

KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM, LEADERSHIP AND VISION: A DIVINE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to define the term 'knowledge' in Divine perspective and to explain its relationship with wisdom, leadership and vision of an organization. The paper provides a unique conceptual framework for learning organizations where authentic sources of knowledge combined with scientific knowledge is shown as a foundation for crating wisdom, leadership and vision in organizational setting.

Divine knowledge is authentic and is based on spirituality, religiosity and ethics while scientific knowledge comprises professional and technical know how about a phenomenon. Knowledge is defined as the sum total of Divine knowledge and scientific knowledge. This combination of knowledge will create wisdom both at individual level and at organizational level. Leadership equipped with this knowledge and wisdom, will be authentic and the vision of such organizations is sound, clear and compelling.

Keywords: Knowledge, Wisdom, Leadership, Vision, Learning Organization

1. Introduction

Every day, people working for an organization face problems and also get opportunities for improvement. To overcome these problems, people seek knowledge because they expect that knowledge will help and guide them in performing their work in a better way. Unfortunately, knowledge is an elusive and misunderstood concept. Each discipline has its own way of realizing the meaning of knowledge in certain contexts (Scarborough and Burrell, 1996; Alvesson, 2001, p. 865). Researchers acknowledge that knowledge is still a crucial, black-boxed and mystified

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concept and is hard to define. True ideas, sometimes, are neglected in favor of a wrong but a more process-oriented and pragmatic view on knowledge. This approach towards knowledge focuses on what works not on what is true. Management in organizations face normative as well as cognitive, and legal pressures for adapting specific forms of knowledge while developing new strategies reorganizations (Alvesson, 2011).

The differences in understanding the concept of knowledge is widely seen in the conception of God, man and its relationship with fellows, universe, value system, social and community setups. Same is true in organizational settings where people from different background join together for a common objective. Wisdom as “the ability to best use of knowledge for establishing and achieving desired goals based on knowledge” is the other requirement of modern day’s organizations. Also, there is a dire need of fundamental change in the philosophy of leadership and management. Transformation in organizations is one of the recent areas of interest where the emphasis of transformation is being focused on purpose, culture, core values, meaning and spirituality. For this to achieve, the authenticity and clarity of knowledge is of utmost importance for creating wisdom, providing the true and authentic leadership, and for creation of a clear and compelling vision for organizations.

This paper attempts to define the knowledge in broader terms and explores the Divine perspective of the term ‘knowledge’. An effort has been made to establish a link of this knowledge with wisdom, leadership and vision of an organization. A conceptual framework is developed that will help the organizations for their sustainability and competitiveness at financial, social, moral and spiritual levels to help organizations in creating sound, clear and compelling vision.

2. What is Knowledge?

Knowledge means information, understanding, or skill that you get from experience or education. It is an awareness of something (Marriam Learner Dictionary, 2013). Knowledge is defined by Webster (1961), as “a clear and certain perception of something”; “the act, fact, or state of understanding; a shared collection of principles, facts, skills, and rules” (Stonehouse and Pemberton, 1999); “a robust and substantial capacity

which can bring about ‘good results’ and productive effects” (Alvesson, 2011).

According to (Akhtar, 1994), the term used for knowledge in Arabic is *'ilm*, which has a much wider connotation than its synonyms in contemporary languages. *Ilm* is an all-embracing term covering theory, action and education. *Ilm* is referred to in many Quranic verses as 'light' (*nur*), and Allah is also described as the ultimate *nur*. It means that *'ilm* in the general sense is synonymous with the 'light' of Allah and the recognition (*ma'rifah*) of Allah (SWT) whereas doubt is interpreted in the Quran as darkness and ignorance. In the *ayat al-kursi* Allah says: (Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth ... Allah is the Master of the believers and He guides them out of the darkness into light). Usually darkness is interpreted as unbelief and light as faith in God.

