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Prophetic Organization Theory: A Brief Historical and Organizational Discourse of Early Islamic Civilization

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Abstract

This paper examines the management style practiced by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during the early period of Islamic Civilization. This management style is labeled as Prophetic Organization Theory (POT). POT is compared with two discourses prevalent in the contemporary Organization Theory which are briefly introduced. The comparison of POT with these discourses is undertaken through employing some facets of contemporary Organization Theory such as ethics, organizational epistemology and ontological states, organizational metaphorical forms, leadership and management styles and, organizational culture. Discussion section summarizes the findings of the comparison.

Keywords: prophetic organization theory, organization theory, Islamic civilization, Islamic management, discourse

Introduction

There are two theoretical perspectives for organizational knowledge defined by organization theory literature. One is the dominant discourse or dual functionalist perspective and the other one is the critical discourse or interpretive perspective or deflective organization theory. The dominant discourse has its basis on psychology, economics, sociology, analytical philosophy and cognitivism. Organizations have formal and rational management systems that can be easily observed by impartial observers who are external and decisions by managers are predictive as well as successful. Organizational strategy is always focused on creating a fit between the internal potentials and the external environmental prospects (Crotty, 1998). In contrast, the critical discourse theory organizations work as complex systems involving human responses and organization dealings (Heracleous, 2006; Fox & Fox, 2004). Objectivity in seclusion is refused, viewer or observer serves here as 'participant enquirer' and involve systems' complex sciences, social constructionism, constructionist psychology, and critical the-

ory. Its focal point is on phenomenology and symbolic interpretations in organizations with multi-directional causality. Constructionism, interpretivism and, ontology of realism are employed as epistemological basis (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

This article studies the inclination of management style of the early or Prophetic period of Islamic civilization in the context of two broad streams of present day Organization Theory. The paper therefore labels that period's management style as Prophetic Organization Theory. Given the breadth and diversity of organization theory, some of its facets are chosen in the studying Prophetic Organization Theory in the backdrop of two of its discourses. These facets include ethical views, organizational epistemology and ontological states, organizational metaphorical forms, leadership and management styles and, organizational culture.

2. Historical Discourse of Early Islamic Civilization

The Arabs are direct descendents of Prophet Ishmael. He was the first one to dwell in Mecca after his father Prophet

Abraham left him and his mother Hajira there under divine ordinations. Prophet Ishmael had twelve sons out of which Nabut and Kaider were the forefathers of Arabic nations (Tibri, 2004). The Arabs inherited the Divine Laws of Prophet Abraham through Prophet Ishmael, but over a period of time mixed them with elements of idolatry (Waliullah, 1991). The Arabian society was largely pagan before the advent of Islam. Idolatry based on polytheism prevailed throughout the Arabian Peninsula (Berkey, 2003). Every tribe and even every house had its own idol-god (Nadvi, 1992). The pagan society had a vague notion of a Supreme God or Allah but they actually believed in many sub ordinate idol-gods (Najeebabadi, 1991). The pre-Islamic Arab society before Islam was a desert occupied by primeval Bedouins (Kitapevi, 2000). The life for clans can be described as:

“Nomadic, revolving around seasonal migration and breeding and selling of animals.... For only a select group of tribes, the Quraysh of Mecca included trade was the major socio-economic activity” (Gordon, 2005).

Women were isolated in most of the social life matters like they can't claim to property and can't remarry behind their deceased husbands like Jewish and Christian tribes (Adnan, 2004; Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2001). Before Islam, in Arab society:

“The condition of women was very poor and the birth of a female child was considered as a curse and misfortune in the family” (Sweet et al., 2008).

Either girl child was buried or were rescued as wealthy people bought them. (Nadvi, 1992; Tate, 2006). Arab society before Islam was like:

According to Seale (1982)

“In the lawless pre-Islamic pagan society of Arabia ‘*Might is Right*’ principle was the underlying guiding philosophy. Robbery, rape,

murder were commonplace, anxiety (was) all-prevalent and compassion non-existent. Raiding, feuding and inter-tribal rivalries, an unbroken cycle of acts of violence, constituted the only way of life these ancient Arabians knew”.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was 29th and 30th in descent from Prophet Ishmael and Prophet Abraham respectively (Hishaam, n.d.). In 610 AD the Prophet (PBUH) received the first revelations of the Quran in a cave on the summit of Mount Hira outside Mecca (Armstrong, 2002; Watson, 2005). Born in the trade rich tribe of Quraysh in 570, the Prophet (PBUH) was strikingly different from what surrounded him.

