**Maimonides: Flexible Leadership**

Abstract

A leader’s flexibility can be expressed via a multi-dimensional structure containing a variety of dynamics and context-dependent adaptations. Leaders who possesses these abilities can inspire a wide range of people to trust and follow them. This article focuses on the leadership style of Maimonides, a medieval scholar who became one of the most influential figures in Jewish history. Beyond the quantity, ~~quality~~, and depth of Maimonides’ writings, the wide range of people with whom he corresponded is instructive about his distinctive leadership ability.

**These leader~~s~~’???** success in appealing to and influencing vast and varied populations can be explained and demonstrated through the Flexible Leadership (F.L.) model. This leadership style offers an effective and ethical way to lead others. **~~Both of these~~ ???** example~~s~~ and the model will enable research on other leaders in various fields.

Key Words: Maimonides, Flexible Leadership, Guide for the Perplexed, Mishneh Torah, Epistle

Research purpose - This paper deals with flexibility in leadership style**.** The purpose of the article is to demonstrate how a flexible leadership style was manifested by Maimonides. The article analyzes the means of operation, opinions, and influence of this??? leader. Methodology - The study of Maimonides is based on his own writings as well as books and articles about him. Leadership flexibility is linked to consciousness of change. Maimonides had a profound consciousness that the period in which he lived was characterized by dramatic changes.

Potential value added by the study - This study can form the basis for research on other leaders from different times and in diverse fields. Future studies will expand and enrich understanding of the situations in which a flexible leadership style is appropriate and when is it inappropriate.

בהתאם להערות שקיבלנו האם והיכן רצוי להוסיף מראה מקום, כלומר הפניות למאמרים שעליהם אנו מבססים את הטענות שלנו. הורדנו את הסקירה הספרותית, בגלל שצריך לקצר את המאמר. מאידך המחקר שלנו מבוסס על מאמרים וגם על דברי הרמב"ם. האם מספיק להבי את המאמרים בביבליוגרפיה מבלי לנתח אותם בגוף המאמר?

כמו כן, נא לבדוק שכל המאמר "זורם" כפי שצריך,

העירו לנו באם אתם חושבים שחסר משהו ו שזה לא מותאם לכתב העת שבו אנו רוצים לפרסם.

**Flexible Leadership**

Flexible leadership refers to adapting one’s leadership style, method, or approach to diverse and changing contexts (Kaiser & Overfield, 2010). Flexible leadership requires a broad repertoire of behaviors that may be adapted to many types of situations. It also requires the ability to know when to express each behavior, and the skill to accomplish what is necessary.

Flexible leadership theory draws on ideas from several areas: leadership, human resources management, strategic management, organizational theory, and organizational change (Yukl, 2008), Jones, S., & Nieto, C. A. (2015). Flexible leadership can be manifest in various contexts (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). A resilient leader has the ability to balance competing values and contrasting behaviors in a way that is suitable to a complex situation. (Landin, J. (2017).

The flexibility of a leader is expressed by a multi-dimensional structure that contains a variety of dynamically activated forces and changes in a context-dependent manner. (Wilkes, J., Yip, G., & Simmons, K. (2011). This type of leadership requires a high level of emotional intelligence, logic, intuition, ability in interpersonal interaction, ability to assess a situation, adjust to it, and to adopt the correct course of action. (Novicevic,2011) Baron, L., Rouleau, V., Grégoire, S., & Baron, C. (2018). Hurtado, P. S., & Mukherji, A. (2015). Heemsbergen, B. (2006). Pillay, S. S. (2010). A leader who possesses these abilities can convince a wide range of people to trust and follow him. His influence will take into account the nature of the audience being addressed. (Jia, X., Chen, J., Mei, L., & Wu, Q. (2018). Flexibility of a leader requires deep recognition of the person or audience to which messages are directed. Without knowing the specific needs and character of the audience to which a message is intended, it is not possible to convey an accurate message.

**Maimonides and His Leadership Style**

Maimonides (1138-1204) was one of the central Jewish philosophers, an important *posek* (person determining religious laws), an astronomer, and a polymath. He is one of the most influential figures in the Jewish world, he was a skilled physician (Shemesh, 2018), influencing and inspiring a wide, diverse range of people (Jacob, 2011). This article analyzes his influence through his ideologies, management style, morality, leadership principles, personal qualities, and ethics (Ahn, Ettner, & Loupin, 2012; Dion, 2012).

