

Meritocracy In The Correspondence Of Prophet Muhammad PBUH

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Abstract

This study addresses the critical phenomenon of leadership incompetence resulting from appointments based on popularity and personal proximity, examining the correspondence of the Prophet Muhammad as a historical model of meritocratic selection. The research objective is to identify selection criteria for envoys, including linguistic competence, cross-cultural experience, and integrity, and assess how prophetic practices can inform contemporary recruitment reform. A qualitative library-based methodology with a historical approach and triangulation of primary sources and secondary literature was employed. Thematic analysis of sirah manuscripts and variant reports reveals selection patterns emphasizing functional capability and the companions' work ethic. Findings confirm that successful diplomatic missions relied on a synergy between technical competence and moral character among envoys. Recommendations include combining procedural merit mechanisms with character development programs and transparent selection processes to curb patronage. The study offers guidance for selection audits, publishing criteria, evidence-based evaluation, and local capacity building.

Keywords: *Correspondence of Prophet Muhammad PBUH; Meritocracy*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of leadership incompetence that arises due to the appointment of officials based on popularity and proximity is an urgent social fact to be studied. In many public contexts, personal popularity often trumps consideration of technical capabilities in the selection process, so strategic positions are filled by figures who lack relevant competencies. As a result, public policies frequently experience implementation failures, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and a decline in public trust in institutions. Personal proximity also creates conflicts of interest and hinders the supervisory mechanism because affective relationships make corrections difficult. The cumulative impact of this practice not only degrades the quality of service but also undermines institutional legitimacy in the long run. Various audit reports and empirical studies show a correlation between the practice of nepotism in recruitment and poor performance indicators of public organizations. Therefore, this social fact emphasizes the need to strengthen a selection mechanism based on competence, transparency, and accountability.¹

A literature review shows that appointing leaders based on popularity and personal closeness is closely related to leadership failures in various public and organizational administrative contexts. Public administration, political science, and organizational behavior studies present evidence that preference for popular figures or affective relations often supersedes consideration of technical capabilities in the selection process.² As a result, there is a mismatch between the competencies possessed by individuals and the demands of the position, so policies become difficult to implement and resource management is inefficient. The phenomenon of nepotism and clientelism that arises in these appointment patterns also triggers distortion of incentives, minimizes opportunities for quality talent, and encourages the practice of symbolic legitimacy. In addition, the literature suggests that strong social networks between mandataries and office-bearers weaken accountability mechanisms due to a reluctance to correct close associates. The long-term impacts noted include the erosion of performance culture, declining bureaucratic morale, and the potential for brain drain when competent professionals leave institutions that do not value merit. In response, researchers recommend procedural reforms such

¹ Emanuele Colonnelli et al., “Patronage and Selection in Public Sector Organizations,” *American Economic Review* 110, no. 10 (2020): 3071–99, <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20181491>.

² Guillermo Toral, “How Patronage Delivers: Political Appointments, Bureaucratic Accountability, and Service Delivery in Brazil,” *American Journal of Political Science* 68, no. 2 (2024): 797–815, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12758>.

as recruitment transparency, evidence-based selection, and independent performance evaluation as mitigation efforts. However, the authors also emphasize that cultural transformations must accompany procedural changes to address their roots.³

This research examines how the practice of correspondence of the Prophet, which involves sending letters to the world's kings through elected envoys, can be a meritocracy model in answering the problem of modern leadership incompetence. By focusing on the mechanism of selection of envoys, the research aims to identify the criteria of competence, trust, and legitimacy that are prioritized in the appointment.⁴ Through this goal, the study seeks to offer practical recommendations to strengthen meritocracy, reduce patronage, and improve institutional accountability. In addition, the research wants to evaluate the limits of such historical adaptations so that the resulting recommendations are sensitive to the modern political and administrative context. The expected outcome is a meritocratic framework that is rooted in historical evidence and can be contextualized in efforts to overcome leadership incompetence in the contemporary era.⁵

The practice of meritocracy in sending the Prophet's letters, namely the appointment of messengers based on professional abilities and beliefs, presents a superior selection model compared to appointments based on personal closeness. The central argument is that diplomatic and administrative tasks with strategic implications require special competencies so that selection based on relationships is prone to resulting in suboptimal decisions. In this perspective, the placement of envoys due to capabilities is expected to minimize message misinterpretations, increase the sender's legitimacy, and strengthen the negotiating position in the inter-ruler arena.⁶ An additional assumption argues that designations based on proximity tend to place loyalty above technical

³ Ghulam Nabi et al., "An Analytical Study of Policy, Politics and Bureaucracy Regarding Meritocracy in the Selection of Head for the Federal Government Institutions," *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review (RJSSE)* 1, no. 4 (2020): 401–10, [https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsse-vol1-iss4-2020\(401-410\).](https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsse-vol1-iss4-2020(401-410).)

