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MEHMED THE CONQUEROR AS A CASE STUDY ON TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Recent research on transformational leadership around the world has established a number of empirical studies. The aim of the present study is to investigate the role of transformational leadership of Mehmed the Conqueror. One of the most important objectives of the study is to analyze the underlying dimensions of transformational leadership features (such as being the role-model, motivating throughout creating inspiration, intellectual capability and providing personal support) and discuss their managerial and theoretical implications for leadership literature.

Keywords: Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Mehmed the Conqueror, Management, HRM

1. Introduction

The past few decades have brought dramatic changes in the attitudes and composition of the global workforce. These changes have forced organizations to modify their HRM practices, as well as their leadership approaches in terms of overall corporate values and behaviors. The pace of change that organizations face today has required more adaptive and flexible leadership. Transformational leaders are the ones who direct organizations for progress by generating new ideas and perspectives. Organizations will be able to survive and adapt to environmental changes if they can increase the capacity of their organizational change. Transformational leaders are the leaders that have business goals to be achieved and high enthusiasm for drastic changes. Transformational leadership can be defined as increasing the interest of the employees to achieve higher performance and developing the commitment in the organization (Bass, 1985).

The Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (1432-1481), also known as “Mehmed the Conqueror”, is one of the most famous sultans in Ottoman Empire. Though being at the age of 21, he succeeded to conquer Istanbul (Constantinople) and he was able to bring an end to the Byzantine Empire. After the conquest of Istanbul, Mehmed the Conqueror completely

retransformed the administration of the Ottoman Empire, for this reason many historians consider him as the “founding father” of the Ottomans.

2. Historical Background & Details about Mehmed the Conqueror

Mehmed the Conqueror is an Ottoman sultan who ruled first from August 1444 to September 1446, and later from February 1451 to May 1481. At the age of 21, he conquered Istanbul in 1453 and brought an end to the Byzantian Empire. As being one of the most powerful empires in the world history, Mehmed the Conqueror is not the sultan who established only the profile of the following sultans and the geographic foundations of the Empire, but also improved political and social institutions of the Ottoman Empire and shaped the future political developments (Inalcik, 2014).

After the death of his father in 1451, Mehmed the Conqueror ascended the throne and he not only strengthened the navy forces, but also erected a powerful fortress (Rumeli Hisarı) on the European side of the Bosphorus, just across the castle on the Asian side (Anadolu Hisarı) for the conquest of Istanbul. In 1453, Mehmed the Conqueror commenced the siege of Istanbul until the conquest on 29th May 1453 after 57 days (Kocu, 2004).

The conquest of Istanbul was a strategic issue, as well as a religious one. Istanbul was a strong symbol of resistance to the expansion of Islam to the West. Every single Muslim would recall to the famous saying of the prophet Mohammed “One day Istanbul would definitely be conquered. What a good sultan and what a good army is the one that would accomplish this”. Thus among Muslims it is a conviction that the conquest of Istanbul was predestined to them by God (Inalcik, 1990).

After the conquest of Istanbul, the borders of the Ottoman Empire expanded because of the campaigns led by Mehmed the Conqueror during his rulership. In 1481, Mehmed the Conqueror got sick while getting ready for a new campaign and after some days he died. The reason of his sudden death is believed to be poisoning. Mehmed the Conqueror's death caused great rejoicing in Europe and the news was proclaimed in Venice as “La Grande Aquila é morta!” — "The Great Eagle is dead!” (Freely, 2009).

3. Transformational Leadership

Change-oriented leadership models, including transformational leadership, charismatic leadership and visionary leadership have dominated the study of organizational leadership for nearly 30 years (Groves and LaRocca, 2011).

