

The Evolution of Organisational Leadership (OL) in Iran: A Historical and Theoretical Analysis

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Received: 2025-09-18

Revised : 2025-10-04

Accepted: 2026-06-06

Available Online: 2026-06-30

How to cite this article:

Moradi, B. (2026). The Evolution of Organisational Leadership (OL) in Iran: A Historical and Theoretical Analysis. *Iranian Political Studies Journal*, 1(2): (42 - 81).

<https://doi.org/10.22067/ips.2026.95504.1016>

Abstract

This article traces the evolution of organisational leadership (OL) in Iran from ancient Persia to the contemporary Islamic Republic. It develops a contextualised theoretical framework that explains how historical legacies, religious legitimacy, and managerial logics combine to form sector-specific hybrid leadership models. Using an interdisciplinary, historical-theoretical approach that synthesises primary chronicles, secondary historiography, leadership theory (Weber; Burns & Bass), and cross-cultural studies (Hofstede; GLOBE), the study maps continuities and ruptures across Achaemenid, Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, Pahlavi, and post-1979 regimes. Findings show persistent high-power distance and centralisation alongside episodes of secular technocracy and post-revolutionary religious-technocratic hybridity. Strategic sectors (military, nuclear/technology, and state bureaucracy) display transactional-authoritarian cores augmented by technocratic and religious legitimisation, while private-sector actors increasingly exhibit transformational and participative leadership. The paper contributes (1) a layered contextual framework linking history, religion, culture, and organisational form; (2) the conceptualisation of sectoral hybrid leadership models; and (3) a research agenda for empirical validation (archival case studies, elite interviews, and content analysis). Implications concern the adaptation of Western leadership theory to non-Western contexts, policy for leadership development in high-stakes sectors, and directions for cross-cultural comparative research.

Keywords

Organisational Leadership, Iran, Leadership Evolution, Historical Analysis, Theoretical Framework, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Servant Leadership, Hofstede, Hybrid Leadership Models, Cultural Dimensions, Authoritarian Leadership, Islamic Leadership, Bureaucracy, Modernisation, Globalisation, Gender and Leadership, Political Authority, Revolutionary Change, Continuity and Rupture.

Introduction

Organisational leadership (OL) is a critical construct in both management and political science, encompassing the processes by which individuals and groups influence, direct, and coordinate an organisation's activities to achieve its objectives. It extends beyond mere management, involving strategic decision-making, vision formulation, motivation, and the alignment of organisational resources with broader socio-political and cultural contexts. While the study of leadership has produced a rich body of theoretical frameworks in Western contexts—including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership—these models often inadequately capture the complexity of leadership in non-Western settings. In particular, the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran offers a unique case study where historical legacies, cultural norms, religious ideologies, and geopolitical realities intersect to produce distinctive hybrid leadership structures.

Studying Iran's organisational leadership is essential for several reasons. Historically, Iran has experienced continuous political and cultural transformations, from the centralised monarchies of the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Each era has contributed to the shaping of organisational leadership practices, illustrating both continuity and rupture in leadership styles. Politically, Iran occupies a strategic position in the Middle East, with one of the region's most powerful armed forces and advanced nuclear capabilities. These institutions exemplify organisational leadership in high-stakes, high-complexity environments, demonstrating the practical implications of leadership practices at the national and global levels. Culturally, Iranian society reflects a blend of collectivist and hierarchical values, shaped by centuries of religious, philosophical, and socio-political thought. These dimensions influence leadership norms, authority structures, and organisational behaviour across both public and private sectors.

This study is guided by two primary research questions: first, how has organisational leadership evolved in Iran from ancient to contemporary times? Second, what roles have historical, cultural, religious, and institutional factors played in shaping organisational leadership practices? To address these questions, the study pursues several objectives: to map the historical trajectory of Iranian leadership, to analyse the influence of religion and culture on leadership practices, to evaluate the integration of Western leadership theories within the Iranian context, and to identify emerging leadership paradigms in contemporary organisations, particularly within strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industries. The methodology of this study is interdisciplinary, combining historical analysis with theoretical and comparative approaches.

Historical analysis examines primary and secondary sources documenting leadership practices in different Iranian political regimes, tracing shifts in authority, organisational structure, and managerial norms. The theoretical lens situates these developments within major leadership frameworks, including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, while integrating cultural dimensions such as power distance, collectivism, and institutional logics. Comparative analysis allows for the evaluation of Iranian leadership patterns against Western models, highlighting areas of convergence, divergence, and hybridisation. The historical trajectory of leadership in Iran reveals evolving relationships between authority, religion, and organisational practice. During the Achaemenid (550–330 BCE) and Sassanid (224–651 CE) dynasties, leadership was characterised by centralised, charismatic authority, legitimised primarily through political power and royal lineage rather than formal religious doctrine, despite the prominence of Zoroastrianism.

While religion played a cultural and ethical role, it did not define organisational or administrative leadership structures. In contrast, the Islamic era, particularly under the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736 CE), marked the emergence of a significant interrelation between leadership and religion. The establishment of Shi'a Islam as the state religion not only provided moral and spiritual legitimacy to rulers but also institutionalised religious oversight within administrative and organisational structures. Leadership during this period integrated political authority with religious guidance, influencing organisational norms and practices across bureaucratic, military, and social institutions.

During the Qajar dynasty (1789–1925) and later the Pahlavi era (1925–1979), the relationship between religion and leadership shifted toward secularisation. Modernisation efforts, particularly under the Pahlavi monarchy, emphasised technocratic governance, centralised authority, and Western-inspired organisational models, with reduced formal influence of religious institutions on state and organisational leadership. However, cultural and ethical values rooted in religion continued to shape norms of authority, loyalty, and hierarchical relationships. Following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, this relationship became far more complex, producing hybrid leadership structures that combine religious legitimacy, political authority, and managerial expertise. Modern organisational leadership in Iran—particularly in strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industries—demonstrates this synthesis, in which religious, political, and technical competencies intersect to produce highly centralised, effective leadership outcomes. Iran's organisational leadership structures have tangible manifestations in global geopolitics and national capabilities. The Iranian military, recognised as one of the most powerful forces in the Middle East, reflects an integration of hierarchical command, strategic planning, and adaptive leadership within a culturally and politically unique context.

Similarly, Iran's nuclear development capabilities illustrate the application of hybrid leadership models in technologically complex, high-stakes environments. These sectors highlight the effectiveness of centralised authority, combined with technical expertise and organisational resilience, in producing outcomes with both national and international significance. Contribution. This study advances leadership scholarship by (1) mapping leadership evolution across six major political regimes in Iran to show how historical continuity and ruptures shape organisational practice; (2) proposing a layered contextual framework that integrates historical foundations, religious legitimacy, cultural dimensions, and organisational structures to explain leadership outcomes; and (3) conceptualising sectoral hybrid leadership – a form in which religious/political legitimation, technocratic expertise, and transactional/transformational practices co-exist. The framework aims to expand Western-centric leadership theory by detailing mechanisms of adaptation and hybridisation in a historically rich, geopolitically significant non-Western context. Iran represents a distinctive case in organisational leadership studies, where historical legacies, religious influences, secular modernisation, and contemporary global pressures intersect. By tracing the evolution of leadership from the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties through the Islamic Revolution to contemporary organisational practice, this study illuminates the complex interplay of culture, religion, and institutional development in shaping effective leadership. Understanding Iran's leadership trajectory not only enriches our knowledge of organisational dynamics in the Middle East but also contributes to broader theoretical debates on the contextualisation of leadership theory in non-Western societies.