The knowledge (*ilm*) covers the sciences of theology, philosophy, law, ethics, politics and the wisdom imparted to the Ummah by the Prophet (SPBUH). *Ilm* is of three types: information (as opposed to ignorance), natural laws, and knowledge by conjecture. The first and second types of knowledge are considered useful and their acquisition is made obligatory. As for the third type, which refers to what is known through guesswork and conjecture, or is accompanied with doubt, are sometimes essential for knowledge as a means, but not as an end. Knowledge is not mere information; it requires the believers to act upon their beliefs and commit themselves to the goals which Islam aims at attaining. The principles of scientific induction were emphasized by the Qur'an, which highlights the importance of observation and experimentation in arriving at certain conclusions. Scientific knowledge, comprising natural and physical sciences, was sought and developed by Muslim scientists and mathematicians vigorously (Akhtar, 1994).

The Quran puts greater emphasis on knowledge and its acquisition. The word *'alim* used in 140 places, *al-'ilm* in 27 places. Overall, the total number of verses in which knowledge (*'ilm*) and/ or its derivatives or associated words like book (al-kitab), pen (Qalam), ink etc are used is more than 700 times. The Islamic revelation started with the word *iqra'* ('read!' or 'recite!'). According to the Qur'an, the first teaching class for Adam started soon after his creation and Adam was taught 'all the Names'. Allah is the first teacher and the absolute guide of humanity. This

knowledge was not imparted to even the Angels. Beside various Qur'anic verses emphasizing the importance of knowledge, there are hundreds of Prophetic traditions that encourage Muslims to acquire all types of knowledge from any corner of the world (Akhtar, 1994).

According to Iqbal, a great philosopher of 20th century, the purpose of the knowledge is to arouse in man the consciousness of his relationship with God and the universe and make him to understand that the universe is the habitat of God. To him, knowledge is not mere an intellectual luxury because man is of a dual nature, so is knowledge is of two kinds: the one is the food for the soul of the man while the other is provision with which man may quip himself with the pursuits of worldly ends. The first kind is divinely ordained knowledge and the other refers to scientific knowledge which is acquired through experience, observation, and research. The second kind is discursive and deductive and refers to the object of worldly value (Maruf, 1977; Ziauddin, 1972). Great Scholar, Al-Ghazali declares that knowledge is excellence in itself and is a mean of acquiring a share in the life hereafter. Nearness to God can only be achieved through knowledge (Mansoor, 1983). Ghazali is praiseworthy of the scientific knowledge and emphasized that the need for the reason (rationalism) and experience (empiricism) becomes great and declared that these two must be used under the framework of divinely ordained knowledge to gain a deeper understanding of it (Iqbal, 1996). Wisdom is the ultimate outcome of knowledge, which is a refined form of data and information (Bierly, Kessler, & Christensen, 2000). The following lines from the Chorus from “The Rock” by T.S Eliot highlighted the above issue as under:

*Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of heaven in twenty centuries
Brings us farther from God and nearer to the Dust”*

To summarize, it is concluded that the concept of knowledge, most of the time, is taken as scientific knowledge only. Divine knowledge, which is the true source of knowledge for the guidance of humankind, sent by God through His messengers is usually ignored. We include this in to the definition of knowledge and categorize the knowledge as one: Divine, Authentic-Ideological, Universal, and Ethics-based knowledge and two:

Professional, Technical and Function specific knowledge. The sum total of these two set of knowledge becomes the whole. The distinguishing features of these two categories are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: Divine Knowledge vs. Scientific Knowledge

	Divine Knowledge	Scientific / Professional Knowledge
Sources	Revelation, Prophets commandments and practices.	Human Experiences, Discussions, Observations, Education, and Training
Purpose	Knowing God, understanding purpose of life, and serving humanity, making life meaningful	Professional excellence, wealth maximization, competitive advantage, market share
Value Creation	Through serving humanity without violating the Divine injunctions	Through production of quality goods and services
Outcomes	Spiritual and religious thoughts, ethics, universal values and principles, personal and social competence, Shared behaviors etc	Profit, Professional Expertise, Organizational competence, System, Structure and Strategy

Source: Author

It is recommended that organizations must acquire both types of knowledge to achieve quadruple bottom line: developed people, sustainable profit, integrated society, and pervasive spirituality. In Divine perspective, the professional knowledge must be under the guidelines and within the boundaries set out by the Divine knowledge. This leads to the purification of the society from evils like interest, nudity, exploitation etc.

