

Influence of Religion on Leadership Styles and Leadership Roles: A Critical Literature Review

Peter Rigi Gaihoo

University of Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract This paper is a critical review of literature on the influence of religion on leadership styles and leadership roles. The paper was motivated by existing lack of interest to pursue the link between religion and leadership despite the pervasive nature of religion in the world among individuals and organizations. The paper used the Kenyan political arena to demonstrate religious influence which manifests through leadership styles and the leadership roles. The paper found that religion influence manifests in leadership styles and the leadership roles in organizations. The paper concluded that the visionary aspect of leadership is intertwined with the visionary aspects of religions. The paper held that there is need for more religious knowledge among leaders and their followers to moderate on the negative influences of religion such as autocratic tendencies and scapegoating.

Keywords Religion, Political Leadership, Leadership Styles, Leadership Roles, Vision

1. Introduction

The role of religion in uniting and guiding humankind is one that cannot be ignored. Barralon (2013) acknowledges that religion plays dominant role in culture, economics, politics, and social life. Efforts to define and conceptualize religion have taken different approaches. Hubbard (2014) has pointed out that religion is the first sense of community; that is, one's mutual experience with others creates sense of community. Stark and Glock (1968) conceptualized that religion is a multi-dimensional term which includes religious beliefs, religious practices, religious feeling, religious knowledge and religious effects.

The paper was motivated by the contested relationship between religion and leadership. On one hand, some leaders have used religion to push positive transformational agendas in organizations, local communities, nations and globally while others have used religion to destroy institutions, societies, nations and harming the world at large (Fagan, 2006; Manala, 2013). The role of religion on leadership is yet to be clear despite the leadership being linked to religion such as Christianity in Kenya where it is held that leaders have been 'anointed by God'. As such, this article conducted a critical review of the existing literature which has sought to explain the role of religion on leadership. This paper takes the position that the influence

of religion manifests in the leadership styles and leadership roles. The paper uses the elaboration by Stark and Glock (1968) about the aspects of religion to show the influence religion has on leadership and particularly political leadership in Kenya.

2. Religion and Leadership Styles

Leadership styles is a key area where religion manifests itself with several authors indicating that there is a significant relationship between religion and the dimensions of leadership styles. According to Hage and Posner (2013), Christians use their religious beliefs and practices to model, encourage, enable, inspire and challenge, key dimensions of leadership styles. The paper holds the position that the impact of Christianity on leadership shows in the varied leadership styles adopted. Christianity influence is felt in all forms of leadership they deem appropriate be it democratic leadership, servant, transformational, charismatic, or strategic leadership as shown in the following discussions.

Autocratic leadership is exercised by various leaders in the Bible including King Solomon and King David. Such leadership involves having the leader exercise total authority bestowed upon him or her by people. In autocratic leadership, the leader is in control over all decisions with little or no input from group members. While this is not the kind of leadership widely accepted, there are various instances where leaders exercised autocratic leadership (Kagema, 2012). Under Christianity, followers are expected to be submissive to leaders while leaders are advised to exercise responsibility. Leaders in autocratic leadership have a lot of power over the people. However, the leadership style is

* Corresponding author:

gaithoriji@yahoo.com (Peter Rigi Gaihoo)

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incredibly efficient. Making decisions is easy and quick and work gets done efficiently (Laub, 2018). Unfortunately, owing to checks and balances, most people resent being governed through autocratic style. In Kenya, autocratic leaders have emerged in times of crisis riding on religion. Autocratic leaders such as Daniel Arap Moi kept invoking the name of God to cultivate legitimacy of their actions. It is common for the Kenyan political leadership to name their opponents *shetani* or the devil during campaigns or when challenged over their policies and practices further showing the impact of religion on leaders. Autocratic political leaders keep asserting that they are chosen by God and thus their policies and actions should not be challenged (Rule, 1984).

Democratic style on the other hand refers to leadership style in which leaders are the final decision makers with the input of followers. Leaders in this category encourage creativity while members are highly engaged. Democratic leadership style fosters high job satisfaction and productivity because followers are involved in decision making. Followers feel in control of their destiny. The downside of democratic leadership is participation takes time contributing to slow decision-making process. In religion, democratic leadership is exemplified in both Islam and Christianity. Islamic democracy holds that people are to elect their leaders. "Sharia", the Islamic law commits to practicing consultation (Mohsen, 2013).

Christianity is also deemed to be the cornerstone of democratic values. The Christian democratic values are based in Jesus' sovereign authority. While Jesus Christ is depicted as the infinite powerful rule, the teachings show the need to exercise democratic leadership by involving his followers in decision making processes as well as building relationships with followers while at the same time striving for consensus from followers (Wambura, 2010). Therefore, it is evident that religion has powerful lessons on the need for democratic leadership which empowers them to make decisions. The political leadership in Kenya keeps on arguing that the voice of the people is the voice of God to emphasize the importance of democratic processes. The Christian practices such as swearing using the bible are also incorporated into the democratic practice among the Kenyan leadership.

Servant leadership also the centre stage of each religion. Coined by Robert Greenleaf in 1977, servant leadership involves serving followers, searching for opportunities to serve followers, and training servants to lead as servants (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). In Christianity, Jesus demonstrated various traits of servant leadership more so exemplified in washing his disciples' feet. Servant leaders lead by example. In servant leadership, values are increasingly important, helping leaders achieve power because of ideals, values, and ethics (Brubaker, 2013). The Kenyan political leaders regularly posture as servants in a bid to endear themselves to the public.