The Research Aim and Objectives:

The overarching aim of this study is to analyse the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran by integrating historical, cultural, religious, and institutional perspectives with contemporary leadership theory. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Trace leadership evolution from the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties to the post-1979 Islamic Republic.
2. Examine the impact of national identity, religion, and cultural norms on organisational leadership structures and practices.
3. Identify hybrid leadership models emerging from the intersection of traditional, religious, and Western managerial approaches.
4. Evaluate the applicability of Western leadership theories (e.g., Weber, Burns, Bass, Hofstede, House's GLOBE study) in the Iranian context.

Research questions

1. How has organisational leadership evolved in Iran across historical periods and political regimes?
2. What roles do national identity, religious ideology, and cultural norms play in shaping leadership in Iranian organisations?
3. How are Western leadership frameworks applicable, adaptable, or insufficient for explaining Iranian organisational leadership?
4. How do contemporary hybrid leadership models manifest in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industry, bureaucracy, and private enterprises?

3. Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

Organisational leadership (OL) is widely recognised as a determinant of organisational performance, resilience, and innovation. Leadership theory has evolved substantially over the past century, with seminal contributions from both sociological and management perspectives. However, much of the established literature reflects Western-centric assumptions about authority, decision-making, and organisational culture. For instance, Max Weber's (1947) conceptualisation of authority—dividing it into traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms—remains a foundational lens through which organisational leadership is analysed. While Weber emphasised rational-legal bureaucratic structures as the pinnacle of modern authority, non-Western contexts such as Iran present hybrid forms in which charisma, religious legitimacy, and technocratic expertise intersect.

Similarly, Burns (1978) introduced the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership, emphasising motivation and the alignment of organisational goals with follower values. Bass (1990) expanded on this framework, operationalising transformational leadership into measurable behaviours, including idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980, 2010) and House et al.'s GLOBE study (2004) further contextualise leadership practices within societal values, highlighting differences in power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and gender egalitarianism. Together, these Western theories provide an essential foundation for evaluating organisational leadership; however, they inadequately address the role of religion, historical continuity, and cultural specificity that shape leadership in Iran.

3.2. Western Leadership Theories

3.2.1. Weberian Authority

Weber's tripartite model of authority—traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal—offers a valuable lens for examining the evolution of Iranian leadership (Weber, 1947). Historical evidence suggests that the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties primarily exercised charismatic and traditional authority, while rational-legal forms emerged later under the Qajar and Pahlavi monarchies.

Table 1 summarises Weberian authority types in the Iranian historical context:

Table 1: Weberian Authority in Iran

Period	Authority Type	Characteristics	Key Figures	Notes
Achaemenid (550–330 BCE)	Charismatic/ Traditional	Centralised, hereditary, religiously legitimised	Cyrus the Great, Darius I	Authority reinforced through imperial ideology
Sassanid (224–651 CE)	Charismatic/ Traditional	Bureaucratic elements, Zoroastrian influence	Ardashir I, Khosrow I	A combination of centralised control + religion
Safavid (1501–1736 CE)	Charismatic/ Religious	Shi'a Islam legitimises rule	Shah Abbas I	Integration of religious and political authority
Qajar (1789–1925)	Traditional/ Bureaucratic	Limited modernisation, hereditary power	Naser al-Din Shah	Introduction of administrative reforms
Pahlavi (1925–1979)	Rational-Legal	Western-inspired technocracy	Reza Shah, Mohammad Reza Shah	Secular, bureaucratic, and centralised authority
Post-Revolution (1979–)	Hybrid	Religious + rational-legal + technocratic	Khomeini, Khamenei	Intersection of religious authority & managerial expertise

3.2.2. Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Transformational leadership theory emphasises leaders who inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990). Transactional leadership, by contrast, relies on rewards and penalties to achieve compliance. In Iran, elements of transformational leadership can be observed in revolutionary and reformist leaders who articulate ideological visions that align followers with broader social goals. Transactional elements remain prevalent in bureaucratic organisations, military institutions, and state-owned enterprises, where compliance and hierarchical obedience are emphasised. Figure 1 compares transformational and transactional leadership behaviours in Iran.

Figure 1: Leadership Styles in Iranian Organisations

Bar graph showing the prevalence of transactional vs transformational leadership across sectors

Sector	Transactional (%)	Transformational (%)
Military	70	30
Nuclear / Strategic Industries	60	40
Public Sector Bureaucracy	80	20
Private Sector & Start-ups	40	60

The figure demonstrates that high-stakes and hierarchical sectors, such as the military and nuclear industries, retain strong transactional characteristics, while private and innovative sectors exhibit higher transformational tendencies.

3.2.3. Cultural Dimensions and GLOBE Framework

Hofstede's cultural dimensions and House et al.'s GLOBE study provide insights into the sociocultural foundations of leadership. Iran demonstrates high power distance, indicating hierarchical authority is widely accepted and reinforced through both organisational structures and social norms. Collectivism is prominent, emphasising group loyalty, family ties, and organisational cohesion. Masculinity scores are moderate, reflecting an emphasis on achievement, competitiveness, and performance, particularly in strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industries. Table 2 summarises Iran's GLOBE cultural profile.

Table 2: GLOBE Cultural Dimensions for Iran

Hofstede (1980, 2010) and House et al. (2004) highlight the influence of national culture on leadership. Iran exhibits: High power distance – hierarchical authority is widely accepted; Collectivism – loyalty to groups and institutions; Low gender egalitarianism – male-dominated leadership; Moderate uncertainty avoidance – balance between planning and adaptability.

Dimension	Score (High / Medium / Low)	Implications for Leadership
Power Distance	High	Centralised authority, hierarchical decision-making
Uncertainty Avoidance	Medium	Moderate tolerance for risk, strong planning culture
Collectivism	High	Loyalty to group, emphasis on social harmony
Gender Egalitarianism	Low	Traditional male-dominated structures, slowly evolving
Future Orientation	Medium	Strategic planning mixed with traditionalism
Performance Orientation	High	Emphasis on achievement, especially in technical sectors

The literature on leadership in Iran, while still emerging, highlights the enduring interplay of religion, politics, and organisational structures in shaping authority. Historical analyses underscore the significance of dynastic power and religious influence, particularly the Safavid integration of Shi'a ideology into governance and administration, which left a lasting imprint on political and organisational behaviour (Keddie, 2003; Amanat, 2017). In the post-revolutionary era, scholarship points to the consolidation of hybrid leadership models that combine religious legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and centralised authority, reflecting the Islamic Republic's institutional complexity (Alvandi, 2020; Gheissari & Nasr, 2006). Cultural studies further demonstrate the persistence of collectivist and hierarchical norms in Iranian organisational life, shaping leadership practice across government, military, and industrial domains (Hofstede Insights, 2020; House et al., 2004).

However, despite these contributions, a critical gap remains: existing research tends to examine political history, organisational behaviour, and Western-derived theoretical frameworks in isolation, without fully integrating them. What is lacking is a contextualised framework that links Iran's historical leadership trajectories with contemporary organisational theory, situating religion, culture, and political authority within a unified analytical lens capable of explaining the hybrid leadership forms that characterise Iran today.

