Religion and Business Leadership: An Empirical Research Review

Tasneem A. Navsariwala
Human Resource Department, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat, Gujarat, (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History
Received: 11 January 2017
Accepted: 14 January 2017
Published Online: 19 January 2017

Keywords
Ethical
Organizational System
Religion
Leadership Approach
Denomination

ABSTRACT

To understand an important role that religion plays and influences the entire scope of human societies including ethical and organizational systems and particularly leadership which is very scant, this paper aims to discuss review of empirical researches conducted to understand interconnection between leader/leadership and religion to know whether religion plays any role in influencing leader and their leadership approach and to what extent and which aspect. With available literature, review has been into two parts: First, among students about their perception towards leadership ability and second, among organizational leader. The finding shows that those who perceive themselves more religious have stronger perception about their leadership ability and religion is found to be an important factor influencing organizational leader in their leadership approach specially in decision making and Islamic leaders are found to have stronger influence of their religion on their leadership practices. Thus research finding points out the points to the fact that very scant literature is available to understand leadership approach from lens of religious influences. To have better understanding of the interconnection between religion and leadership approach we require to add more empirical evidences for the given subject and also these researches are conducted majorly for Christian denomination and at international level only. So it would interesting to study religion and leadership approach in Indian context as well as in other religious denomination specifically Islam to understand role and importance of religion on leadership approach.

INTRODUCTION

It is not merely a matter of belief or faith in a religion, but religion is also a primary mode for creating a sense of belonging and influences the entire scope of human societies, including ethical and organizational systems. For many people around the world, religious beliefs are central to their everyday lives, as religion provides the moral codes by which they live (Greetz, 1993). Religious beliefs do not only provide a framework of general ideas or systems but also shape these ideas and systems (Iannaccone 1998). Emile Durkheim (1915) defined religion as ‘a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set aside and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them’. Lot of researchers have focused their interest on studying religion as an important factor influencing leader/leadership. This paper discusses empirical researches conducted by various researchers to find out interconnection between leader/leadership and their religion and how these values, belief and religious principles has influenced their leadership approach

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Leadership Perception

Miles (2007) proposed a model that identified religiosity, gender and at risk behavior factors to be associated with perceived leadership ability and also empirically tested the model among 790 freshmen’s college students at private university at the United States of Christian faith. The first factor religiosity was expected to have a positive relationship with effective leadership on the basis that the traits of effective leaders are likely associated with religiosity. The second factor gender was expected to have association with perceived leadership ability on the basis that women report lower self efficacy for leadership tasks in their leadership capabilties and that current workplace needs leaders who exhibit higher levels of cooperation, support, employee participation that are more often linked to women’s leadership styles than men’s. The third factor at risk behavior was included drawn from the self-confidence literature specifying that high self confidence as one of the trait separating leaders from non leaders and individuals who have high self confidence drink less alcohol as a way of gaining self confidence and vice-e-versa. The study demonstrated empirical evidence that stronger perceptions of self reported leadership ability were found for those who viewed themselves as more religious compared to those who perceived themselves as less religious. Additionally male displayed stronger perception of self reported leadership ability than women and at risk behavior had no influence on leadership perception.

Similar study about leadership perception was conducted by James (2003) to study the relationship between religious orientation and leadership orientation among 170 students association officer from twelve major adventist college and universities located at United States and Canada of Christian faith. Religious orientation measured by three orientation factor

1Religiosity was referred to as “a particular institutionalized or personal system of beliefs, values, and practices related to the divine-a level of reality or power that is regarded as the ‘source’ or ‘ultimate’ transcending yet immanent in the realm of human experience”. It was considered that implicit or explicit values stemming from religiosity can be function as leadership values.
namely, Extrinsic 2, Intrinsic 3 and Quest 4. Leadership orientation was measured under four leadership frames namely, Structural5, Human Resource6, Political7 and Symbolic8. The result showed that intrinsic religiosity was positively associated with all leadership frames, validating researchers belief that full embracement to one’s religious beliefs does significantly impact one’s way of leading while Extrinsic religiosity was found positively associated only with political frame indicating that people used extrinsic religiosity for their own ends and are often categorized as selfish and shallow and lastly, Quest religiosity was found positively associated with structure, human resource and political frame and negatively associated with symbolic frame. Thus, while the study revealed a number of significant relationships but the findings were non-conclusive. It was not clear whether one's religious orientation affects his/her leadership style or not. It appeared that while religion had a significant impact on the rest of our lives, the interaction between religious orientation and leadership orientation was found more complicated than thought.

Hastings (2006) examined the role of family background and religion in predicting leadership skill. Among 26 undergraduate female students from Liberty university (private christian) in south east America. The hypothesis tested was that the children coming from intact and healthy families who share religious beliefs with their parents and consistently practice those beliefs will have stronger leadership scores than children coming from divorced, unhealthy families lacking religious practices. Thesresult showed no significant correlation between demograhic, family background and religious belief but it showed that religion had greatest influence on leadership which indicated that it would be interesting to study the type of religion a person is involved and how it impacts the leadership capabilities.