⁴ Reno Candra Sangaji and Tomi Agus Triono, "Implementasi Kepemimpinan Profetik Dalam Memecahkan Masalah Sosial Di Indonesia: Study Literatur Profetik Leadership," *Journal of Society Bridge* 1, no. 2 (2023): 7–13, <https://doi.org/10.59012/jsb.v1i2.9>.

⁵ Refai Al-Qarni Mohamed Al-Saba, "Evaluation of the Implementation of Merit Criteria in the Selection of Senior Bureaucratic Officials in Egypt," *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences* 5, no. 5 (2023): 417–34, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHASS-07-2021-0123>.

⁶ Denny Kuswara and Ima Mayasari, "Implementasi Manajemen PNS Berbasis Sistem Merit Dalam Penempatan Jabatan Struktural Pegawai Di Pemerintah Provinsi DKI Jakarta," *Cakrawala Reppositori IMWI* 6, no. 1 (2023): 336–51, <https://doi.org/10.52851/cakrawala.v6i1.241>.

prowess, thus compromising the effectiveness of mission execution that requires expertise. To test this claim, the study proposes a historical-critical analysis of the corpus of correspondence and a comparative study that relates the characteristics of the messenger to the mission outcome. If proven, the findings will provide an empirical basis for recommending recruitment reforms that affirm meritocracy as the primary strategy for addressing modern leadership incompetence.⁷

Meritocracy

Meritocracy is a concept of government and social organization that places abilities, achievements, and competencies as the main basis for obtaining position, authority, or awards in society. The term arises from a combination of the word 'merit', which means qualification, and the suffix '-cracy', which refers to the form of power, so that the position's legitimacy is linked to achievement rather than descent or wealth.⁸ In practice, meritocratic mechanisms often rely on formal instruments such as exams, certifications, and performance appraisals to determine who is worthy of occupying a particular position. Proponents of this system emphasize the goal of efficiency, professionalism, and equal opportunity for talented individuals. However, critics also say that meritocracy can reproduce inequality without equal access to learning facilities and social capital. Some observers warn of the potential for elitism in which the technocratic class dominates decision-making. Therefore, the researchers say that meritocracy's success depends heavily on institutional design and transparency of the selection process. In summary, this concept targets the placement of competent people in important positions, but its realization varies according to the context of the country and the organization.⁹

Meritocracy can be categorized according to the realm of its application. There is political meritocracy related to filling public positions, administrative meritocracy in the bureaucracy, and educational meritocracy that arises in the academic selection system. In addition, at the organizational level, there is often a distinction between a procedural approach that emphasizes formal processes

⁷ Andry Prasetya Permana and Rahmad Taufik, "Implementasi Kebijakan Dan Sistem Merit Pada Seleksi Terbuka Jabatan Pimpinan Tinggi Pratama Kabupaten Bangka Selatan," *Responsive* 6, no. 1 (2023): 15, <https://doi.org/10.24198/responsive.v6i1.42811>.

⁸ David Bartram, "Does Belief in Meritocracy Increase with Inequality? A Reconsideration for European Countries," *The British Journal of Sociology* 74, no. 5 (2023): 763–80, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13042>.

⁹ Sergio R. Clavero García, "The Idea of Merit: Delineation and Challenges," *Philosophia* 51, no. 3 (2023): 1175–91, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-023-00628-x>.

such as exams and certifications, and a substantive approach that assesses work outcomes and track records. In the private sector, a market meritocracy also assesses individuals through productivity, superior assessments, and other quantitative achievements.¹⁰ Another distinction arises between formal meritocracy listed in regulation and informal meritocracy that relies on internal managerial norms and practices. This classification helps explain why policies that seem meritocratic on paper can bear fruit differently when implemented. Frequently raised vulnerable points include unconscious bias, unequal access to resources, and vulnerability of assessment mechanisms to manipulation. Comparative analysis shows that combining procedural mechanisms plus efforts to widen access tends to increase the credibility of merit practices. Therefore, understanding these categories is essential for designing policies that minimize distortion and strengthen merit legitimacy.¹¹

An example of the application of meritocracy can be seen in bureaucratic reform that establishes competency-based selection to fill public positions and professionalize the apparatus.¹² On the other hand, the reality in many countries shows cases where meritocratic efforts are disrupted by bribery and buying and selling positions, so the credibility of the selection process is eroded. Case study documents in Indonesia, for example, reveal several incidents of appointing officials related to corrupt practices despite the rules on the merit system.¹³ Other cases in the technology and information security sectors raise concerns when institutional leaders do not have relevant expertise backgrounds, leading to criticism that merit claims are not proven in practice. These case studies confirm that the success of meritocracy requires law enforcement, transparency, and increased equality of access. Improvement efforts include selection audits, publication of assessment criteria, and capacity programs for disadvantaged

¹⁰ Hasan Gürkan, “The Meritocracy Paradigm During The Emergence of The Modern State In The Ottoman Empire,” *History Studies International Journal of History*, August 20, 2022, 14, <https://doi.org/10.9737/hist.2022.1094>.