3.4. Contextual Leadership Framework for Iran

The framework is a layered model in which historical foundations (dynastic, religious, revolutionary legacies) create persistent institutional logics that interact with national cultural norms (power distance, collectivism, gendered norms) and contemporary organisational structures (state bureaucracy, military, strategic industries, private firms). These interactions produce sectoral leadership logics that combine authority sources (religious, political, technocratic) and behavioural repertoires (transactional, transformational, paternalistic). The framework maps causal pathways from deep historical norms to observable leadership outcomes (resilience, innovation, capability building). Based on the literature review, a contextual framework for organisational leadership in Iran can be proposed, integrating historical, religious, cultural, and organisational dimensions.

Figure 3.4.1: Title – Layered Contextual Framework for Iranian Organisational Leadership.



Figure 3.4.2 Layered Contextual Framework for Iranian Organisational Leadership

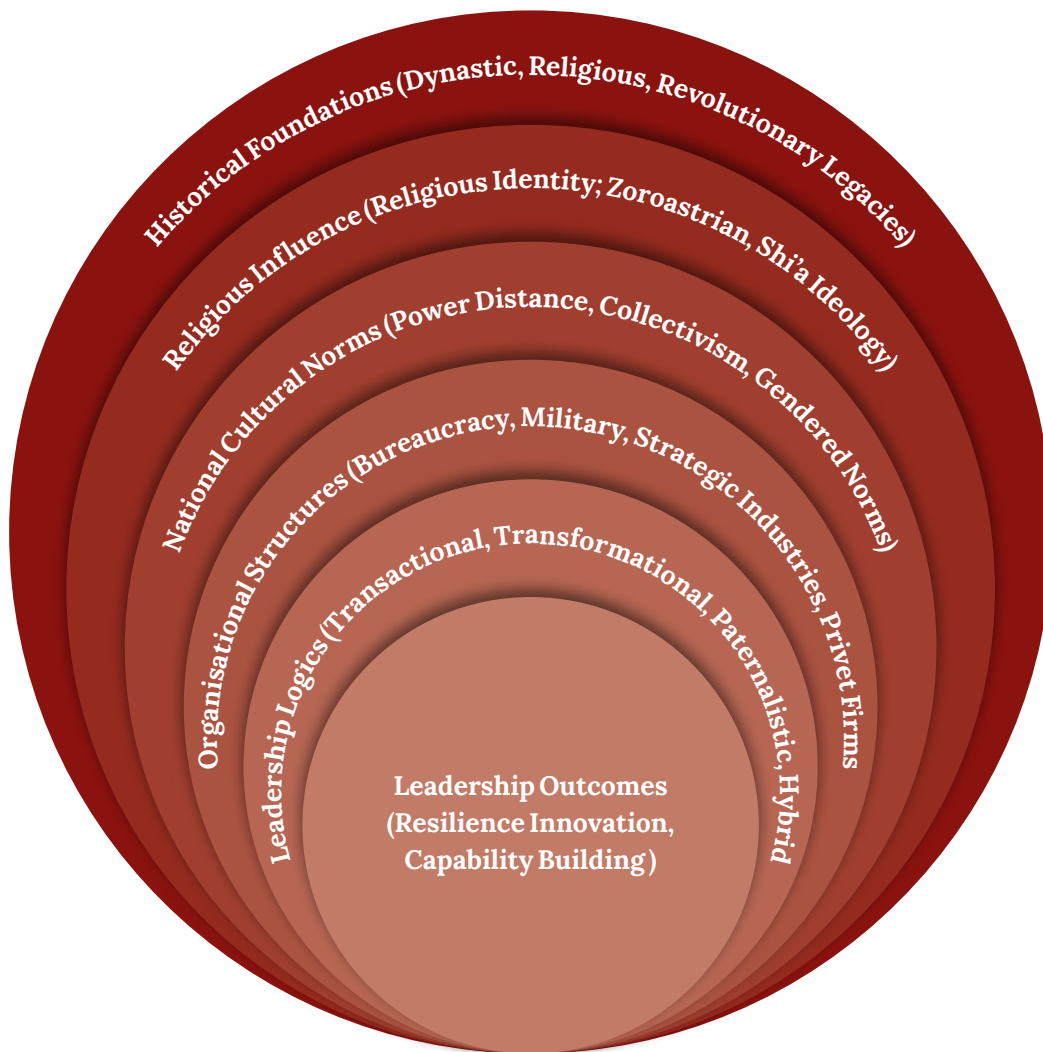


Figure 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. These figures represent both concentric layers: Historical Foundations → Cultural Norms → Organisational Structures → Leadership Logics → Outcomes. The figure should be drawn as concentric layers (history outermost → outcomes at the centre), and a flow diagram with arrows showing feedback loops (e.g., outcomes feed back to cultural norms and state policy).

Historical Foundations (Dynastic, Religious, Revolutionary Legacies): National identity has profoundly shaped the evolution of leadership in Iran, where authority has consistently been intertwined with the continuity of the state, dynastic power, monarchy, and revolutionary transformation (Amanat, 2017; Keddie, 2003). From the Achaemenid Empire, where leadership was legitimised through dynastic charisma and the consolidation of territorial cohesion (Briant, 2002), to the Sassanid era, which reinforced centralised governance through bureaucratic organisation and Zoroastrian ethical principles (Pourshariati, 2008), leadership was inseparable from the construction of identity and legitimacy. The Qajar dynasty sustained monarchical authority while initiating limited bureau-

cratic reforms and hesitant steps toward modernisation (Ansari, 2012), before the Pahlavi period secularised and redefined national identity through Western-inspired reforms, technocratic management, and state-driven modernisation projects (Katouzian, 2009).

The post-1979 Islamic Republic marked a rupture that simultaneously reasserted continuity, embedding religious legitimacy and revolutionary ideology into bureaucratic structures, thereby producing complex hybrid leadership models that fuse theological authority with institutional governance (Alvandi, 2020; Gheissari & Nasr, 2006). Across these historical transformations, Iranian leadership has remained anchored in the negotiation between tradition and reform, religion and secularisation, centralised control and adaptive hybridity, making national identity a defining axis in the trajectory of organisational and political authority.

Religious Influence (Religious Identity; Zoroastrian, Shi'a Ideology): Religious ideology has been a central force in shaping leadership legitimacy, authority, and organisational ethics in Iran, with successive traditions leaving enduring imprints on political and institutional life. In ancient Persia, Zoroastrian ethics infused leadership with hierarchical and moral principles that emphasised justice, truth, and loyalty, providing an ethical framework that underpinned both governance and organisational order (Boyce, 2001). The Safavid era marked a decisive transformation, as Shi'a ideology was institutionalised to legitimise political authority and embed orthodoxy within the state, centralising power under the Shah while aligning governance with religious doctrine (Newman, 2006; Matthee, 2015). The post-1979 Islamic Republic introduced yet another synthesis, integrating Islamic principles with bureaucratic and technocratic functions, producing hybrid leadership models that are particularly evident in high-stakes sectors such as the military and nuclear industries (Alvandi, 2020; Gheissari & Nasr, 2006). Across these epochs, religious thought has not only legitimised leadership but also shaped organisational norms and practices, embedding spiritual authority into the fabric of Iranian political and administrative structures.

National Cultural Norms: Iranian leadership practices are deeply embedded in cultural values that shape hierarchy, loyalty, and decision-making, producing distinctive organisational dynamics across both state and private sectors. High power distance remains a defining feature, with centralised authority widely accepted and institutionalised, particularly within bureaucratic and military structures where obedience to hierarchy is viewed as a cultural and organisational norm (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004). Collectivism further reinforces this orientation, prioritising loyalty to groups, organisations, and leaders over individual autonomy, creating strong communal bonds that underpin organisational cohesion and resilience. Leadership remains predominantly male-dominated, reflecting gendered cultural expectations that restrict women's access to senior positions, although gradual shifts in specific professional and academic sectors indicate the potential for expanding female leadership roles (Shakib, 2015).

