The Book of Dede Korkut in the Traces of the Turkish Approach to Leadership: The Bey as a Paternalistic Leader

Sümeyye Kuşakcı

Despite not emerging as a written work, the *Book of Dede Korkut* contains the codes of various dimensions of Turkish civilization (Gökyay, 1976). The oral transfer of Dede Korkut's stories from Turkestan to Anatolia, their transformation to the Islamic worldview, and their subsequent commitment to paper have enriched and expanded the understanding of Turks. All researchers who've studied the *Book of Dede Korkut* agree that it is a masterpiece (Bulduk, 1995; Ergin, 2005; Sakaoğlu, 1998). However, what makes the *Book of Dede Korkut* so invaluable is not the period in which its stories take place, the language used, or the literary value of the text, but rather its versatile structure that covers all of these aspects.

Like many classical texts, the *Book of Dede Korkut* has attracted the attention of scholars from the fields of literature, language, anthropology, and sociology. However, only a relatively small number of studies have read the texts from the perspective of management thought or leadership (Baysal & Göktaş, 2015; Çakır, 2020). Leadership research has expanded systematically since the 19th century and has been fed by classical texts from many different cultures (Bragues, 2008; Cheng, 2010; Flynn, 2008; Harris, 2010; Jain & Mukherji, 2009; Kumar & Rao, 1996; Takala, 1998). However, the lack of texts from Turkish civilization, which has profoundly contributed to the management tradition throughout history, constitutes the starting point of this research.

@ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, İbn Haldun Üniversitesi, sumeyye.kusakci@ihu.edu.tr

ID 0000-0002-9493-2591

This study aims to increase the understanding of the traditional Turkish management approach and make inferences about modern management by examining the profile of the bey (khan) as told in the *Book of Dede Korkut*. The main feature distinguishing this study from other similar ones is how it examines the stories from the management perspective. In addition, the study aims to make an original contribution to the literature through the use of mixed research methods.

The questions the study aims to answer can be listed as follows:

- Q1: Which positive/negative features of the bey (khan) depicted in the 12 stories told in the *Book of Dede Korkut* come to the fore?

- Q2: How can these characteristics be systematized to produce a leader prototype?

- Q3: What are the similarities and differences between modern leadership models and the leader model described in the *Book of Dede Korkut*?

The Turkish Management Approach

The problem of how intercultural management differences affect the behavior of individuals and organizations has been an important research topic in both sociology and business administration (Hofstede et al., 2010; House et al., 2004; Ouchi, 1993; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995; Weber, 2011).

However, describing the management approach of a society that emerged on the stage of history in the 3rd century BC in Central Asia, that constantly moved in Asia and Europe for centuries, and that experienced religious and cultural transitions will not be easy. Nevertheless, some standard characteristic features are seen to have been encountered in Turkish societies and state structure (Eroğlu, 2018; Gerk, 2020; Guvenc, 2021; Nizam-ul-Mulk, 1981; Roux, 2007; Sargut, 2015; Sığrı et al., 2015; Tekin, 1995).

About Dede Korkut

The *Book of Dede Korkut* has been among the daily narratives of Turkish society since the 6th century, but wasn't discovered as a written text until 1815 in Dresden. This copy is estimated to have been written in the second half of the 15th century. The work was published in Ottoman Turkish by Kilisli Muallim Rıfat in 1916 and first printed using the Roman alphabet by Orhan Şaik Gökyay in 1938. After the Dresden copy, the one found in the Vatican increased academic interest in the work, with Muharrem Ergin conducting the first scientific study based on the original texts in 1958.

According to some people, Dede Korkut, also known as *Korkut Ata*, is the author of the book, while he is only the copyist according to others. While Korkut Ata had been a holy figure before the adoption of Islam, perhaps he gained a new spiritual identity with the cultural transformation experienced during the Islamization of Turks (Özdemir, 2003). Regardless of the era, Dede Korkut is the ancestor of the Turk people, a strong poet, and a wise personality (Gökyay, 1994).

The times and places where the stories in the *Book of Dede Korkut* occur also involve similar subjects of discussion. The social structure, names, and expressions indicative of the era when Oghuz Turks had not yet left Turkistan are mentioned in the work, as well as places belonging to Azerbaijan and Anatolian geography. While the stories point to older times, they have been Islamized and localized throughout the historical process (Gökyay, 1994; Türker, 2011).

The current editions were primarily shaped according to the Dresden manuscript and consist of a preface and 12 stories. Although these 12 stories describing the 12 Oghuz Beys appear to be independent from one another, they actually constitute a whole.

According to Kilisli Muallim Rıfat Bey, four main messages occur in the *Book of Dede Korkut*: heroism, morality, family love, and childrearing (Zeyrek, 2015). This comprehensive summary by Rıfat Bey is genuinely admirable, because almost every story in the book emphasizes love, morality, and heroism in a line from family to society.

Theoretical Background: Leadership

Leadership is one of the most discussed and researched subjects in all fields of social sciences. However, the beginning of leadership research in the modern sense goes back to the 19th century. According to Yammarino (2013), numerous well-conceptualized and sometimes well-tested leadership studies have been conducted since the beginning of the 20th century. The dominant leadership theories in the literature can be classified as traits, behavior, contingency, and contemporary theories. This classification also reflects the historical development of the concept of leadership.