Charismatic leadership is a leadership style that resembles transformational leadership. In charismatic leadership, leaders evoke nonetheless, charismatic leaders tend to focus

on themselves, thus high belief in oneself as opposed to followers. Succession of leaders in spaces that implore charismatic leadership may be difficult because replacing such a leader is extremely difficult. Charismatic leaders such as Reverend Martin Luther King are acknowledged as having fused religious teaching into their leadership enabling them to push their transformative agendas in a short period of time (McGuire & Hutchings, 2007).

According to McClendon and Riedl (2015), political leaders in Kenya use the Pentecostal and Charismatic messaging to stimulate citizens to participate in political activities. Raila Odinga has endlessly invoked the Biblical charisma in his campaigns for the presidential seat in Kenya over the years. In the 2017 General Elections campaigns Raila Odinga campaigned under the theme of the walk to Canaan promising his supporters of reaching the promised land once elected (BBC, 2017).

Strategic leadership on the other hand focuses on leaders with overall responsibility for an organization (Gaitho, Ongut, Awino & Kitiabi, 2018). Strategic leadership is exercised by top management or executives in an organization. Gaitho and Awino (2018) further indicated that strategic leaders often focus on creating organizational the vision, meaning and purpose. Strategies are adopted to enable the leader achieve the vision of the organization as well as help subordinates execute their tasks efficiently. Religion incorporates strategic leadership extensively exemplified through various rulers in the history of religion. For instance, leaders exhibited strategic leadership in battlefields while engaging with their opponents. In addition, to achieve the best outcomes, leaders such as Moses and Jesus utilized strategic leadership to guide followers (Worden, 2005). The political leadership in Kenya fashions their visions in line with religious beliefs with an aim of achieving desired political ends through religious effects among their followers. The politicians share their strategic visions using Biblical language to give hope and inspiration.

3. Influence of Religion on Leadership Roles

The influence of religion on leadership roles takes many shapes according to the existing literature. Religion serves as the backbone of ethics, values, and morals, thus corner stone of societies. The essence of religion is to guide spiritual and personal beliefs. Phipps (2012), in an authoritative study that explores link influence of spiritual beliefs on strategic decision making observes there are a few academic articles that touch on personal spiritual beliefs of leader relating to strategic leadership. Most literature fails to address relationship between leader and religion, notably evading the role of religion on leadership. However, ways in which leaders integrate religious faith with business life is espoused. In the research findings, Phipps (2012) has argued religion plays dominant roles in leadership citing leaders tend to

impose their religious beliefs in their leadership styles. Since personal beliefs are largely shaped by religion, leaders tend to express their beliefs through leadership (Fernando, 2005). In the Kenyan political front leaders tend to use religion to avoid individual and collective responsibility. The politicians are fond of evoking God whenever they fail in performing their duties. ‘That’s God’s will’ and ‘With God we will overcome’ are popular scapegoats used by Kenyan political leadership in crisis such poor service delivery and issues such as terror attacks (Gumo, Akuloba & Omare, 2012).

Another facet where religion asserts itself is with regard to ethics among strategic leaders. Spalding and Franks (2012) indicate that religion prescribes morals and ethics amongst their followers which in turn dictate how they behave in organizations and in relation to others. Frunza (2017) has further argued that the leadership is the edifice of ethics in organizations on the basis of the religious persuasions or non-persuasions. In an attempt to explore relationship between religion and ethical decision making, Vitell (2010) established that religion is associated with higher ethical judgment. Leaders who exhibit religious are likely to detect an ethical problem facing an organization as opposed to leaders who lack religious background.

Similar findings by Hage and Posner (2015) revealed that religiosity impacts leadership practices and behaviours. However, the study also affirms that leadership in workplace is significantly complicated by religion. Based on this link between religion and ethics, Gaitho et al., (2018) as well Gaitho and Awino (2018) found that ethical practices by strategic leaders in African public entities consequently affect organizational performance emphasizing the role of integrity rooted in African culture and religion on strategic leadership outcomes. The political leaders in Kenya have perfected the abuse of religious beliefs to cover up their unethical practices and behaviour. Once caught in corruption scandals the Kenyan politicians hide under religion claiming that their wealth is a ‘blessing’ from God. The political leaders also use the religious institutions including the churches and the clergy to legitimise their ill gotten wealth by attending church serving posing as God fearing men and women. The Kenyan political leadership also use religious feelings and effects among the citizens to clean their images by contributing for church development (Kahura, 2018).

4. Conclusions and Limitations

Aspects of leadership including need to meet strategic mission and vision of an organization, information gathering, and decision making largely attract influence from religion. The paper demonstrates that religion influence leadership into two areas – under leadership styles and under leadership roles. The paper position is that the ethical and visionary aspects of leadership aligns with religious based beliefs and values. Both religion and leadership converge on insights into the future based on past and present realities. The paper

however advises leaders to be cautious on the extent to which religion affects their leadership styles and roles to mitigate on the negative influence of religion such as autocratic tendencies and scapegoating in face of crisis. Political leaders have also to be alive to instances where extremist religious practices leading to poor services and instability due to disregard of subjective information while over relying on religious beliefs and practices. The paper sees the need for more religious knowledge among leaders and citizens to moderate on the negative influence of religion in leadership styles and leadership among the political leadership in Kenya.

The paper found limited literature expressly investigating the influence of religion on leadership and especially the evolving strategic leadership genre with majority contribution having been made by religious leaders or religiously inclined scholars. The paper observes while it makes attempts to extend this scholarly discourse; there still remains vast grey areas given the pervasive nature of religion in day to day life which need further probing by leadership scholars across disciplines to corroborate or counter the religiously inclined studies. Such studies would go a long way in developing conceptual measures and theoretical frameworks on influence of religion on leadership.

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