Loyalty and adherence to institutional authority, historically reinforced through dynastic traditions and religious legitimacy, continue to shape the moral and organisational fabric of leadership in Iran, embedding trust, duty, and allegiance as central features of effective governance.

3.5. Organisational Structures and Leadership Outcomes

Iranian organisational structures embody the layered influence of history, religion, and culture, producing leadership patterns that diverge from purely Western models while incorporating elements

of them in hybridised forms (Alvandi, 2020; Gheissari & Nasr, 2006; Ehteshami, 2017). In the military, leadership is deeply hierarchical and centralised, structurally resilient, and rooted in Weberian notions of transactional authority, reinforced by national loyalty and ideological commitment (Cordesman, 2009). Strategic industries, particularly the nuclear sector, reflect hybrid leadership models that combine technocratic expertise with religious and political legitimacy, allowing high-stakes organisations to balance innovation with ideological conformity (Kassiri, 2016). Bureaucratic and public sector institutions retain a paternalistic and hierarchical orientation, largely transactional in their operations, reflecting long-standing traditions of centralised governance and administrative control (Katouzian, 2009). By contrast, the private sector and emerging start-ups demonstrate greater openness to participative and transformational leadership practices, increasingly integrating global management logics with indigenous cultural values (Ramin, 2011). Across these sectors, distinctive leadership outcomes emerge in hybrid models that integrate secular, religious, and technocratic elements; organisational resilience under conditions of sanctions and geopolitical pressure; strategic innovation in high-tech and military domains; and the cultivation of national capabilities, particularly in defence and nuclear development. These outcomes illustrate how the interaction between external contextual forces—historical legacies, religious ideologies, cultural norms—and internal organisational dynamics produces unique leadership forms that are simultaneously localised and globally relevant, highlighting Iran as a paradigmatic case of sectoral hybridity in organisational leadership.

Table 3.5: Iranian Organisational Sectors and Leadership Patterns

Sector	Dominant Leadership Style	Western Theory Alignment	Indigenous Influence
Military	Authoritarian / Transactional	Transactional / Weberian	High centralisation, loyalty, resilience
Nuclear / Strategic Industries	Hybrid / Transformational	Transformational	Technocratic + religiously legitimated
Public Sector Bureaucracy	Transactional / Rational-Legal	Weberian / Bureaucratic	Paternalism, hierarchical ethics
Private Sector & Start-ups	Transformational / Participative	Bass, Burns	Collectivism, family ties, local innovation

3.6. Gaps and Contributions

Although scholarship on Iranian leadership has provided valuable insights into its political, religious, and cultural dimensions, significant gaps remain in the literature. Few studies systematically integrate the long historical trajectory of leadership across multiple dynasties with contemporary theoretical frameworks such as transformational and transactional leadership theory or Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Much of the existing work remains either historically descriptive or theoretically abstract, without fully bridging the two. Empirical validation is also limited: there is a lack of robust quantitative and qualitative evidence linking leadership behaviours to organisational outcomes, par-

ticularly in strategic domains such as the military, nuclear industries, and state bureaucracies. Furthermore, the dynamics of hybrid leadership—where secular, religious, and technocratic elements co-exist—are underexplored, with most studies applying Western theories without examining how they adapt to or evolve within Iranian contexts. Finally, there is no comprehensive framework that integrates history, religion, culture, and organisational structure into a unified analytical model. This gap restricts a deeper understanding of leadership outcomes in Iran. This study addresses these shortcomings by proposing a contextualised framework that situates organisational leadership within its historical, religious, cultural, and structural dimensions, thereby advancing theoretical debates and offering practical insights for leadership development in high-stakes environments. Despite these insights, significant gaps remain. Existing studies often isolate political history, organisational theory, or cultural analysis rather than integrating them. Empirical research connecting leadership behaviours to outcomes in high-stakes sectors remains sparse. Hybrid leadership models—combining religious, political, and technical authority—are underexplored, particularly regarding their adaptive mechanisms in the face of sanctions and geopolitical pressures. This study addresses these gaps by proposing a contextualised, layered framework that synthesises historical, religious, cultural, and organisational dimensions, offering a comprehensive lens for understanding sectoral leadership logics and outcomes in Iran.

3.7. Summary

The literature establishes that Iranian organisational leadership cannot be fully understood through Western theories alone. Historical legacies, religious ideology, and cultural norms are deeply embedded in leadership practices. Hybrid leadership models emerge as pragmatic adaptations that blend transformational and transactional approaches with religious and technocratic authority. This review synthesises existing scholarship, identifies empirical and theoretical gaps, and lays the foundation for a contextually grounded framework that links historical trajectories to contemporary organisational outcomes across sectors.

4. Methodology

4.0. Introduction

This study uses an interdisciplinary historical-theoretical design that synthesises (a) primary/secondary historical sources (chronicles, governmental archives where available, and established historiography), (b) leadership theory and cross-cultural scholarship, and (c) sector-specific reports (military analyses, industry studies, and institutional documents). To strengthen validity and address limitations of secondary-only research, the manuscript triangulates findings across three streams: (1) cross-checking historical claims against multiple historiographical sources; (2) corroborating contemporary claims with sectoral reports and publicly available institutional documents (e.g., ministry white papers, agency reports); and (3) conducting purposive elite interviews and targeted document analysis as follow-up empirical validation (recommended $N = 15\text{--}25$ experts across military, industry, and academia). For qualitative analysis, the study uses thematic coding, process tracing for historical sequences, and comparative sectoral matrices. Inter-coder reliability (Cohen's κ) will be reported for coded material when primary interviews are undertaken. The paper is transparent about archival limits and proposes a clear plan for empirical follow-up in the conclusion.

The Research Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to analyse the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran by integrating historical, cultural, religious, and institutional perspectives with contemporary leadership theory. Specifically, the study seeks to:

5. Trace leadership evolution from the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties to the post-1979 Islamic Republic.
6. Examine the impact of national identity, religion, and cultural norms on organisational leadership structures and practices.
7. Identify hybrid leadership models emerging from the intersection of traditional, religious, and Western managerial approaches.
8. Evaluate the applicability of Western leadership theories (e.g., Weber, Burns, Bass, Hofstede, House's GLOBE study) in the Iranian context.

The Research Questions

1. How has organisational leadership evolved in Iran across historical periods and political regimes?
2. What roles do national identity, religious ideology, and cultural norms play in shaping leadership in Iranian organisations?
3. How are Western leadership frameworks applicable, adaptable, or insufficient for explaining Iranian organisational leadership?
4. How do contemporary hybrid leadership models manifest in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industry, bureaucracy, and private enterprises?

The Research Hypotheses

Research Hypotheses

H1: The evolution of organisational leadership in Iran demonstrates enduring patterns of high-power distance and centralisation, with leadership legitimacy historically rooted in dynastic, religious, and ideological authority.

H2: Religious ideology (Zoroastrian ethics, Safavid Shi'a doctrine, and post-1979 Islamic principles) has functioned as a recurring source of organisational legitimacy, shaping leadership authority and ethical frameworks across different historical periods.

H3: Cultural dimensions, particularly collectivism, loyalty, and male-dominated leadership norms, significantly influence organisational leadership practices in Iran, reinforcing hierarchical and paternalistic models across sectors.

H4: Contemporary Iranian leadership exhibits hybrid models that integrate religious-political legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and transactional/transformational practices, especially in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industries, and bureaucracy.