“(He) swept the floor, milked the ewes, and mended with his own hands his shoes and his woolen garment in his domestic life many weeks would elapse without a fire being kindled on the hearth...his ordinary food consisted of dates and water” (Gibbon, n.d.)

In another book, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* Hart (1978) selects Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on top because of his faith that:

“Muhammad (PBUH) had a much greater personal influence on the formulation of the Moslem religion than Jesus had on the formulation of the Christian religion (and he (Muhammad, PBUH) was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both religious and secular levels” (Hart, 1978).

The German philosopher Goethe (1749-1832) has narrated the ascent of the Islamic Civilization under the leadership of the Prophet (PBUH) in *Mahomet's Gesang or Song for Muhammad* (Schimmel, 2003). The spirit of teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through Quranic revelations was to apply the sovereignty of Allah (Mau-

doodi, 2008). It is indivisible and only Allah is the Lord of spiritual as well as secular world. Islam as it came to be known as, meant a complete surrender or submission to His Rulership alone in all matters of life (Cornell, 2007). All Muslim men and women should be submissive to Allah and His demand (Maudoodi, 2008). There is a basic difference between other religions and Islam that later gives salvation in both this world and hereafter (Rodinson, 2002). Din, as the Prophet (PBUH) preached it, meant a state of complete indebtedness and submission to the Creator (Nasr, 2001).

Quran assists Muslims in both religious and secular matters of life. Every notion of Islamic society like political, managerial, economy, civil etc. is purely embedded in the principles of Holy Quran (Al-Buraey, 1985). No partition is marked among the sacred, worldly and routine activities and they are linked together since the times of our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Justice was the goal to achieve to create an impartiality and equity between the haves and have-nots (Armstrong, 2002).

Alongside Quran, the second most important source of guidance for the Muslims, both during and after the life of Prophet (PBUH), is the Sunna. Sunna, “the Way of the Prophet” (Cornell, 2007) profoundly influences the daily discourse of a Muslim’s life and provides guidance to him/her in the celestial as well as the mundane aspects of existence. The earlier Islamic scholars of the 8th and 9th century based all the jurisprudence on the Prophetic Hadith or words of the Prophet (PBUH). Each hadith is reliably supported by a “chain (isnad) of devout Muslims leading directly back to the Prophet himself” (Armstrong, 2002; Rippin, 1993). The isnad is thus a “chain of narrator, tracing the incident, or saying, back to a first-hand authority” (Bennet, 1998). These isnads were examined stringently by the early Islamic scholars for any break in the chain. If a break was found or if any of its narrator was found to be a ‘bad Muslim’, the hadith was rejected.

At the time of the hijra (migration to Medina from Makkah) three distinct groups existed in Medina: the Muslim Muhajirin (the Exiles) from Mecca and their native Muslim Ansar (the Helpers), the hypocrite converts to Islam (Munafiqeen) who retained an affiliation for idolatry and, the Jews (Gibbon, n.d). The latter two groups were looking to build their own strongholds in Medina and only received the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions half-heartedly. Despite this difficult civil situation the Prophet (PBUH) was able to establish brotherhood among the Exiles and the Helpers and also entered into pacts with the Jews. He thus brought together the heterogeneous elements of the city “into an orderly confederation” (Armstrong, 2002). The Charter of Medina, “the first written constitution for a pluralist society” (Meri, 2006), through which the Prophet (PBUH) built this confederation appealed on the basis of universal humanity to all factions to unite as one nation. This was an entirely new experience for the tribal Arabs who knew no larger loyalty than that for their own tribes or clans.

The universalism of the Prophetic message along with the moral codes and precepts of the Quran, calling for emancipation of the suppressed and the women, initiated a great mental change towards civility in the lives of barbaric and vengeful Arabs (Nadvi, n.d.) This societal change in the attitude initiated a “transformation of community of Medina into a vast empire” (Lewis, 1974). Islam was the first world religion to embrace commerce. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his first wife Khadija (RA) were both traders. Ja’far bin Ali’s book *The Beauties of Trade* was written in 12th century AD. Baghdad and Cairo became the world commercial centers in European dark ages (Zeldin, 1998).

