.H)
9. Al-Muqaddimah (Introduction to History) by Ibn Khaldun (1406 A.D)
10. Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an (book on Qur'anic Exegesis) by Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi (671 A.H).

There were many other books publicised during this great period in the Islamic history. However, due to the space and time constraints, it is not possible to mention all of them in this paper.

CONCLUSION

The importance of knowledge in Islam as upheld in the time of the Prophet and of the Caliphates witnesses that it has to be disseminated in a systematic and appropriate manner. The practice of teachings in the Islamic History, the establishment of the educational infrastructure such as mosques, schools, universities and libraries, and the involvement of rulers in encouraging the development of knowledge and publication of academic researches prove that Islam puts a great emphasis on the importance of knowledge management in order to produce a pious and learned society. This model in 'knowledge management' is still applicable today and should be incorporated in the present educational system. An appropriate and systematic management of knowledge may also contribute to the development of da'wah.

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