3. Knowledge and Wisdom

Wisdom is “the faculty of making the best use of knowledge, experience, and understanding by exercising good judgment.” (Webster, 1961). According to (Bierly, Kessler, & Christensen, 2000), the concept of wisdom is action-oriented, used to apply appropriate organizational knowledge while planning, making decisions and implementation. They defined wisdom as “the ability to best use of knowledge for establishing and achieving desired goals based on knowledge”. Wisdom, in the Eastern Thought led by Confucius, Tao, Buddhism etc., is the establishment of harmony with environment and leading a meaningful, righteous and true life. Western thought, led by Aristotle and Kant, stress on the practicality or value-added quality of wisdom. According to Beck (1999), “wisdom is comprised of both understanding of the truth (knowledge) and doing what is good (action)”. To know what is right to do and not to do it is not wisdom. Also, wisdom is not to do what is right without knowing it right or wrong. Wisdom is to know what is right and to do it.

Quran (2:151; 2:269), explains wisdom as "just as (you have found from this: that) We sent the Messenger to you from among you, who recites to you Our Revelations; who purifies your lives; who instructs you in the Book and in Wisdom and teaches you those things that you did not know."; "He bestows wisdom upon anyone He wills, and he who is given wisdom is in fact given great wealth, but only those who have common sense learn lessons from these things." In this context, Wisdom signifies sound perception and judgment. One who is possessed of wisdom will follow God's path rather than that of Satan. The followers of Satan believe that wisdom and shrewdness is constantly concerned with saving out of one's earnings to perpetuate the income. Whereas in Divine perspective, true wisdom consists in using one's resource moderately to meet one's needs and in spending whatever is left for charitable purposes because the life of this world is only a fraction of man's total life which is not limited to the confines of this world. Therefore, the truly wise person is he who makes full use of the tenure of this life and invests his resources in prosperity keeping in views the bounties of Allah (SWT) in this life and in the life hereafter (Maudoodi, 1972).

The sources of wisdom are experience, spirituality, and passion (Bierly, Kessler, & Christensen, 2000). Experience provides individuals

an intuitive ability in assessing the relative importance of events, detecting changing patterns, judgment about the importance of developments, and in making decisions. According to Malan and Kriger (1998), managerial wisdom is the "the ability to detect the thin differences between what is right and what is not". Spirituality involves the understanding and appreciation of the role of God and one's relationship with God, one's purpose in life, one's position in the universe, one's soul etc. Religion provides rituals, routines and ceremonies for achieving spirituality (Rothberg, 1993). Spirituality enhances wisdom in two ways. One, by formulation of deeper goals and through a self-reflection of experiences and two, by clarifying objectives and goals by providing a basis of core beliefs and understanding of one's purpose in life. Spirituality, therefore, promotes faith, courage and hope and facilitates in making wise decisions (Bierly, Kessler, & Christensen, 2000).

Passion is the strong feelings and desire to do something. One must have the strong belief to make it happen. Passion increases where employees believe that their work is meaningful. Spirituality promotes passion. Without passion, wisdom does not work and even potential knowledge will not realize the value (Bierly, Kessler, & Christensen, 2000). Passion excites for excellence in an organization. It helps in overcoming resistance to change and ensure continual learning.

The combine outcome of two set of knowledge: Divine and Scientific/Professional Knowledge is the wisdom which provides insights into decision making both at personal level and at collective level keeping in view the peaceful and meaningful life in this world and the ultimate blessed life in hereafter.