¹¹ Eloy Oliveira et al., “What Does the Evidence Tell Us about Merit Principles and Government Performance?,” *Public Administration* 102, no. 2 (2024): 668–90, <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12945>.

¹² Muhammad Rizal Buhori and Muhammad Eko Atmojo, “Pelaksanaan Lelang Jabatan Aparatur Sipil Negara (ASN) Berbasis Sistem Merit Di Kabupaten Klaten Tahun 2018,” *Jurnal Pemerintahan Dan Politik* 7, no. 3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.36982/jpg.v7i3.2334>.

¹³ Valentin Laura Sampe et al., “Reform of Human Resources Management Through Merit System at West Java Regional Personnel Agency,” *KnE Social Sciences*, ahead of print, May 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i9.10990>.

groups. Thus, these examples show that meritocracy is a normative goal that requires institutional design and sustained oversight to realize its benefits.¹⁴

Correspondence of Prophet Muhammad PBUH

The correspondence of the Prophet PBUH refers to official letters that he sent to rulers and important figures outside the Arabian Peninsula as an instrument of da'wah and diplomacy. These letters are not just formal communication, but contain an invitation to monotheism, a call for justice, and an offer of peace prepared with standard grammar and high manners. In this concept, correspondence is a prophetic medium that expands the scope of da'wah while building relations between countries. Prophetic correspondence blends spiritual messages with strategic political considerations, making it a unique study at the intersection of history, theology, and international relations. This concept also emphasizes the importance of respecting the recipient through special greetings that adapt to the local culture. Through the theoretical framework of cross-cultural communication, the Prophet's correspondence is understood as a holistic approach that prioritizes wisdom. This definition opens the door to interdisciplinary research exploring prophetic diplomacy's implications in the modern era. Therefore, the Prophet's correspondence is a relevant object of study for understanding transformative diplomatic strategies.¹⁵

The study of the Prophet's letters groups the manuscripts based on the purpose of reception and the recipient's context, namely letters to the rulers of the Scribes, pagan rulers, and letters to Arab chiefs. In the category of Scribes, such as Heraclius and Najashi, the letter contains the greeting "Arizon" and excerpts of Qur'anic verses relevant for interreligious dialogue. For pagan rulers, such as the Persian Kisra, the letter's contents were designed without referencing the Scribes, but instead emphasized the invitation to pure monotheism. The category of letters to Arab chiefs emphasizes the social and ethical aspects of the community, with an invitation to strengthen alliances and peace. Each category is also distinguished by the language style, opening structure, and closing form according to the recipient's communication norms. The literature then adds a category dimension based on urgency, whether the

¹⁴ Ahmad Azharil, "Centralized Governance Reform of the State Civil Apparatus Based on the Merit System and Law Number 5 of 2015 Concerning the State Civil Apparatus," *STAATSRECHT: Indonesian Constitutional Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (2022): 37, <https://doi.org/10.15408/siclj.v6i1.28475>.

¹⁵ Abdul Ghoni, "Mengagas Dakwah Korespondensi Nabi Muhammad SAW," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 37, no. 1 (2018): 153, <https://doi.org/10.21580/jid.v37.1.2623>.

letter is a peaceful invitation, a warning, or a request for help. This grouping facilitates comparative analysis of the objectives and methods of delivery. Researchers can trace specific prophetic values in a diplomatic context by understanding categorization.¹⁶

Some historians record a letter to Emperor Heraclius quoting QS Ali-Imran:64 as a form of respect and an invitation for peaceful dialogue, even though he rejected the da'wah. The letter to the Persian Kisra was marked by the rejection of the "Scribes" and led to the tearing up of the manuscript, which was followed by the collapse of the Sassanid dynasty eight years later. To King Najasyi, the letter was delivered with a respectful greeting and produced a warm welcome; even some historians mention that Najasyi embraced Islam. The case of sending a letter to Muqawqis in Egypt shows that although the invitation was rejected, he treated the messenger kindly, marking the ethics of consistency in prophetic diplomacy. This comparative study of recipient response analysis reveals how adapting communication strategies varies according to culture and political structure. The history of letters to Arab chiefs also shows methods of personalizing messages, such as emphasizing friendship and local justice. The analysis of these cases becomes empirical evidence that the Prophet's correspondence is a unique blend of da'wah, diplomacy, and political strategy. The results of this study provide a historical model that can be learned from for the ethical and practical practice of contemporary diplomacy.¹⁷