The focus of the current research is on the paternalistic leadership approach. Farh and Cheng (2000, as cited in Hernandez et al., 2011, p. 1175) defined paternalistic leadership as "an approach that combines strong discipline and authority with paternal benevolence." While the paternalistic leader establishes legitimate

authority and control, he also possesses an attitude of care and kindness toward the welfare of his followers both at and outside of work (Hiller et al., 2019). This approach is the dominant leadership style in the Chinese business world and is fed by Confucian values, as would be expected. However, this stye is also observed in other collectivist and power-distance countries such as Türkiye, Mexico, Malaysia, Pakistan, and India. Paternalistic leadership consists of three sub-dimensions: competence, benevolence, and moral leadership (Lau et al., 2019).

Methodology: Grounded Theory

This research uses grounded theory, which is a qualitative analysis method, and each stage of the research benefits from the program MAXQDA, a kind of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Grounded theory was developed in 1967 by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, with the purpose of revealing the theory that is hidden in practice. According to its founders, grounded theory "is the discovery of a theory based on data systematically obtained through social research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although different approaches have emerged, the basic assumptions remain valid (Egan, 2002).

Data coding involves three steps: open, selective, and theoretical coding. The raw data is the manuscript of the *Book of Dede Korkut* utilized from Orhan Şaik Gökyay's (1976) translation of the work as published by the Ministry of Culture under the title *Dede Korkut Hikayeleri* [Book of Dede Korkut]. The final product of grounded theory entails a theoretical model that explains a social phenomenon. The final product of our research is a leadership model that attempts to explain the leadership described in the *Book of Dede Korkut*.

Findings

The open coding stage of the research involved reading the manuscript and coding it line by line and paragraph by paragraph without any preconditions or restrictions. While 37 of the 46 codes identified at this stage (e.g., nobility, vigilance, reason & intelligence, generosity, honesty) are related to the profile of the bey*s* (khans) in the stories, while the remaining nine codes reveal the perception of basic concepts such as God, prophet, and the world.

The next stage is the selective coding, which distinguishes the categories that are suitable for the purpose from the irrelevant categories, reassembling the suitable ones into main categories. Figure 1 was obtained with the help of MAXQ-

DA's MAXMap function and shows in detail the results from the selective coding stage.

The theoretical coding is the final stage of the grounded theory model and can lead the study to an alternative leadership model by associating the main categories with each other in different ways. The point that stands out in this process is the frequency distributions of the main categories, which will help in proposing a model.

Figure 2 shows how often each main category is repeated and can thus be interpreted as follows: The Oghuz bey as described in the *Book of Dede Korkut* stands out first with his moral characteristics. The second distinctive feature is his equipment, which becomes an extension of his hands and feet (i.e., his horse, sword, and *kopuz* [lute]). The third feature involve the characteristics Oghuz beys have for gaining experience by going hunting, following his ancestors, preparing for battle, consulting and using his mind, and cheating when necessary, while always remaining alert to the tricks of the enemy. Ultimately, internal and external conflicts are inevitable due to the period and geography. As such, the fourth set of characteristics a bey should have is courage and strength. Adaptability and nobility, comrades, faith, physical features, and vanity are at the end of the list, but each one is pretty meaningful.

Discussion & Conclusion

The study shows the leadership characteristics of an Oghuz bey to be able to be listed under nine main categories: moral characteristics, equipment, managerial characteristics, strength and courage, ancestry, comrades, faith, physical characteristics, and pomp and show. A deeper evaluation based on the number and frequency of the coded sections reveals that innate qualities such as nobility or physical appearance can be ignored, while moral qualities are indispensable. Managerial traits, equipment, and comrades fall under moral traits, while strength and courage are seen to play a protective role in the framework of the model.

Moral characteristics form the basis of Dede Korkut's leadership building. A building cannot be raised without moral features and a complementary belief (i.e., foundation). Of course, columns are also necessary when talking about a building. Administrative features, equipment, and loyal companions appear as the three pillars of the building. A bey can only construct the building with his cognitive abilities, technical equipment, and a good team. The roof of the building, being the

component that secures its contents, is the bey's strength and courage. The roof protects against cold, heat, and rain, and courage is a trait that both protects its followers from environmental conditions and instills fear in the enemy. Finally, the bey's physical appearance and flamboyance are the decorations that can be seen outside the building. These decorations are not indispensable to the building but are rather embellishments.

As a result of a comprehensive comparison, this study's model can be said to differ from other trait and situational leadership models. Nevertheless, more closely resembles the behavioral approach. As shown in Table 2, Dede Korkut's leadership styles also has many similarities with the ethical, spiritual, servant, and authentic leadership approaches. However, Dede Korkut's leadership differs from each of the others in terms of its primary focus. Meanwhile, paternalistic leadership appears to be the most similar approach.

One limitation of the study can be considered its use of a manuscript printed in the Roman alphabet and adapted to modern Turkish. This study on the *Book of Dede Korkut*, one of the masterpieces of Turkish-Islamic civilization, should be investigated by other disciplines in the future. Of course, other works from Turkish civilization should also be subjected to similar examinations, removed from the dusty pages of history, and made available to the people of the 21st century.

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