4. Knowledge and Vision

Vision is idealized and conceptual representation of an organization. Vision is comprehensive, vibrant and compelling statement describing what the organization stands for, what it believes in, and why it exists? Vision helps organizations in planning, setting idealized goals and creating strategies. This is one by the alignment of the available resources taking into account the ethical and moral obligations towards its stakeholders and society (Anwar and Hasnu, 2012). Vision creation is, therefore, of critical importance for the competitive environment of the

time because: it helps in controlling organizational destiny; is helpful in developing creative strategies; and it provides basis for a change in corporate culture (El-Namaki, 1992). There are four important objectives of the vision of an organizations (i) vision describes the core beliefs and values of an organization (ii) elaborates a purpose for the organization, (iii) explains what is to be done to fulfill its purpose, and (iv) specifies broad goals (Coulter, 1998).

Organizations spend time and large amounts to develop vision statements but the core and the essence lies in the translation of organizations core ideology, purpose and values into their daily activities. The essence also lies in organizations' drive for progress into their whole culture in their social environment (Collins, 1996). A faulty or poorly defined vision or mission statement could promote enterprise failure (Abolaji, 2010). Sustainable competitive advantage can only be achieved by a well-articulated and well understood vision (Hamel and Pahalad, 1989; Kantabutra, 2008, 2009, 2010). Karns (2011) advocates that a new vision for the purpose of business is vitally and urgently needed to replace the contemporary concept of wealth maximization of shareholders. Therefore, efforts are needed to promote ethical and virtuous personal and corporate behaviors for business paradigm to contribute to the wellbeing of customers, employees and community for common good. Vision challenges policies, prevailing wisdom and existing norms (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977; House *et al.*, 1991; Shamir *et al.*, 1993; Tichy and Devanna, 1986).

The knowledge vision of an organization arises from exploring the basic question: 'Why do we exist?' By thinking beyond profits and asking 'Why do we do what we do?' The answers to these questions provide the foundation, and give a direction for knowledge creation. While the strategy of a company can change as the situation changes, the knowledge vision does not change so easily. Knowledge vision also inspires the passion of organizational members to encourage them to create knowledge (Collins, 2001). Anwar and Hasnu (2013), argued that ideology defines the character of an organization. It inspires controls and guides the vision of an organization. If the ideology is sound the vision will be clear and compelling where the source of sound ideology is divine knowledge. Sound ideology defines purpose of being and provides the guiding principles as core values. Working and practicing on true purpose and core

values in the organizational setting is of profound importance for creating and clarifying the vision.

5. Knowledge and Leadership

Leaders influence the discipline, direction and spirit of an organization. Leadership is considered as one of the most influencing factors for creating the vision of an organization. Authentic and true leaders transform the vision of the followers, groups, and organizations. The contemporary theories of leadership focus on Transformation, spirituality, servant, visionary, level -5 and authentic leadership etc. Therefore, the future vision of the organizations will be based on spirituality, ideology, and purpose. Leadership plays a fundamental role in facilitating wisdom and spirituality in the workplace (Cacioppe, 2005). Leadership is the guiding force for organizational learning (Lahteenmaki, Toivonen, and Mattila, 2001). The vision of the leader motivates followers to set quality goals and raise their effectiveness and increases their performance (Awamleh, 1999). Leadership influence knowledge-creating process by providing vision; sharing of knowledge assets; and promoting and enabling the continuous spiral of knowledge creation (Nonaka, 2005).

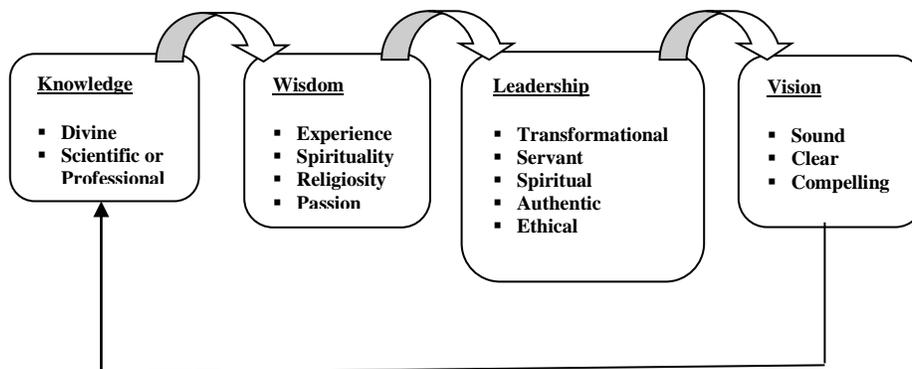
According to Fry (2003), spirituality is necessary for a continued success of a learning organization, because spiritual leadership addresses the fundamental needs of both leader and follower for spiritual survival. His model for spiritual leadership comprises values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate individuals so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership.