RESEARCH METHOD

The object of this research is correspondence conducted by the Prophet PBUH, including official letters addressed to rulers, community leaders, and religious communities outside Makkah and Medina. In this study, the letters are understood not only as written texts, but as acts of political, diplomatic, and da'wah communication that bring social consequences. The material limitation includes only letters referenced in sirah and hadith sources with adequate sanad or contextual captions, while oral traditions without written references are excluded. The temporal period of the research focuses on the prophetic period. The aspects analyzed included delegates who were tasked with sending letters. The determination of these objects is intended to sharpen the analytical focus so

¹⁶ Amin Sihabuddin, "Jurnalisme Profetik Di Era Society 5.0 : Analisis Korespondensi Kenabian bagi Aplikasi Dakwah," *TABAYYUN* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.19109/tbayyun.v3i1.14715>.

¹⁷ Zarul Arifin and Sri Sudono Saliro, "Concepts And Basis of International Relations In Islamic Government Perspective," *Jurnal Syariah* 29, no. 2 (2021): 233–56, <https://doi.org/10.22452/j.s.vol29no2.4>.

that the study does not get stuck on loose generalizations. By paying attention to correspondence as an archive of action, the study seeks to read textual interactions and their implications for power relations. Explicit object assignment also minimizes source selection bias in the data collection stage.¹⁸

The research design adopts a qualitative approach with a literature study method, combining a historical context reconstruction framework. A qualitative approach was chosen so that the research could explore the meaning, practice, and social context behind the delivery of the prophet's letters. Literature studies allow for intensive review of primary manuscripts, critical editions, and secondary literature without needing large-scale field intervention. The historical framework demands chronological reconstruction, attention to continuity and change, and the placement of texts in the political and social dynamics of the first century of the Hijri. The design stages include source identification, authenticity verification, hermeneutic textual reading, and comparative review between sources. The research used source triangulation and cross-checking between narrative traditions and modern scientific studies to strengthen credibility. The epistemology of the research is interpretive with attention to sanad, the possibility of interpolation, and the editing bias of the manuscript.¹⁹

The primary data sources come from the classic sirah nabawiyah books and collections of hadith relevant to prophetic correspondence. In addition, the research utilizes articles from reputable academic journals, historical monographs, and interdisciplinary studies that discuss aspects of diplomacy, communication, and philology.²⁰ Examples of primary sources include the widely studied works of Sirah in Islamic historiography, along with manuscript variants available in digital repositories or archives. Secondary sources were selected from peer-reviewed publications and recent academic books that examined the political and social context of the time.²¹ Inclusion criteria include

¹⁸ Fauziah Ramdani, "Komunikasi Dakwah Rasulullah : Telaah Surat–Surat Rasulullah," *Nukhbatul 'Ulum* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.36701/nukhbah.v5i1.50>.

¹⁹ Danang Fachri Adz Dzikri and Ni'matus Solehah, "Pemikiran William Montgomery Watt Tentang Sosok Muhammad Dalam Karyanya Muhammad Prophet And Tasteman," *Al-Dzikra: Jurnal Studi Ilmu al-Qur'an Dan al-Hadits* 16, no. 1 (2022): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.24042/al-dzikra.v16i1.10941>.

²⁰ Suleyman Sertkaya, "A Critical and Historical Overview of the Sirah Genre from the Classical to the Modern Period," *Religions* 13, no. 3 (2022): 196, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030196>.

²¹ Javid Ahmed Bhat, "Overview of Prominent Sirah Writings of Modern Period: Modern Sirah Writings," *Karachi Islamicus* 2, no. 2 (2022): 28–36, <https://doi.org/10.58575/ki.v2i2.29>.

the publisher's credibility, methodological transparency, thematic relevance, and the existence of critical analysis related to the manuscript. To ensure traceability, all sources are systematically documented with metadata logging, issue numbers, and translational information. This combination of primary and secondary sources enables cross-validation and enriches historical interpretations.²²

The data collection technique in this study focuses on document analysis: critical reading, citation extraction, and preparation of thematic summaries of each manuscript. Each fragment of the relevant letter was transcribed, contextually annotated, and encoded according to analysis categories such as delivery destination, address, rhetorical strategy, and recorded impact. The researcher uses a reference management tool to store citations, notes, and notes of manuscript variants to facilitate the research audit trail. A search of secondary literature is carried out in a structured manner in academic databases using predefined keywords to find comparative studies and criticism of sources. The collection process also involves cross-verification between editions, checking the sanad when available, and recording the chronology and physical condition of the manuscript when accessed. All collected data is organized in thematic worksheets and structured digital storage to simplify coding. This procedure is implemented to maintain the integrity of the data and minimize the loss of historical context when quoting old texts.