Transformational leadership refers to the leader who triggers his/her followers beyond immediate self-interests through charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass, 2000). Transformational leaders may also be characterized as paying attention to the individual subordinate by understanding and sharing in the subordinate’s concerns and developmental needs and treating each subordinate individually (Smith *et al.* 2004). Transformational leaders have the ability to transform and shift followers’ motives from the level of self-interest to the level of common interest, which creates a more collectivistic belief about their capability among followers (Demir, 2008). Transformational leaders develop a collective mindset within the group that provides a shared vision, shared values and joint decision-making. Members of the group feel part of a larger whole and they are more likely to develop a shared perception (Nielsen and Daniels, 2011). In other words transformational leaders influence their followers by developing and communicating a collective vision and inspiring them to look beyond self-interests for the good of the team and organization.

The most recent model of transformational leadership includes four leadership dimensions consisting of idealized influence/charisma that the leader acts as a role model and takes the lead in displaying desirable behavior, inspirational motivation that the leader outlines a clear vision, intellectual stimulation which leader encourages followers to make use of their skills, and individualized consideration that the leader acknowledges individual differences and adjusts behavior according to followers’ needs and capabilities (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Bass and Avolio, 2000).

4. Evaluating Mehmed the Conqueror in Terms of Transformational Leadership

Albert Einstein once said, "Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means". That sentiment is the essence behind the theory of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership allows leaders not only to achieve success, but also to transform the thoughts and actions of individuals, groups and even organizations. In this sense Mehmed the Conqueror, a sultan who transformed a state to an empire and a leader who still inspires people after 600 years is an outstanding example.

Though evaluating Mehmed the Conqueror could be realized by many different leadership styles and theories according to different approaches, the study focuses on only transformational leadership in order to reveal the dimensions of the aspect in details. Mehmed the Conqueror will be evaluated according to the dimensions of transformational leadership.

4.1. Idealized Influence/Charisma

Transformational leader provides a role model and engenders trust, admiration, loyalty and respect amongst followers through application of charismatic vision and behavior.

According to Turkish and Byzantian traditions, the ruler who conquers the capital becomes the ruler of the empire. After the conquest of Istanbul, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire at that time, Mehmed the Conqueror declared himself as the Roman Emperor. Mehmed the Conqueror used various titles like "khan" coming from Turkish tradition, "gazi" from Islamic tradition and "Caesar" from Byzantian tradition to be able to establish the future political figure of an Ottoman Sultan by unifying in his personality Turkish, Islamic and Roman heritage (Inalcik, 2014).

With the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed the Conqueror, as a charismatic sultan, codified the first Ottoman code of laws and rules in order to be an unchallanged ruler with a centralized decision making mechanism. Mehmed the Conqueror ordered his code of laws to be applied by the upcoming sultans and consequently he was able to influence all the sultans with his own decisions.

4.2. Inspirational Motivation

The transformational leader inspires followers towards new ideas or goals by developing a shared vision. He also encourages his followers to integrate and become part of the overall organizational culture and environment.

Famous saying of Mehmed the Conqueror "Either I will conquer Istanbul or it will conquer me" shows the strength of the vision developed by Mehmed the Conqueror showing a clear view of the future. This old saying still motivates many Turks in their business or daily lives, when they face an obstacle (Inal, 2008).

Mehmed the Conqueror made war consistently to expand the borders the Ottoman Empire between 1451-1481. He is the one who transformed the Ottoman state to the Ottoman Empire. An empire is a geographically extensive group of states and people united and ruled by a central authority. Thus Mehmed the Conqueror was able to establish the nucleus of the 400 years of the Ottoman sovereignty and civilization in Anatolia and Rumeli (the part of the Ottoman Empire in Europe), which became the geographic foundations of the Empire.

4.3. Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leadership encourages change by creating an environment that makes use of the followers' skills and encourages innovation.