3. Islamic Work Ethics: The Basis of Early Islamic Management

As mentioned above, all fields of Islamic knowledge are underpinned by the directives of Quran and Sunnah. Islamic Work

Ethic (IWE), which underpins the entire Prophetic Organization Theory, is no exception to this general rule. This Prophetic management style, with its dual character of sacred and the mundane (Lewis, 1998), changed the basic fabric of the pagan Arab society. The family organization took shape from the overall societal change and for the first time, parents, elders, women and slaves were given their due share of rights in managing the family affairs (Nadvi, n.d.; Nasr, 1999). The organizations of state and the family displaced the centuries old tradition of having tribes and clans as the only socio-political organization in the Arabian land (Gordon, 2005).

IWE of Prophetic Organization Theory measures morality in terms of an emphasis on intentions rather than outcome or consequences. Engaging in businesses involving excessive speculation or trading in alcohol may bring fortune but are considered immoral behavior under IWE (Ali & Al-Owaihian, 2008). IWE does not view business as means to tyrannize people (Koontz et al., 1980). Rather work is a holy and sacred activity for which an individual is accountable not only to his/her employer but also to Almighty Allah. Work is thus not differentiated from acts of worshipping or praying (Nasr, 1987; Beekun & Badawi, 2005). The Quran defines the Islamic community as “a community justly – balanced” (2:143) or as people who should hit the golden mean without inclining to extremes and who are well-poised in every virtuous act (Daryabadi, 1991). Ali (2005) underpins IWE on Quranic verses “So perform what you are bidden” (2:68), “And He has subjected to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on earth, the whole from Himself” (45:13), “And that there shall be for man naught except what he endeavors” (53:39) and, “For all there will be degrees in accordance with what they did, and thy Lord is not unaware of what they do” (6:132). Based on these verses he defines four pillars of IWE.

Effort or endeavors, competition in acquiring degrees or ranks, transparency for He is aware of what is done and, morally responsible conduct because all humans are subjected to Divine Laws both here in this world and in the Hereafter. The real mission of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was to preach, teach and spread the message of Allah and not the establishment of a state. Over a period of time, however, the Islamic state emerged as means to the Prophetic end. It can be said that the city of Medina provided the nascent Islam its first organizational base.

4. Organizational Discourse of Early Islamic Civilization

The expansion of Islam, mosques, the first real organization of Islam, grew in almost all tribes and clans of Arabia. These mosques were not only places for worship but also served as centers for social, political and organizational matters and were used as schools, courts and, parliaments (Meri, 2006; Nasr, 1999). There were at least 30 mosques in and around Medina in the life time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). All of these mosques had permanent imams who led the congregational prayers. It seems that central administrators and governors of various provinces acted as imams in their tribes or regions. Mosques were egalitarian institutions devoid of any clergy, ranks and hierarchy of monks and priests where some were more privileged or more sacred than others (Watson, 2005; Gibbon, n.d.). The extremely humble architect of these mosques displayed the underlying egalitarian values of the Prophet (PBUH). The floors had no carpets, roofs were of palm fronds and the worshippers prostrated on sandy floor (Meri, 2006). The Prophet (PBUH), after some detailed discussions, accepted Umar’s (RA) method of calling for prayers (azan) and Bilal bin Rabah was appointed the first prayer-caller or mu’azzin (Siddiqi, 1988).

After the hijra to Medina, the Prophet (PBUH) also organized the institution of tabligh (preaching), talim (teaching of Is-

lamic tenets) and tafaqquh fi al-din (training and comprehension in religion) and appointed muballighs (preachers) and mu'allims (teachers) for this purpose. A group of poor Muslims called the *ashab al-suffah* (the people of the ledge) accompanied the Prophet (PBUH) round the clock and learnt the fundamentals of religious matters from him. Similarly many muftis (jurists/legal opinion providers) were trained by the Prophet (PBUH) as a matter of policy to create a batch of interpreters of Quran and the Sunnah. This was done with the intent to continue the Prophetic mission in times to come. The Prophet (PBUH) was the head of religious as well as secular authority. This dual leadership enabled him to create a state along with a pluralistic society (Ro'I, 2004).