Data analysis is carried out through data reduction, categorization, and thematic synthesis stages to reveal the principle of meritocracy in the correspondence of the Prophet PBUH. Source criticism is applied systematically to assess the authenticity, possibility of interpolation, and consistency between manuscript variants. A comparative approach is used to compare the accounts in different sirah books and the findings of contemporary studies to build a coherent historical narrative. Triangulation between primary evidence, scientific interpretation, and historical context is used to improve the validity of research inferences. The analysis results are presented descriptively and argumentatively, complemented by selected quotes, thematic summary tables, and chronological maps when needed to clarify the flow of events. Ethical considerations include appropriate attribution, respect for textual sources, and methodological transparency in presenting the study's limitations.

²² Firman Solihin, "Relevansi Dan Urgensi Aplikasi Metodologi Kritik Hadis Dalam Penelitian Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah," *Tahdis: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Al-Hadis* 12, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.24252/tahdis.v12i2.20175>.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Meritocracy in the Correspondence of Prophet Muhammad PBUH

The letter addressed to Emperor Heraclius was sent by a trusted envoy, Dihyah al-Kalbi, as an official introduction to the invitation to receive Islamic guidance. It contains a sincere call to uphold monotheism, reinforced by a quote from one of the holy verses of QS. Ali Imran verse 64 calls for a peaceful dialogue between the People of the Book. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) begins the letter by greeting "Arizon," referring to those who previously believed in the Prophet Jesus AS as brothers and sisters. He emphatically emphasized the importance of renewing our beliefs, so as not to be fixated solely on the apostleship of Jesus AS, but also to acknowledge his apostolacy. The prophetic message also reminded Heraclius not to bear the sin of Arizon that delayed the renewal of their faith. The letter shows the meticulousness of the Prophet's diplomacy in delivering da'wah through polite and respectful language. In return, Heraclius received the delegation with great courtesy, admiring the manners and sincerity of the Messengers, although he rejected the call to convert to Islam. This interaction became an early example of prophetic diplomacy that prioritized dialogue.²³

Messenger Abdulloh bin Hudzaifah brought the letter of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH, to the king of Persia, Kisra Abrawaiz, as a manifestation of da'wah directly from Medina. In the manuscript, there is a sincere invitation to accept Islamic guidance without including the greeting "Expert of the Book," considering the Magi's belief that the sun is the object of worship. The Prophet PBUH specifically avoided referring to the Scribes so that the King of Persia would not bear the collective sin of the Magi's beliefs in his kingdom. Each sentence in the letter is designed to affirm the principle of God's oneness and the moral responsibility of a ruler. When he received the letter, Kisra opened it in front of the palace and tore the message paper as a form of firm rejection. Witnessing the incident, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH prayed that Allah would tear apart the Persian power as the letter was destroyed. History mentions that the Persian Empire experienced a great rift about eight years later, ending its dominance. This story reminds us that rejecting the call for divine grace and justice has tremendous consequences in human history.²⁴

²³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Membaca Sirah Nabi Muhammad SAW Dalam Sorotan Al-Qur'an Dan Hadits-Hadits Shahih* (Lentera Hati, 2011), 820.

²⁴ Ali Al-Hasani Al-Nadwi, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyah*, Edisi Terjemahan (Mardhiyah Press, 2001).

The messenger of Amr bin Umayyah carried out the noble task of delivering the letter of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, to King Najasyi in Habasyah, carrying a sincere message of guidance. In the manuscript, there is an invitation to worship only the One God and affirms the story of Mary and the Prophet Isa AS as a sign of divine miracles. The mention of Maryam's name is beautifully arranged to connect the sanctity of the chosen female figure with the teachings of monotheism brought by Islam. King Najasyi received the letter with respect, courtesy, and an appreciative attitude from Najasyi as he refrained from directly rejecting the sacred message. Some historians record that the meaning of the letter touched him until he decided to embrace Islam as a form of his faith. This event proves how prophetic diplomacy can gently and wisely forge brotherhood bonds between nations.²⁵

The letter addressed to Muqauqis by the Prophet PBUH was brought by Hatib bin Abi Baltha'ah, the official representative of Muslims. The letter contains an invitation to accept the guidance of Islam as the way of salvation and truth. In it is quoted Q.S. Ali-Imran verse 64, which states, "Say: 'O People Ahlul Kitab, let us come to the same sentence between us and you...'"'. There is also a special greeting to Arizona: the people who believe in the Prophet Isa, so they are still classified as People of the Book. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized that Muqauqis should not bear the sins of the people of Qibthi, who should renew their faith, not only recognizing the Prophet Isa as an apostle but also believing in the apostolate of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. When the Messenger's delegation arrived, Muqauqis welcomed them politely and respectfully. Although he refused the invitation to convert to Islam, he still kindly gave gifts to the messengers as a reward for their noble mission.²⁶

The results of the analysis of several sirah documents and manuscript variants that were the subject of the research showed a consistent pattern in the selection of the delegation to send letters by the Prophet PBUH, which was influenced by the ability to speak the language of the messenger to the language of the ruler who was the recipient. Some fragments of letters and contextual information reveal that the chosen envoys often have cross-cultural experience or a reputation for being able to communicate in regional dialects, so the selection is not based solely on personal proximity. This tendency seems strategic because language mastery is essential to maintain the accuracy of meaning and avoid misunderstandings in the content of da'wah and diplomacy.