Organizational Leadership

Gasser (2009) investigated impacts of religious biases on the quality of leadership decision making among twenty military organization leaders of United States armed forces commissioned and non commissioned officers based in Europe (Belgium, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom). This qualitative research study was aimed at finding answers of two questions: 1) do religious biases influence how leadership decisions are made? and 2) In what ways do religious biases alter the quality of leadership decisions made?. The finding provided evidence that majority (94.7%)of participants expressed having some connection with either religious principles or religious beliefs while making leadership decision and that religious beliefs helped them guide in making decisions and exhibited apparent transcendent innate beliefs regarding the rightness of decisions, on the other hand few participant stated that they made their leadership decisions on the merits of choices independent of their religious background. Fernando (2005) investigated how religion influences business leaders among thirteen Sri lankan business leaders of Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim faiths in colombo. For this study, spirituality and religion were not considered as a separate theme and the role of religion was considered to be a central theme in spirituality at work. In the indepth face to face interview participants explained that they adopted role modelling as their leadership style and admitted that their role modelling style was influence by their spirituality. Adding it further, they also said that communication played a critical role for making their leadership style (role modelling) more effective and they explicitly used religious content in their message. The finding of the study showed that majority of the participants explained that religious faith was the basis of their spirituality.

Fernando & B.Jackson (2006) investigated how religion based workplace spirituality influenced the decision making processes among thirteen Sri lankan business leaders. Using groundedtheoretical framework 9 was used as the primary method for collecting data on two research topics; First, the meaning of spirituality and second, the enactment of workplace spirituality. The finding of the study on meaning of spirituality reflected that majority of the leaders explained their spirituality on the basis of their religious faith and for enactment of work place religiosity they engaged in religious practices at work for decision-making and it was further identified that ‘right’ decision making was a common need of all the business leaders and leaders attributed the origin of this sense of rightness to religious faith which again originates from spirituality i.e. a consciousness experiencing.

Hage (2013) undertook a quantitative research to determine if a relationship exists and to what extent between religion and religiosity of organizational leaders and their leadership practices in general generally, but most specifically in the context of non-Western Christian and non-Christian (Muslim) leaders in Lebanon. Leaders religion 10 and leaders religiosity11 were independent variable and leadership practice was dependent variable. Research question investigated by the study were: 1) to what extent are the leadership practices of organizational leaders based on their religion, 2) what correlation, if any, exists among the religiosity of organizational leaders and their leadership practices, 3) to what extent do religiosity and religion predict leadership practices in the workplace, 4) what difference, if any, exist in the leadership practices of organizational leaders from different religious backgrounds based on their religiosity. The overall finding of the study suggested religion to be a major influencer of beliefs and behaviors and significantly affected the leadership practices of organizational leaders but there also exists difference in the leadership practices based on difference in religion. Religion played important role for Muslim leaders on influencing their leadership practices while religiosity did not.

\[\text{Grounded theory (GT) is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the construction of theory through the analysis of data. Grounded theory is a research methodology which operates almost in a reverse fashion from social science research in the positivist tradition. It assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered but are constructed by the researcher because of his or her interactions with the field and its participants.}\]

\[\text{An affiliation that is part of a personal identity and not necessarily a reflection of the level of religious involvement whereby one may consider oneself as Christian or Muslim by birth or legal status without adhering to the teaching of the stated religion.}\]

\[\text{To portray the level of practice and involvement in the basic tenets of the religion and to measure the religious knowledge of individuals, self-esteem, well-being and the extent to which people use their religion for their own ends and the degree to which people live their religion.}\]
DISCUSSION

Thus, the review of literature for understanding interconnectedness between religion and leader/leadership showed that at students perception level empirical evidence showed that those who viewed themselves as more religious showed stronger self reported perception about their leadership ability compared to those who perceived themselves as less religious and that religion had great influence on leadership while other research suggested that while religion had a significant impact on the rest of our lives, the interaction between religious orientation and leadership orientation was found more complicated than thought. The review of literature for organizational leadership revealed leader’s connection with either religious principles and beliefs and that religious beliefs helped them guide in making decisions. Leader’s expressed their religious faith to be the basis of their spirituality. Religion significantly affected the leadership practices of organizational leaders and there also existed difference in the leadership practices based on difference in religion and specifically Islam, wherein Islamic beliefs and principles are said to play important role for Muslim leaders on influencing their leadership practices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The available review of literature for understanding about the interconnection between religion and leadership provided valuable insights on important role that religion plays in a leader’s life. But limited study in this field itself points out the fact that there exists scarcity of empirical evidences to understand role of religion on leadership. Further, all the studies are undertaken considering only Christian denomination and at international level only like Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Canada, USA and Europe. So it would interesting to study religion and leadership approach considering other religious denomination to have better understanding of the role and importance of religion on leadership approach. And also it would be interesting to conduct such research in Indian context which is rich with various religion and culture practices.

REFERENCES