As stated by Covey (2004, p. 70), “when conscience governs vision, discipline, and passion, leadership endures and changes the world for good. He further explained that moral authority makes formal authority works. When conscience does not govern vision, discipline and passion, leadership does not endure, nor do the institutions created by that leadership endure. In other words formal authority without moral authority fails...it also changes the world but not for good, rather for evil. Instead of lifting, it destroys; rather than lasting, it is eventually extinguished”. Therefore, ethics, spirituality, honesty and humbleness are central to leadership practices for accomplishment of goals through mutual and

shared vision and understanding. And the bases of all these attributes are taken from Divine guidance. According to Anwar and Hasnu (2013); Leadership takes its power and moral authority from ideology, purpose and core values and influences the direction, spirit and discipline of an organization. Leadership transcends and transforms the vision of an organization through common understandings.

6. Conceptual Framework

The above discussions lead us to the development of a conceptual framework. The framework links knowledge, wisdom, leadership and vision. Knowledge is composed of Divine knowledge and professional knowledge where the latter is within the boundaries set out by the former. This set of knowledge will create wisdom both at individual level and at organizational level. The other components for creating wisdom are experience, spirituality and passion besides knowledge. Leadership with this knowledge and wisdom will be transformational, servant, spiritual, authentic and ethical. Vision, the reason of being of an organization, in such organizations will be sound (authentic not fake), clear and compelling.



Continuous reinforcement

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

7. Conclusions

Knowledge is a term which everyone talks about and everyone tries to learn about. Every day, people working for an organization face problems and also get opportunities for improvement in their personal and organizational life. For their solution, people seek knowledge because they expect that knowledge will help them in problem solving and decision making.

Despite its importance, knowledge is a slippery and an elusive concept. The meaning of knowledge is mostly misunderstood and unclarified. For researchers, most of the time, knowledge is difficult to define. The truth and reality is neglected in favor of a more pragmatic and process-oriented view on knowledge. The focus is not on what is true but on what works. The differences in understanding the concept of knowledge is widely seen in the conception of God, man and its relationship with fellow being, universe, value system, social and community setups. Same is true for organization setting.

This research defined knowledge and developed a conceptual framework showing a relationship of knowledge with wisdom, leadership, and vision of an organization. We argue that the purpose of the knowledge is to arouse in man the consciousness of his relationship with God and the universe and his fellow beings as knowledge is not mere an intellectual luxury. As man is of a dual nature, so is knowledge: the one is the food for the soul of the man while the other is provision with which man may quip himself with the pursuits of worldly ends. The first kind is divinely ordained knowledge and the other refers to professional knowledge which is acquired through experience, observation, and research. The combine outcome of these two set of knowledge is the wisdom that provides insights in decision making both at personal level and at collective level. The other components for creating wisdom are experience, spirituality and passion. Leadership with this knowledge and wisdom will be transformational, servant, spiritual, authentic and ethical. Vision, the reason of being of an organization, in such organizations will be sound (authentic not fake), clear and compelling. Continuous reinforcement of knowledge, wisdom and leadership is required to keep vision sound, clear and compelling.

There are certain limitations to the research. The research is based on extensive literature review and the personal understanding and observations of the authors. Therefore, the conceptual framework needs to be tested and explored further. The issues of validity and reliability are to be addressed in order to investigate causal relationships with identified measures of performance.

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