²⁵ Ibnu Hisyam, *Sirah Nabawiyah*, Edisi Terjemahan (Pustaka Hati, 2021), 815.

²⁶ Muhammad Husain Haikal, *Sejarah Hidup Muhammad*, Terjemahan Ali Audah (Pustaka Literasi Antarnusa, 1990).

These findings further strengthen the argument that individual competency criteria, particularly in the language aspect, are one of the considerations for delegate selection that reflect competency-based practices. Overall, the pattern of delegate selection that considers language proficiency appears to be a functional practice that increases the effectiveness of message delivery and reflects the preferences of delegate selection based on capability.²⁷

The appointment of a delegation to send letters by the Prophet PBUH is more based on the practical skills of the messenger than just personal proximity. Although delivering letters can be considered strenuous, involving physical risks and not always accompanied by special material provisions, the selection pattern prioritizes communication skills and strategic policies. Social logic may require the appointment of loyal close friends for risky tasks. Still, the sources of the head record the placement of the figure that is considered most functionally appropriate. As a comparison, which has an analogous connection, the role of amil zakat in the prophetic period emphasizes the difference in the context of compensation for amil in the past, facing heavy tasks in line with distance travel and transportation limitations, to get a justification for special compensation. Similar to the case of sending letters, the absence of material allowances and the high element of risk show that competency demands go beyond just personal belief. This finding indicates that the Prophet's selection practice contains functional meritocratic principles that aim to ensure the accuracy of meaning and the success of diplomacy and da'wah.²⁸

The success of sending letters to the kings was not solely based on the practice of technical meritocracy. Still, it was also closely related to the character and work ethic of the companions. Deep faith gives birth to an attitude of selfless devotion, so the messenger is willing to take risks to fulfill the mandate. Historical narratives show that their loyalty, honesty, and moral fortitude strengthened the credibility of the message brought to the outside. Language proficiency is often essential, but it can lose effectiveness without moral integrity. Real risks arise if the envoy only masters communication

²⁷ Almir Rogério Da Silva and Isabella Francisca Freitas Gouveia De Vasconcelos, "Meritocracy and Competency-Based People Management Model: Utopia or Organizational Reality?", *Cadernos EBAPE.BR* 19, no. 1 (2021): 190–202, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1679-395120190100x>.

²⁸ Daniel Markovits, "The Common Good Or The Good Of All? Comment on M. Sandel's *The Tyranny of Merit*," *American Journal of Law and Equality* 1 (September 2021): 139–45, https://doi.org/10.1162/ajle_a_00012.

techniques but does not have an ethical commitment; They could have reported the task completed when it was not, so the diplomatic mission failed.²⁹

Contextualization of Meritocracy in the Contemporary Era

In this disruptive era, which is changing rapidly due to technological currents, the implementation of meritocracy is becoming increasingly urgent. The complexity of social, economic, and environmental problems requires placing individuals with specific competencies in relevant work areas so that policies and programs can respond to dynamics precisely. The mismatch between the tasks and capabilities of the implementer can slow down institutional adaptation and cause significant social and economic burdens. Therefore, a selection mechanism that is transparent, evidence-based, and open to competency renewal should be prioritized in government structures, public organizations, and the private sector. The implementation of meaningful meritocracy must also be accompanied by a policy of access to education and training so that opportunities are not only enjoyed by groups who are already privileged. In addition, a system of accountability and periodic evaluation is needed to ensure that competency-based placements produce real performance, not just administrative formalities. Thus, a fair and measurable meritocracy is a prerequisite for societies, countries, and the global community to take advantage of technological transformation opportunities and manage their risks effectively.³⁰

The application of meritocracy is not absolute in every context of filling positions. In some situations, the criteria determined are specific technical skills and more general leadership capacity. The most apparent example appears at the level of heads of state or ministry leaders, where no formal education guarantees eligibility to be president. Leadership skills are often honed through experience, decision-making processes, and the ability to build political legitimacy. Likewise, a minister who may not have a ministerial technical background can succeed if he has vision, coordination skills, and strong managerial skills. Thus, meritocracy must be understood more broadly, and specialization and transferable leadership capacity must be assessed. However, selection based on leadership ability must also be accompanied by accountability mechanisms and performance appraisals so that they do not become a justification for nepotistic or opportunistic appointments. In essence,

²⁹ Nur Fadlilah, “Keadilan Sahabat Nabi Dalam Perspektif Fuad Jabali,” *MUTAWATIR* 2, no. 1 (2015): 110, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2012.2.1.110-127>.