Maimonides’ leadership style can be characterized as flexible leadership, which enabled him to affect people in a dynamic and clear manner, adapted to the particular audience. The way he communicated his ideas depended upon the situation, context, and target audience. He had a creative ability to convey one message in different ways and to relate to the same issue in different ways. He could exchange an old perspective with a new one, identify a situation, adapt his proposed solution to it, and offer a new perspective on the changing reality. He saw his responsibility as not only bringing his target audiences closer to him, but also bringing himself closer to them, and adapting his message accordingly.

An examination of Maimonides’ leadership teaches us that a flexible leadership style was embodied by leaders in the past, long before the current terminology came into use. Maimonides was a philosopher and well-respected religious authority. People turned to him for spiritual guidance to help them act in a righteous manner and to follow a path of truth. In fact, Maimonides was viewed as a type of mediator; he was perceived as an intermediary between the metaphysical and physical world, between God and man. The crises he addressed were related to his spiritual mission (Halkin & Hartman, 1993).

**Maimonides: Between Dogmatism and Pragmatism**

In examining Maimonides’ broad range of activities, one can note certain contradictions. On the one hand, he exhibited flexibility and the ability to adapt to different situations and specific cases. On the other hand, Maimonides codified Jewish law, which can be seen as having introduced an element of dogmatism into Judaism.

However, encouraging flexibility of thought is unquestionably evident in Maimonides’ philosophical book *Guide for the Perplexed*. This book is aimed at advanced scholars, and it is clear that Maimonides offers them a wide range of ideas. This is the exact opposite of dogmatism. Students must maneuver between the variety of ideas presented in the different chapters of this book, and in so doing, they develop their worldview (Kreisel, 2012, p. 264). It should be noted that Maimonides asserts that only flexible-minded people can swim in the multifaceted sea of knowledge addressed in his book. Moreover, he guides them to flexible thought patterns as a condition for understanding the depths and secrets of the book.

## **Expressions of F.L in Maimonides’ Writings**

Several of Maimonides’ prominent personal qualities and methods of influence are instructive about his tremendous impact. F.L is Maimonides’ dominant quality. His writings indicate an understanding of the psychological complexity that occurs when people encounter an approach that differs from their own. Reflecting this understanding, Maimonides wrote in such a way that made the reader feel comfortable. His flexibility is demonstrated in his ability to adapt his communication to his audience. This skill works in two ways. Maimonides was able to adapt himself to his target audience, while at the same time successfully bringing his target audience closer to his viewpoint (Hoffman & Frost, 2006; Kiener, 2011). Following are some of his writings that can show how much Maiminonides used the elements of F.L

**I think that this chapter is not related to FL**

***Mishneh Torah.*** Maimonides wrote this book both for people with basic knowledge of Jewish religious law as well as for those with a broad and deep understanding of it; in other words, for the Jewish people as a whole. Through this book, Maimonides made the Torah (the central holy book of the Jewish people, which includes the religious commandments) more widely accessible, enabling more people to learn Torah, to understand *halacha,* and to live a religious life more independently. Consequently, the sage and the layman had access to the same knowledge. Even if the sage was better informed, the gap between them was reduced, and the difference became quantitative rather than qualitative. The sages now were no longer an exclusive and superior guild. This was a dramatic shift within Judaism. Because it was so dramatic, it was explosive.

## ***Guide for the Perplexed*.** The *Guide for the Perplexed* was written for a religious person with persistent and fundamental questions and difficulties. It was aimed at people whose psychological character was in tension with religion and religious obedience, and those who did not find answers within traditional explanations. Until Maimonides, such people had no source of explanation within Jewish thought (Altmann, 1972).

In *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides accompanies and guides his students and then lets them continue on alone, placing his hope and trust in them.

. **Maimonides’ Letters.** Maimonides’ various writings illustrate the substantial efforts he made to offer knowledge to a wide range of people, including Jewish community leaders who held authority, political power, and influence.

Maimonides corresponded with congregation leaders and answered their personal letters. He also corresponded with private individuals, heartening them, contributing to their personal development, and trying to alleviate their difficulties.

***Letter on Apostasy*.** Maimonides’ approach allowed a Jew to acknowledge Muhammad’s prophecy yet remain part of the Jewish people (Soloveitchik, 1980). This was unprecedented. The following is the background.