The Quran does not mention the word 'administration' but *yudabbiru*, which means to economize, devise a plan, manage, steer and carry out the business (Cowan, 1976). Accordingly the Prophet (PBUH) administered the newly emerging State of Medina through a combination of centralization and decentralized delegation of authority. His administrative State machinery and the resulting organization structure included central, provincial or divisional and local administrators (Ali, 2005). The central administrators included the *na'ibin* (deputies), *mushirs* (advisors), *katibs* (secretaries), *rusul* (envoys), officers on special duties and, *shu'ara* (poets) and *khutaba* (orators). The provincial administrators consisted of the *walis* (governors), *ru'asa* (local administrators), *naqibs* (local representatives), *qazis* (judges) and *sahib al-suq* (market officers) (Siddiqi, 1988). The Arabs, whether Muslims or pagans were, in general, a mercantile community par excellence. In the city of Medina, the exiles mainly engaged in trade while the helpers pursued their original profession of agriculture and farming. The state revenues of the Islamic state depended on contributions and donations, war spoils, landed property and, collection of *jizyah* (tax) and *sadaqat*. Tax collection was responsibility of the gover-

nors but special officers were also appointed for this purpose. The Prophet's (PBUH) tax-collecting apparatus was a two-tier system, comprising of central and local collectors (Siddiqi, 1988). Central collectors were appointed directly by the Prophet (PBUH) and sent from Medina to various tribes and regions. They did not collect the taxes directly from the people but remained stationed at the headquarters of their regions and collected from the local collectors. Both types of collectors were given specific job descriptions and appointment letters from the Prophet (PBUH) and were instructed to go to the tax-payers themselves instead of putting the people to the hardship of going to a certain office or department for payment of tax.

Some qualifications like knowledge of the geographical and tribal conditions, basic computing skills, integrity of character and, high morality, were the main pre-requisites for becoming a tax-collector. The Prophet (PBUH) debarred his kinsmen from getting appointed as tax collectors. Local tax collection was usually the responsibility of local administrators who operated in their own areas, tribes and territories. Special posts of tax assessors (*kharas*) and protectors of tribal land (*sahib al-Hima*) along with *katibs* or writers of tax matters also existed in the life time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Siddiqi, 1988).

The Muslim community at Medina lived in constant threat of the enemies, both external (Meccans and other tribes hostile to Islam) as well as internal (Jews and the hypocrite converts). To dilute this threat the Prophet (PBUH) organized the military by appointing a number of officers and functionaries. These included the commanders of the expeditions, wing-officers, standard-bearers, scouts, spies, guides, officers-in-charge of the war spoils and prisoners of war, officers-in-charge of weapons and war-horses and, the bodyguards. Article 36 of the Charter of Medina vested the military powers in the hands of the Prophet (PBUH) and gave him the right to appoint officers in all

the administrative divisions of the state including the military. This made him the supreme commander of the Muslim army. He organized the Islamic army by appointing key army personnel from among the various clans and tribes in a fair and proportionate manner (Siddiqi, 1988).

The rightly guided Caliphs of Islam adopted the Prophetic egalitarian values as basis of developing the State and other organizations. Abu Bakar (RA), after becoming the Caliph, took a strict account of his own property to make it evident “whether he was enriched or impoverished by the service of the state” (Gibbon, n.d.). These Caliphs considered themselves responsible to three entities: Allah (Quran), His Prophet (PBUH) (Sunnah) and, the people. They preserved the Prophetic model of state organization in its original form. With the expansion of the state, they made additions to the model but did not disturb the unchangeable underpinning Divine-command ethics. They furthered the concept of penetration governance of the Prophet (PBUH) by visiting the cities on regular basis, meeting the masses, protecting the public wealth, emancipating the oppressed, providing equal rights to minorities, initiating land and housing reforms, building the urban infrastructure and, making the powerful accountable to law (Tibri, 2004). Omar (RA), the second Caliph of Islam, abolished the Roman feudal system in Syria and redistributed the land to the actual cultivators of the soil (Husaini, 1966). He introduced police, night patrol, the institution of hisbah to maintain law and order, prison system, annual conferences of government officials, land surveying and establishment of diwan, bait al-mal or treasury house, and the Islamic calendar. He established the Islamic ‘welfare state’ on the model provided by the Prophet (PBUH) (Al-Buraey, 1985; Hasan, 1997).