³⁰ Annisa Dewi Mantika Setiawan et al., “Relevansi Peraturan Pemberhentian ASN Terhadap Sistem Merit Di Indonesia,” *Dialogue : Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Publik* 4, no. 1 (2022): 232–46, <https://doi.org/10.14710/dialogue.v4i1.14262>.

the principle of meritocracy should involve a combination of technical expertise and leadership qualities, adapted to the task's nature and the institution's demands.³¹

Ideally, position placement combines relevant technical expertise with qualified leadership skills so that position holders understand the substance of the task while being able to manage processes and resources. These two elements allow the organization to work efficiently because decisions are based on a combination of technical insight and managerial skills. However, it is often difficult to find candidates who meet both criteria simultaneously in public and organizational recruitment practices.³² In these conditions, placing superior figures in a leadership capacity can still result in effective and adaptive organizational performance. A managerially competent leader can formulate visions, delegate tasks appropriately, and recruit and organize a team of specialists to close technical gaps. The main mechanisms to overcome competency gaps are building teams, accelerating organizational learning, and managing information flows. Additionally, leaders who are responsive to change can facilitate knowledge transfer and accelerate institutional adaptation to new challenges. Therefore, while ideally combining technical and leadership competencies is best, choosing strong leadership is a realistic and often the most productive strategy in situations of pragmatic limitations.³³

The author considers that the principle of meritocracy should be an absolute guideline in appointing public and organizational positions in the contemporary era. This view is based on an understanding of a hadith of the Prophet, which emphasizes the danger of handing over affairs to people who do not have competence, because it opens the way to damage and failure.³⁴ Thus, choosing individuals solely because of popularity or personal closeness contradicts the ethics of fairness and effectiveness taught in the tradition. Proximity-based appointments risk putting underqualified people in vulnerable

³¹ Matthias Kaltenegger and Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik, "Who's Fit for the Job? Allocating Ministerial Portfolios to Outsiders and Experts," *European Political Science Review* 14, no. 4 (2022): 618–34, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773922000285>.

³² Sajid Ahmed Mohamed et al., "Decision Making Capability of Management & Its Optimum Effectiveness with Competent Technical Skills in Business Process Management," *Webology* 19, no. 1 (2022): 4055–67, <https://doi.org/10.14704/WEB/V19I1/WEB19267>.

³³ Elea Imarisha, "Management of Technical Employees in the Involvement of Coordination and Collaboration," *Journal of Management and Administration Provision* 2, no. 2 (2022): 44–50, <https://doi.org/10.55885/jmap.v2i2.177>.

³⁴ Ahmad Faiz et al., "Revitalisasi Merit System Dalam Pengangkatan Jabatan Fungsional Di Badan Kepegawaian Daerah Jawa Tengah," *Journal of Education, Humaniora and Social Sciences (JEHSS)* 4, no. 1 (2021): 306–13, <https://doi.org/10.34007/jehss.v4i1.658>.

positions, so that essential tasks are not carried out as intended. In addition, the affective relationship between the mandate giver and the position recipient often creates a moral obstacle for the giver to correct when performance declines. Popularity not accompanied by real achievements easily becomes a tool of pseudo-legitimacy that obscures professional evaluation and degrades the quality of decision-making.³⁵

The principle of meritocracy has cross-cultural adaptability and can be applied since the prophetic time without contradicting the traditional political framework. When the Prophet PBUH interacted with the monarchical pattern of kings, appointing envoys showed a preference for functional skills relevant to the mission purpose. Although he held executive, legislative, and judicial functions in his society, narrative evidence features ability-based selection for specific tasks. This shows that a political structure that resembles a monarchy does not automatically negate the possibility of applying merit. In a contemporary context where the majority adheres to democratic principles, the values of transparency and anti-nepotism actually open up more space for the internalization of meritocracy. Democratic mechanisms such as open selection, public evaluation, and institutional accountability provide channels for capability-based placement. However, its effectiveness also requires policies equalizing access to education and training so that merit does not become a guardian of privilege. Thus, the tradition of functional selection in the prophetic era can be seen as a relevant precedent for efforts to institutionalize meritocracy in all sectors of modern society.³⁶

Although meritocracy is indispensable and can be implemented in many contemporary situations, the study found that fundamental problems persist when the recruited team, although technically competent, does not emulate the work ethic and moral integrity of the companions sent by the Prophet to deliver letters. Even if institutional reforms and selection processes have been designed in such a way as to enforce competence, the absence of moral commitment causes collective performance to be eroded by opportunistic attitudes, disregard for trust, or low dedication to work. Historical cases show that the Friends combine skills and are shaped by the values of faith that encourage

³⁵ Indra Sandinirwan et al., “FAKTOR-FAKTOR YANG MEMENGARUHI KEBERHASILAN IMPLEMENTASI SISTEM MERIT DALAM ORGANISASI PEMERINTAHAN DI INDONESIA,” *JURNAL MANAJEMEN PENDIDIKAN DAN ILMU SOSIAL* 3, no. 2 (2022): 1165–77, <https://doi.org/10.38035/jmpis.v3i2.1369>.