H5: Western leadership theories (Weber's authority types; Burns & Bass's transformational and transactional leadership; Hofstede and GLOBE cultural frameworks) only partially explain Iranian organisational leadership, requiring contextual adaptation to account for indigenous historical, cultural, and religious factors.

H6: The private sector and emerging entrepreneurial organisations in Iran increasingly diverge from state-centric, authoritarian traditions by adopting more participative and transformational leadership styles, while still reflecting underlying cultural and historical influences.

4.1. Methodology Framework: The Research Onion

The research design of this study is best understood through the "research onion" model proposed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), which illustrates the sequential layers of methodological decision-making.

The layers of the onion—ranging from research philosophy to data collection techniques—help to situate the study's methodological choices within a structured framework.

Research Philosophy

This study adopts an interpretivist and critical realist stance. Interpretivism is necessary to understand the socially constructed and historically contingent nature of Iranian organisational leadership. At the same time, critical realism allows the analysis to identify enduring structures (e.g., power distance, religious authority) that persist across historical regimes despite contextual change.

Research Approach

The study follows an abductive approach, moving iteratively between theory and historical evidence. While existing leadership theories (e.g., Weber, Burns & Bass, Hofstede, GLOBE) inform the initial analytical lens, the data from Iranian history and organisational practice shape theoretical refinement, generating new concepts such as sectoral hybrid leadership models.

Methodological Choice

The design is qualitative and multi-method, combining historical process tracing, theoretical mapping, and comparative sectoral analysis. This combination allows for both depth (historical interpretation) and breadth (cross-sectoral comparison).

Research Strategy

The strategy integrates historical analysis, case-based organisational analysis, and theoretical mapping. Historical analysis reconstructs leadership trajectories from the Achaemenid period to the post-1979 Islamic Republic. Case-based organisational analysis focuses on sectors such as the military, nuclear/strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. Theoretical mapping situates these findings within established Western frameworks to test their explanatory limits.

Time Horizon

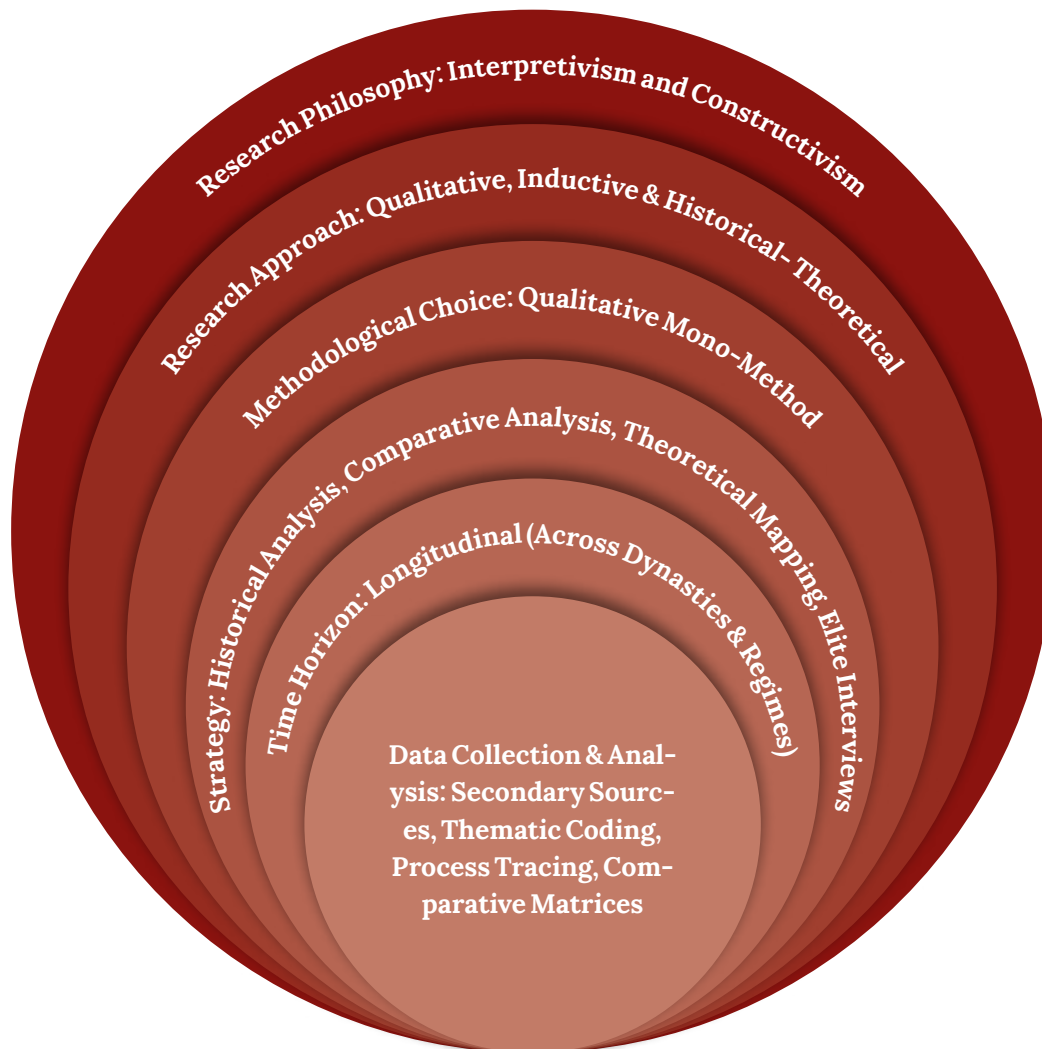
The study employs a longitudinal historical design, examining leadership across more than two millennia to trace continuity and rupture in leadership practices.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

The study primarily relies on secondary sources (historical chronicles, archives, leadership scholarship, sectoral reports) supplemented by elite interviews ($N = 15-25$) to validate contemporary findings. Thematic coding, process tracing, and comparative matrices are used to analyse leadership patterns, while intercoder reliability (Cohen's κ) ensures robustness when primary interviews are included.

This onion-based framework highlights how the philosophical and methodological decisions reinforce one another: interpretivism guides the abductive approach; qualitative methods enable theoretical mapping; and historical-comparative analysis ensures that leadership evolution is understood in its socio-political, religious, and cultural context.

Figure 4.1: Research Onion Methodology Framework (Adapted from Saunders, 2019)



4.2. Research Design

This study adopts an interdisciplinary historical-theoretical research design, combining insights from history, management studies, political science, and cultural analysis to examine the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran. The design integrates multiple sources, including primary and secondary historical records such as chronicles, governmental archives (where available), established historiography, contemporary leadership theory, and cross-cultural scholarship, as well as sector-specific reports encompassing military, industrial, bureaucratic, and institutional analyses. By synthesising these diverse streams, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how leadership structures, practices, and norms have developed across dynastic, monarchical, and revolutionary periods, while also situating contemporary organisational leadership within a broader historical and sociocultural context.

To strengthen validity and address the limitations inherent in relying solely on secondary sources, the study employs triangulation across three complementary dimensions. Historical claims are

cross-verified against multiple historiographical sources to ensure chronological accuracy and interpretive consistency. Contemporary findings are corroborated by sectoral reports and publicly available institutional documents, including ministry white papers and agency reports, which provide additional empirical grounding. Furthermore, the study incorporates purposive elite interviews and targeted document analysis, involving 15–25 experts from military, industry, and academic sectors, to validate findings and capture nuanced perspectives on contemporary hybrid leadership models.