Maimonides opposed the traditional religious concept that a person who leaves the Jewish religion cannot ever return to it. Maimonides differentiates between those who leave the religion voluntarily and those are coerced to do so. Maimonides’ advice is not to follow the extreme and erroneous thinking of “all or nothing,” but rather to try to do one’s best within the existing limitations.

Thus, Maimonides describes a type of “conversion” to Islam in which Jews only make a statement acknowledging Muhammad’s divine mission but do not commit any acts of idolatry. Maimonides’ flexibility allowed one to escape the death penalty and still continue to be part of the Jewish people.

Here Maimonides’ leadership qualities are appropriate to the F.L model, which takes into account the special and unprecedented (at the time) circumstances. Maimonides teaches ethical action in a complex reality. Of course, this advice would not have to be given in an ideal world, in which it is easy to know right from wrong. However, in practice, there is often tension between religious commitment and real life. Dealing with this complex dilemma requires a high level of self-awareness, willingness to offer an unconventional response to a complex situation, and the ability to convince others to accept this response (Landin, 2017).

## ***Letter to the Sages of Lunel.*** In this letter to the community of Lunel, France, Maimonides expresses his desire to raise the generation of potential leadership that will follow his death.

Maimonides communicated the urgency of the Jewish people’s catastrophic spiritual state to the sages of Lunel. He then empowered them with the role of spiritual leadership.

Maimonides gave the sages of Lunel the feeling that the fate and future of the Jewish People depended on them, that there were no others who could carry out this holy wor

Flexible leadership, in this case, is expressed in the ability to delegate authority and to encourage other people to take leadership, (Jones & Nieto, 2015) even if they take a different direction. This letter is an expression of Maimonides’ self-awareness and clear understanding of the complex reality being faced by future generations.

***Letter to Ovadiah the Proselyte*.** The famous appeal is to the convert Ovadiah Ger Zedek (Kellner, 2016). (The term ger zedek is Hebrew for “righteous convert” and can be used to refer to any person who became a Jew for all intents and purposes.) Maimonides teaches Ovadiah Ger Zedek how to pray like the rest of the Jewish people, while acknowledging that his prayer may differ somewhat from that of other Jews (Birnbaum, 2005). It was important for Maimonides that Ovadiah should not feel inferior, but that his thoughts and his activity would be enhanced through self-awareness. For example, Maimonides suggested that it would be permissible for Ovadiah to adapt the wording of prayers that speak from the perspective of the Jewish nation, such as those that praise God for “bringing us out of the land of Egypt” while at the same time noting that Ovadiah would be allowed to use the original wording of the prayers, because he had “come under the wings of the Divine” and there was no difference between him and someone born a Jew (Kobler, 1978, pp. 195-197).

Maimonides was prepared to adapt the prayer text so that it would be perceived as natural and in a language with which Ovadiah felt comfortable. This requires flexibility of thought, thinking outside the box. Through emotional intelligence and awareness of Ovadiah’s special situation, Maimonides opened up a number of possibilities to him and treated him in a welcoming and gentle manner.

The way in which Maimonides guided Ovadiah reflects his deep understanding of humans and shows Maimonides’ emotional intelligence and self-regulation.

**Maimonides as a Prototype for the Flexible Leadership Model**

Maimonides is a significant example of a leader who understood that since relying on past knowledge is not sufficient to provide solutions to new situations and dilemmas, there is a need for flexible thinking in order to deal with new problems. There is a need for openness and courage to think “outside the box” (Baron et al., 2018). In the significant decisions facing us, the past cannot help, because the situation is unprecedented.

**Flexible Leadership as a Model for Analyzing Leaders**

This model is not limited to current leadership but is equally relevant to past and future leaders. This broad perspective enables us to explore and sharpen definition of additional principles of leadership. It can assist in the study of leadership, as well as in the study of leadership in general and in the study of F.L in particular.

Abilities such as sense-making and framing, leading change processes, communicating persuasively, and motivating others are grounded in the practice of mindfulness. The flexible leader has the ability to self-regulate .... the ability to self-regulate at the emotional level, and it requires clarity of perception and thinking, and emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is exercised in several dimensions, which include self-awareness, other-awareness, task-awareness, and situational awareness. We demonstrated the flexible leadership model by examining Maimonides' writings. This model examines other leaders from different fields.

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