Figure 1 shows the overall organization and administration model of the Prophetic State at Medina. The same model was utilized by the rightly guided Caliphs of Islam.

Figure 1 and the Prophet’s (PBUH) dialogue with Mu’az bin Jabal illustrate that the Prophetic model of administration and management comprised of absolute, fixed and unchangeable Divine ethics at its basis. The resulting managerial systems and styles were however allowed to evolve (within the framework of Divine commands) and varied according to situations. This resulted in a hybrid of mechanistic and organic organization designs, centralized and decentralized decision making and, bureaucratic and participative management. The presence of local administrators and representatives allowed integration among different functions of the State, which on their own, were highly differentiated.

In nutshell, the unique features of the Prophetic administration included its Divine origin, emphasis on egalitarian values and standards, non-exploitation in financial matters and prevention of injustice, decision making through consultation, cooperation, modesty and simplicity, punishment of administrative corruption and, balance between material and spiritual well-being (Al-Buraey, 1985) .

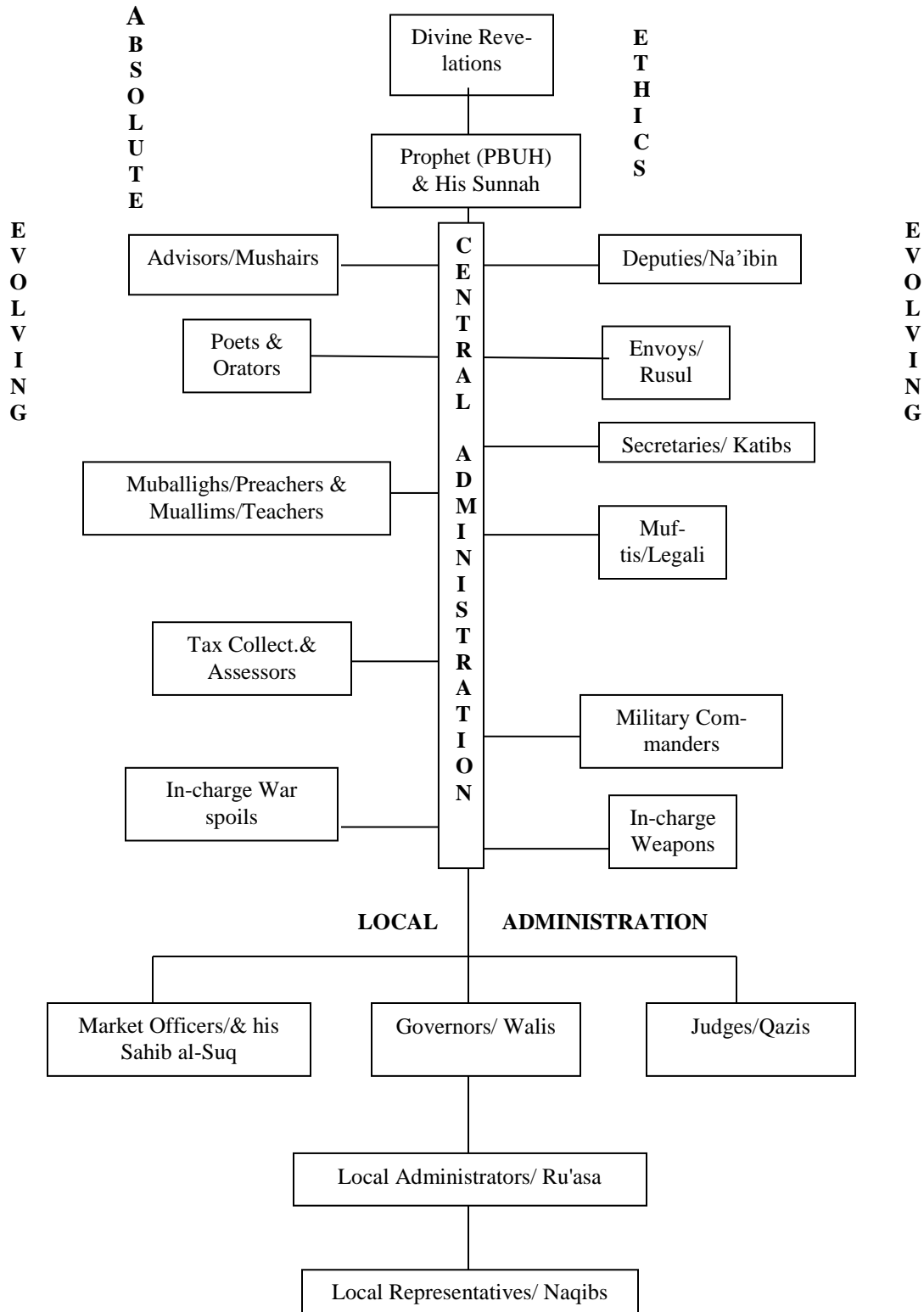


Figure 1. Prophetic organization model

5. Discussion

Following is a brief discussion around the facet of Organization Theory chosen for analyzing the management style of early Islamic civilization. The early Islamic civilization was based on Divine-command non-consequentialist ethics. Its ethics were based on complete surrender and submission to Allah's ordinances in all areas of life. The social morality of Islamic work ethics was derived from Divine commands and encouraged justice, equity, compassion, emancipation of the weak and the suppressed, mercy, humbleness, patience, contentment, generosity, self-restraint, equality, simplicity, charity, personal piety and, zeal for knowledge. The Islamic Work Ethics denounced materialistic lust, greed, arrogance, wickedness and conceit, corruption, immorality, economic exploitation and wrongness in the society as well as organizations. The dual aim of Islamic ethics was to achieve societal good through cultivation of morality in the individual. Islamic organizations fused work and worship. Work was, therefore elevated as sacred and pious activity for which one was accountable not only to an employer but to Almighty Allah as well. Intentions and egalitarianism were at the heart of early Islamic civilization's ethics.