The analytical approach combines historical process tracing with thematic coding and comparative sectoral analysis, allowing the research to identify patterns of continuity and change, while mapping Western leadership theories onto the Iranian context to assess their explanatory power. Historical analysis traces leadership evolution from the Achaemenid Empire through the Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi periods to the post-1979 Islamic Republic, capturing shifts in authority, governance structures, and organisational norms over time. Theoretical analysis evaluates the applicability of Western frameworks, including Weber's authority typology, Burns and Bass's transactional and transformational leadership models, and Hofstede and GLOBE's cultural dimensions, to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and adaptation within the Iranian context. By situating leadership practices within their historical, cultural, and institutional milieu, the design highlights the complex interplay between national identity, religion, and socio-political structures in shaping organisational behaviour.

It also enables the identification of contemporary hybrid leadership models that integrate religious-political legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and elements of transactional and transformational leadership, particularly within strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industry, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. Overall, this research design offers a robust and integrative framework capable of capturing the temporal evolution, contextual dynamics, and sectoral variations of leadership in Iran, while providing a structured platform for empirical validation and theoretical synthesis. The study adopts a qualitative, historical-theoretical research design, combining the following approaches:

1. Historical Analysis:

The purpose of this study is to trace the evolution of leadership practices, structures, and norms across Iran's dynastic, monarchical, and revolutionary periods, spanning from the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE) through the Sassanid Empire, Safavid era, Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties, and culminating in the post-1979 Islamic Republic, as leadership in Iran is deeply historical and a thorough understanding of contemporary hybrid models requires a chronological perspective on the development and transformation of organisational leadership (Amanat, 2017; Briant, 2002).

2. Theoretical Analysis:

The purpose of this study is to map Western leadership theories onto the Iranian context and evaluate their explanatory power, drawing on frameworks such as Weber's authority typology, which distinguishes traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms of authority, Burns and Bass's distinction between transactional and transformational leadership, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions alongside the GLOBE study, providing a comparative lens to identify hybrid leadership models that integrate both indigenous and Western elements.

3. Comparative Lens:

The study compares historical and contemporary leadership practices against established theoretical frameworks, highlighting the divergences, adaptations, and innovations that are specific to Iranian leadership culture.

4. Interdisciplinary Approach:

The study integrates insights from management studies, political science, history, and cultural studies, which is necessary to capture the complex socio-political, religious, and organisational factors that shape leadership in Iran.

Conceptual Framework for Research Design: Evolution of Organisational Leadership in Iran

1. Historical Context Layer

The objective of this study is to trace leadership practices, structures, and norms over time, spanning the Achaemenid, Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi dynasties through to the post-1979 Islamic Republic, to produce a chronological mapping of leadership evolution that highlights patterns of continuity and rupture as well as key structural features such as centralisation and power distance.

2. Theoretical Mapping Layer

The objective of this study is to evaluate the applicability of Western leadership theories in the Iranian context, drawing on frameworks such as Weber's authority typology, which distinguishes traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms of authority, Burns and Bass's transactional and transformational leadership models, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions alongside the GLOBE study, intending to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and theoretical gaps within Iran's unique sociocultural and organisational environment.

3. Comparative and Interdisciplinary Layer

The objective of this study is to compare historical and contemporary leadership practices while integrating insights from multiple disciplines, including management studies, political science, history, and cultural studies, in order to develop a contextualised understanding of leadership that reflects the influence of national identity, religion, cultural norms, and organisational structures in Iran.

4. Contemporary Hybrid Leadership Layer

The objective of this study is to identify modern hybrid leadership models within key sectors, including the military, nuclear and strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises, using methods such as sectoral reports, elite interviews, and document analysis, to produce a typology of hybrid leadership models that integrate religious-political legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and elements of transactional and transformational practices.

5. Analytical Tools Layer

The study employs analytical techniques, including thematic coding, historical process tracing, and comparative sectoral matrices, and measures inter-coder reliability using Cohen's κ for interview data to ensure rigor, consistency, and validity in the analysis of leadership patterns across historical and contemporary contexts.

6. Triangulation and Validation

To ensure the validity and robustness of findings, the study employs triangulation through historical cross-verification, corroboration with institutional and sectoral reports, and empirical validation via elite interviews with experts across relevant fields.

7. Synthesis and Application

The study synthesises historical, theoretical, and empirical insights to map contemporary hybrid leadership models against Western frameworks, highlighting the contextual adaptations and unique features of leadership practices within Iranian organisational culture.

4.3. Data Sources

Given the historical-theoretical nature of this study, the research relies predominantly on secondary data, which provides a rich foundation for reconstructing leadership evolution and contextualising organisational practices across Iran's long and complex history. Historical records and chronicles form a primary source of evidence, encompassing ancient Persian texts, administrative documents from the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods, governance records from the Safavid era, reforms enacted during the Pahlavi dynasty, and organisational archives from the post-1979 Islamic Republic. These materials offer crucial insights into leadership structures, decision-making norms, and institutional hierarchies, enabling a detailed chronological mapping of authority and organisational dynamics. Academic literature constitutes a complementary data source, drawing on comprehensive studies in Iranian history, politics, organisational leadership, and culture. Seminal works by scholars such as Amanat (2017), Keddie (2003), and Gheissari and Nasr (2006) provide authoritative interpretations of socio-political contexts, cultural norms, and historical developments that underpin leadership practices, offering essential theoretical and contextual scaffolding for the study.

Leadership theory texts, including foundational contributions from Weber, Burns, Bass, Hofstede, and House et al. (2004), are used to situate Iranian leadership within established Western frameworks. These texts enable rigorous comparative analysis, helping identify points of convergence and divergence between indigenous leadership models and global theoretical constructs. Sector-specific reports further enrich the dataset by providing contemporary empirical evidence from critical domains, including the military, nuclear and strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. These reports, which include analyses of organisational structures, leadership practices, and institutional performance, are essential for identifying contemporary hybrid leadership models and validating theoretical mappings against real-world organisational contexts.

The reliance on secondary data is particularly justified given the historical scope of the study and the challenges associated with accessing primary archival materials across multiple centuries. Secondary sources allow for the reconstruction of historical evolution, the interpretation of cultural and institutional contexts, and the systematic analysis of leadership frameworks in situations where primary empirical data may be limited or inaccessible. Collectively, these sources form a robust and multi-layered evidentiary base that supports the study's historical-theoretical approach and facilitates the triangulation of insights across time periods and organisational sectors. Given the historical-theoretical nature of the study, the research relies primarily on secondary data:

4.4. Data Analysis

The study employs a rigorous qualitative approach, combining content analysis with comparative-historical methods to systematically examine leadership practices and organisational structures across Iran's extensive historical timeline. Leadership patterns are first categorised chronologically, tracing developments from the Achaemenid Empire through the Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi dynasties to the post-1979 Islamic Republic. This chronological mapping enables the identification of continuity and rupture in leadership practices, organisational hierarchies, and decision-making norms, highlighting enduring features such as centralisation, power distance, and authority legitimacy. Concurrently, Western leadership theories are applied to each historical period to assess their explanatory power within the Iranian context. Frameworks such as Weber's authority typology, Burns

and Bass's transactional and transformational leadership models, and Hofstede and GLOBE's cultural dimensions are used to evaluate areas of convergence and divergence, revealing where indigenous leadership practices align with or depart from established theoretical constructs.