Before the siege of Istanbul, the Ottomans used to cast only medium-sized cannons. A Hungarian engineer designed cannon which was able to hurl a stone ball of 300 kg over 1.5 km. Given abundant funds and materials, the Hungarian engineer built the gun in three months at Edirne, which was the capital of the Ottoman Empire at that time, from which it was dragged by

fifty oxen and 400 men to the siege (Maksudoglu, 2011). In the meantime, other cannons were produced for the Ottoman forces. Those pieces of artillery were the most innovative and powerful of his time and they brought an end to the time of walled cities. Ottomans could not first lay siege to Istanbul because of the Golden Horn, which was a long and narrow bay. The Ottoman fleet could not enter to the bay because of the defensive walls built by the Byzantians. Mehmed the Conqueror ordered a road construction of greased logs across the north side of the Golden Horn and rolled his ships down to transport the fleet overland into the Golden Horn. This strategic thought shows the innovation capacity of Mehmed the Conqueror with the army.

In order to create an intellectual climate, despite radical and controversial ideas, Mehmed the Conqueror gathered Italian artists, humanists and Greek scholars at his court (Kucuk, 1987). He let the Byzantine Church be open for the Christians. Mehmed the Conqueror loved and appreciated arts. He not only wrote poems but also called the famous artist Bellini from Venice to paint his portrait. He was the first Ottoman sultan who allowed his portrait to be painted. He collected books in Greek and Latin in his personal library. Mehmed the Conqueror also invited Muslim scientists such as Ali Kuşçu (famous astronomer, mathematician and physicist) and artists to his court in Istanbul and established a university (the first university) in the city. He used to discuss his thoughts with religious leaders and philosophers. In his reign, mathematics, astronomy, and Muslim theology reached the highest level among the Ottomans.

4.4. Individualized Consideration

The transformational leader treats each follower as unique and acknowledges personal differences in terms of their needs, concerns and challenges.

To encourage the return of the Greeks and the Genoese that fled from Istanbul, Mehmed the Conqueror gave their houses back and provided safety guarantee. He thought that Muslims, Christians and Jews should resettle in Istanbul (Inalcik, 2009).

Mehmed the Conqueror took revolutionary decisions on land usage. In the Ottoman Empire, the conquered territory was distributed in the form of land grants among the military. Mehmed the Conqueror removed the feudal system (inheritance of land), thus inhibiting the aristocracy and local dynasties from dominating the Empire. He replaced the current system with apparatuses of provincial administration. This initiative ensured a fairer distribution of wealth. The land belonged to the state, while the farmers had their exploitation rights.

He encouraged endowments and creation of charitable trusts. Thus in his time many hospitals, universities, waterways, mosques and marketplaces have been built by charities (Inalcik, 1967). All the other sultans followed his footsteps, finally turning Ottoman Empire into an Endowment Civilization.

5. Conclusion

The case study evaluated the role of Mehmed the Conqueror as a transformational leader according to four dimensions including (1) idealized influence/charisma, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation and (4) individualized consideration. The analysis of his leadership style revealed the way Mehmed the Conqueror transformed the Ottoman State to the Ottoman Empire, how he became a role model for all the following sultans and why he still inspires people in the Islamic world after 600 years.

The case study suggests that Mehmed the Conqueror is a transformational leader whose influence went well beyond his life span. The analysis shows that the interpretation of the four dimensions of transformational leadership by Mehmed the Conqueror reflects the mentality of 15th century, the culture of the Ottomans and the necessities of the Ottoman State. Thus, a closer examination of the relation between the implementation of the transformational leadership style and the culture as well as the requirements of the organization might be a contribution to the leadership literature.

One of the most important points for leadership literature could be mentioned as the preparation of Mehmed the Conqueror to conquer Istanbul that could be a further research. This preparation process shows the success of Enderun School system that was mainly based on

personal characteristics and talent analysis and effective placement of the shahzades (princes). The shahzades in the Ottoman Empire were raised with a visionary mentality, which proves that Mehmed the Conqueror's transformational leadership is a result of not only his personal talent and leadership, but also his education and preparation for the throne.

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