The main organizational forms at the genesis stage of Islamic civilization included mosque, family, welfare state and governance and, tabligh or preaching. All of these organizations were ideological and egalitarian in nature. The predominant management style of Islamic organization was a balanced blend of people and task orientation. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) led and managed in transformational ways through preaching and practicing morality of the divine ordinances. Brain and holographic systems portray the Prophetic organizations' symbols, as these organizations were formed on the principles of equality and egalitarian values. Elitism was evaded and consultation in decision making process together prevented the advancement of managerialist approach in the Islamic organizations.

In general, the organizations functioned like organic entities. However a firm adherence with divine ordinations also kept the element of centralization in these organizations. The purpose of centralization was however not the quest to control but to create order and discipline. The cardinal elements of Islamic epistemology included: revelation, reason and rationality, gnosis or unveiling of knowledge, observation and empiricism and, exploration, investigation and reflection. The multi-faceted Islamic epistemology sought wholeness of knowledge. The predominant ontology of Prophetic organizations was realism. However, the Islamic realist ontology negates dualism between spirit and body. Collectivism is the broad cultural orientation of early Islamic organizations had been. The Islamic collectivism was achieved through individual morality. The resultant society and organizations were therefore based on horizontal relations and sought to protect the elders, parents, women, and the jobless and the invalid members. The overarching Islamic organization of ummah sought to create a universal community fostering the culture of collectivism. There are three basic components as harmony, collectivity and subjectivity for Islamic organizational culture.

From the above discussion it follows that Islamic ethics are naturally inclined to adapt to complexity sciences and quantum paradigm (the backbone of critical discourse of organization theory) because they seek fusion of sacred and secular, body and spirit and, thought and matter. Bureaucracy of Islamic organizations did not seek control, but order. The combination of absolute divine commands and evolving managerial practices were inclined towards the formation of a few guiding principles and local if-then rules. This possibility aligns early Islamic organizations with theory of Chaos and Autopoiesis and self-regeneration of the critical discourse. The fluid and organic design of IWE based organizations is also compatible with the contemporary organiza-

tional inclination towards horizontal, lean and non-bureaucratic organizations. But at the same time, absolutism of divine commands created discipline and order oriented verticalness in organizations. In light of the above analysis it can be inferred that early Prophetic Islamic organizations and management style were a balanced and harmonious blend of contemporary critical and dominant discourses of organization theory.

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