Contextual analysis further situates leadership within broader sociocultural and institutional environments. This involves examining the influence of national identity, religious ideology, cultural norms, and organisational structures on leadership outcomes, providing a nuanced understanding of how historical, political, and religious factors shape authority and managerial practices. Finally, a comparative synthesis integrates historical and theoretical insights to identify contemporary hybrid leadership models in Iran. This synthesis evaluates the extent to which Western frameworks are transferable, adaptable, or insufficient for explaining leadership in non-Western contexts, thereby illuminating the unique configurations of hybrid authority that combine religious-political legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and elements of transactional and transformational leadership. The analytical framework guiding this process draws on multiple complementary methods.

Historical leadership is examined through chronological mapping of chronicles, historical texts, and archival sources. National identity is analysed via content analysis of historical, political, and cultural literature. Religious influence is interpreted through textual and thematic analysis of Zoroastrian, Shi'a, and broader Islamic texts. Cultural norms are assessed using Hofstede and GLOBE cultural mapping, as well as comparative studies and sector-specific reports. Organisational structures are explored through sectoral case analysis, encompassing the military, nuclear and strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. Leadership outcomes are synthesised comparatively, allowing for the identification of hybrid models and the evaluation of theoretical applicability. Collectively, this integrated approach ensures a robust, multi-dimensional analysis that captures temporal evolution, contextual influences, and sectoral variations, providing a comprehensive understanding of organisational leadership in Iran. The study employs qualitative content analysis and comparative-historical methods (See Table 4.5):

Table 4.5: Analytical Framework

Dimension	Analytical Method	Data Source / Evidence
Historical Leadership	Chronological mapping	Chronicles, historical texts, archives
National Identity	Content analysis	Historical, political, and cultural literature
Religious Influence	Textual interpretation, thematic analysis	Zoroastrian, Shi'a, Islamic texts
Cultural Norms	Cultural mapping using Hofstede/GLOBE	Literature, comparative studies, sector reports
Organisational Structures	Sectoral case analysis	Military, nuclear, bureaucracy, private sector
Leadership Outcomes	Comparative synthesis, hybrid model identification	Literature synthesis, theoretical mapping

4.5. Research Design: Justification

The study adopts a historical-theoretical approach that captures the temporal evolution of leadership in Iran, enabling a nuanced understanding of organisational practices within the country's distinct socio-political and cultural environment.

By tracing leadership patterns across dynastic, monarchical, and revolutionary periods, the approach illuminates how historical legacies, institutional frameworks, and cultural norms have shaped authority, decision-making, and organisational structures over time. An interdisciplinary lens underpins the research, integrating insights from management studies, political science, history, and cultural analysis. This integration is essential for capturing the complex interactions between socio-political dynamics, religious ideologies, cultural values, and organisational behaviour that collectively shape leadership practices in Iran. Comparative analysis serves as a critical dimension of the study, bridging Western leadership theories with indigenous Iranian practices. By systematically mapping frameworks such as Weber's authority typology, Burns and Bass's leadership models, and Hofstede and GLOBE's cultural dimensions onto historical and contemporary Iranian contexts, the study identifies hybrid leadership models that blend traditional, religious, and Western managerial elements. This approach not only highlights areas of convergence and divergence but also provides a structured means of assessing the applicability and adaptation of global leadership theories in a non-Western setting.

Finally, the reliance on secondary data ensures rigorous analysis in contexts where access to primary historical and contemporary records may be limited or restricted. Secondary sources, including chronicles, archival records, academic literature, leadership theory texts, and sector-specific reports, collectively provide a robust evidentiary base that supports triangulation, empirical validation, and the generation of theoretically grounded insights. Together, these design choices provide a comprehensive and methodologically sound framework that balances historical depth, theoretical rigour, and interdisciplinary breadth, enabling a detailed and contextualised understanding of organisational leadership in Iran.

4.6. Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to rigorous ethical standards by relying primarily on publicly available historical and academic sources, ensuring transparency, reproducibility, and accountability in the research process. All sources are meticulously cited and referenced, maintaining academic integrity and properly attributing to the original authors. Furthermore, the study exercises cultural sensitivity and respect in interpreting religious, historical, and political contexts, carefully considering the sociocultural nuances that influence leadership practices in Iran and avoiding misrepresentation or bias. This ethical approach safeguards both the credibility of the research and the integrity of the cultural and historical subjects under investigation.

4.7. Limitations

While the study employs a rigorous historical-theoretical and interdisciplinary approach, several limitations must be acknowledged. Reliance on secondary sources may result in the omission of unpublished, classified, or otherwise inaccessible organisational data, potentially limiting the completeness of the historical and contemporary record. Interpretive bias is an inherent risk when analysing historical and religious texts; however, this is mitigated through systematic cross-referencing across

multiple sources, triangulation of evidence, and careful contextual interpretation. Additionally, the findings of this study are context-specific to Iran, reflecting the country's unique socio-political, religious, and cultural environment. Consequently, caution should be exercised when generalising results to other national contexts. However, the framework and methodological approach can provide valuable comparative insights for examining organisational leadership in non-Western settings.

4.8. Sample Selection

For empirical validation, the study employs purposive expert sampling, targeting individuals with demonstrated expertise in leadership and organisational structures across strategic sectors, including the military, nuclear/strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. A sample of 15–25 experts is recommended, selected based on seniority, sectoral experience, academic contributions, and familiarity with historical and contemporary leadership practices. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, confidentiality, and participant validation of responses, are strictly followed to ensure the credibility and reliability of qualitative data.

4.9. Appendices: Qualitative Questionnaires

The study employs semi-structured interview questionnaires, the full versions of which are provided in the appendices. These instruments are organised around four thematic domains: historical leadership perspectives, contemporary organisational practices, hybrid leadership models, and theoretical reflections on Western frameworks. Each questionnaire incorporates structured prompts alongside open-ended questions to elicit rich, context-specific narratives, and is supported by coding guidelines for thematic analysis. This approach enhances transparency, ensures replicability, and strengthens the study's methodological rigour.

4.10. Summary

This methodology establishes a robust, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary framework for examining organisational leadership in Iran, integrating historical, theoretical, and empirical perspectives. By combining detailed historical analysis, rigorous theoretical mapping, and comparative synthesis, the study captures the evolution of leadership across dynastic, monarchical, and revolutionary periods, revealing patterns of continuity and rupture, as well as structural characteristics such as centralisation and authority legitimacy.

It highlights the influence of national identity, religious ideology, and cultural norms on organisational practices, while systematically mapping Western leadership theories onto the Iranian context to assess their applicability and limitations. Furthermore, the methodology enables the identification and analysis of contemporary hybrid leadership models across strategic sectors—including the military, nuclear and strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises—shedding light on how indigenous, religious, and Western managerial elements converge in practice. Collectively, this approach provides a rigorous and nuanced foundation for understanding both historical and contemporary organisational leadership in Iran, while offering transferable insights for comparative studies in non-Western contexts.

Chapter 5: Historical Evolution of Organisational Leadership in Iran

5.1. Introduction

This chapter traces the evolution of organisational leadership (OL) in Iran from the Achaemenid Empire to the post-1979 Islamic Republic, situating leadership practices within the broader intersections of history, religion, culture, and institutional development. Organisational leadership in Iran cannot be understood merely as a managerial or administrative phenomenon; instead, it is embedded in centuries of shifting political authority, dynastic transformation, and the continuous negotiation between tradition and reform. Each political era—Achaemenid, Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, Pahlavi, and Islamic Republic—contributed distinct institutional logics, authority structures, and legitimising ideologies that continue to shape organisational behaviour in contemporary Iran.