³⁶ Petrus Tan, “Tirani Meritokrasi Dan Reimajinasi Solidaritas: Sebuah Kajian Berdasarkan Perspektif Michael Sandel,” *Jurnal Ledalero* 22, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.31385/jl.v22i1.332.1-19>.

responsibility, sacrifice, and discipline, reinforcing the effectiveness of public duties.³⁷ Therefore, meritocracy without the support of character education risks only giving birth to a technocratic bureaucracy that is procedurally efficient but fragile in terms of public morals. Formal and non-formal education must play a central role in fostering moral capacity, work ethic, and service orientation that support the sustainability of merit-based performance. In addition, recruitment policies need to integrate ethical indicators and oversight mechanisms that assess consistency of behavior, not mere technical outputs. Thus, efforts to strengthen meritocracy should be combined with character-building programs so that competence is not detached from moral responsibility.³⁸

The principle of meritocracy does not solely determine the success of a leader, although it remains a crucial initial foundation. Meritocracy demands appointing leaders and forming teams based on competencies and achievements, but the organization's reality shows that technical competence alone is not enough. Leadership abilities, specific skills in a particular area, and performance outcomes must be complemented by strong character and a consistent work ethic for the organization's vision to be realized.³⁹ As such, the selection process ideally combines competency assessment and character evaluation, so leaders are not only experts but also trustworthy and accountable. One of the concrete ways to assess these non-technical aspects is through psychological tests and psychological assessments that continue to be developed to capture aspects of honesty, resilience, and emotional intelligence. Ongoing training and coaching interventions are necessary to strengthen the work ethic and foster leadership values within the team after merit-based recruitment has been conducted. Formal and non-formal education is also central in shaping individual character from an early age so that ethical foundations and hard work can support professional competence.⁴⁰

³⁷ Sopiah Desi Amalia et al., “Hubungan Islamic Work Ethic Dan Learning Agility Karyawan Badan Amil Zakat,” *Biopsikososial: Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi Fakultas Psikologi Universitas Mercubuana Jakarta* 5, no. 1 (2022): 454, <https://doi.org/10.22441/biopsikososial.v5i1.12334>.

³⁸ Ariyanto et al., “Mencegah Merosotnya Integritas Penyelenggara Pemilihan Umum Dengan Pendidikan Karakter Bangsa,” *Journal of Law Review* 1, no. 1 (2022): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.55098/jolr.v1i1.6>.

³⁹ Eden Komarudin Soeardi et al., “The Role of Leadership in the Development of Public Organizations,” *Journal of Governance* 7, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.31506/jog.v7i4.17903>.

⁴⁰ Sam Rockwell, “Aligning Leaders and Organizations During Role Transitions: Addressing Issues of Competency, Role Identity, and Authentic Prototypicality,” *International Journal of Business and Management* 18, no. 2 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v18n2p1>.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the Prophet's correspondence practice revealed a pattern of delegation selection oriented towards functional capabilities, especially language proficiency and cross-cultural experience, that increased the effectiveness of diplomatic and da'wah message delivery. In addition to this technical evidence, the findings confirm that the mission's success is greatly influenced by the envoys' character, integrity, and work ethic, so formal competence without a moral foundation risks lowering credibility and implementation results. Empirically, this combination of technical skills and moral virtues underpins the legitimacy of cross-cultural communication in the historical context analyzed. The study's main contribution is to present a historical-analytical framework that links the practice of prophetic selection with contemporary meritocratic discourse, thus providing an empirical basis for evidence-based recruitment policy design. A triangulative methodology that combines primary sources, head studies, and public administration literature enriches an interdisciplinary perspective on how merit can be internalized without neglecting ethical aspects. For practical policy, the study recommends the combination of procedural mechanisms (transparency of selection, audits, competency criteria) with character-building programs and ethical indicators in periodic evaluations so that merit-based placement is genuinely sustainable. For follow-up studies, it is recommended to conduct a comparative study that relates the competence profile of the envoy to mission outcomes quantitatively, as well as research on the implementation of measurable character education programs in the modern selection process. Thus, this study paves the way for a more holistic implementation of meritocracy, placing capable actors while ensuring moral responsibility that underpins long-term performance.

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