The significance of this historical approach lies in its capacity to illuminate both continuity and rupture in Iranian leadership models. Continuities can be observed in the persistence of high-power distance, centralised authority, and hierarchical obedience across different regimes. At the same time, ruptures are evident in recurring attempts at secular modernisation, religious revival, and the hybridisation of organisational practices. These dynamics resonate strongly with Weber's typology of authority (traditional, charismatic, rational-legal) as well as with Burns' and Bass' models of transactional and transformational leadership. However, the Iranian case demonstrates a unique blending of these authority types and leadership behaviours, mediated by cultural dimensions such as collectivism, patriarchy, and religious legitimacy. By examining organisational leadership across successive historical periods, this chapter contributes to a contextualised understanding of how deeply rooted cultural and institutional patterns interact with global theories of leadership. For instance, the dynastic charisma of Cyrus the Great, the bureaucratic rationality of the Sassanids, the religious-ideological centralisation of the Safavids, and the technocratic governance of the Pahlavi each represent historically specific configurations of leadership that both align with and diverge from Western frameworks. The Islamic Republic, with its fusion of religious legitimacy, revolutionary ideology, and technocratic expertise, embodies the culmination of this evolutionary trajectory, producing hybrid leadership models that are particularly evident in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industries, and state bureaucracy.

The analytical task of this chapter is therefore threefold. First, to map the historical trajectory of organisational leadership in Iran across six major political eras, highlighting how different forms of authority and organisational practice emerged. Second, to examine the role of religion, culture, and identity in legitimising and institutionalising leadership norms within each historical context.

Third, to interpret these developments through the lens of leadership theory, thereby identifying continuities, ruptures, and hybridisations that define Iran's leadership evolution. In doing so, this chapter not only situates Iranian organisational leadership within its historical and cultural milieu but also provides the empirical foundation for the contextual leadership framework proposed in Chapter 3. By bridging historiography with organisational theory, the chapter lays the groundwork for understanding how Iran's leadership models, while distinctively localised, also offer valuable insights for comparative and global leadership studies.

5.2. Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE)

During the Achaemenid Empire, leadership was characterised by a combination of charismatic and traditional authority. The early Persian state actively promoted loyalty across its diverse territories, consolidating national identity while embedding Zoroastrian ethical principles into administrative practices. This hierarchical and centralised bureaucratic system ensured cohesion, resilience, and loyalty, laying the groundwork for future governance structures.

5.2.1. Leadership Characteristics

During the Achaemenid Empire, leadership was characterised by a blend of charismatic and traditional authority, where rulers derived legitimacy from both personal magnetism and dynastic heritage (Weber, 1947). The formation of a unified Persian state actively fostered a sense of national identity, promoting loyalty and cohesion across a vast and culturally diverse territory (Briant, 2002). Zoroastrian ethical principles underpinned both moral and administrative decision-making, guiding rulers and officials in promoting justice, truth, and communal responsibility (Boyce, 2001). Culturally, the society exhibited high power distance, with strict hierarchical structures reinforcing centralised control and the authority of the monarchy. Organisationally, the empire relied on a robust bureaucratic apparatus, including a network of satraps (regional governors) who were directly accountable to the king, ensuring effective governance across provinces. These combined factors produced leadership outcomes characterised by administrative cohesion, enduring loyalty, and organisational resilience, establishing a stable foundation for centralised authority that would influence successive Persian dynasties (See Table 5.2.1)

Table 5.2.1: Achaemenid Leadership Features

Dimension	Characteristics
Authority Type	Charismatic / Traditional
National Identity	Early Persian state consolidation
Religious Influence	Zoroastrian ethics
Cultural Norms	High power distance, loyalty to the central authority
Organisational Structures	Bureaucracy with the satrap system
Outcomes	Administrative cohesion, resilience, loyalty

5.3. Sassanid Empire (224–651 CE)

The Achaemenid Empire represents the earliest and one of the most formative stages in the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran. Emerging under Cyrus the Great and consolidated by successors such as Darius I, the empire established a model of governance that combined charismatic and traditional authority with an unprecedented degree of administrative sophistication. Leadership during this period was legitimised through dynastic power and imperial ideology, reflecting Weber's concept

of charismatic and traditional authority, while simultaneously embedding moral and organisational principles derived from Zoroastrian thought. The consolidation of a unified Persian identity across vast and culturally diverse territories reinforced loyalty to the central state, demonstrating the early interplay between national identity and leadership legitimacy. The Achaemenids pioneered a highly centralised yet resilient bureaucratic system, most notably through the satrapy model in which regional governors (satraps) remained accountable to the King. This structure not only reflected the cultural norm of high-power distance but also institutionalised mechanisms of control and accountability that sustained cohesion across the empire's vast geography. Zoroastrian ethical values—emphasising truth, justice, and loyalty—further reinforced the moral basis of authority, shaping both political legitimacy and organisational practices. The outcomes of this leadership system were significant. The Achaemenids achieved administrative cohesion and remarkable resilience, enabling the empire to govern an unprecedentedly large and multicultural domain while maintaining stability and loyalty among diverse populations.

By embedding authority within dynastic charisma, centralised hierarchy, and religiously informed ethics, the Achaemenid leadership model laid the foundations for subsequent Persian governance traditions, establishing centralised authority as a defining feature of Iranian leadership culture that endured long after the empire's fall.

5.3.1. Leadership Characteristics

The Sassanid Empire, which succeeded the Parthians and ruled from the third to the seventh century CE, represents a crucial stage in the consolidation of Iranian organisational leadership traditions. Leadership during this period combined charismatic-traditional authority with a more systematic form of bureaucratic rationality, creating a dual foundation of legitimacy that reinforced dynastic continuity while ensuring administrative efficiency. The Sassanid monarchs drew heavily on the legacy of earlier Persian empires, presenting themselves as heirs to the Achaemenid tradition and thereby strengthening a sense of enduring national identity.

This continuity was reinforced through the institutionalisation of Zoroastrianism as the state religion, which not only provided a divine sanction for royal authority but also offered a comprehensive ethical framework that shaped governance and administrative practices. Cultural norms under the Sassanids emphasised centralisation and loyalty to hierarchical authority, with leadership structures reflecting the expectation of obedience to the monarch as both a political and spiritual figure. A sophisticated bureaucratic apparatus was established to support taxation, military organisation, and infrastructure maintenance, enabling more systematic governance across a territorially expansive and diverse empire. This bureaucratic rationality was complemented by the moral authority of Zoroastrian principles, which codified ideas of just leadership, duty, and responsibility, embedding them into the structures of statecraft.

The outcomes of this leadership system were marked by strong centralised governance, resilience in the face of both internal and external pressures, and the codification of ethical leadership norms that linked political authority to moral responsibility. The Sassanid leadership model thus represents both a continuation and an evolution of earlier Persian traditions, reinforcing the enduring patterns of centralisation, hierarchical loyalty, and religiously informed legitimacy that have characterised Iranian leadership across centuries.

5.4. Safavid Dynasty (1501–1736 CE)

The Safavid Dynasty marks a pivotal transformation in the historical evolution of leadership in Iran, distinguished by the institutionalisation of Shi'a Islam as the state religion and the creation of a unified Iranian identity under a centralised monarchy.

Emerging at the turn of the sixteenth century, the Safavid rulers consolidated political authority through a fusion of charismatic leadership, dynastic legitimacy, and religious ideology, positioning themselves as both temporal sovereigns and spiritual leaders. This period represents a decisive departure from earlier empires by embedding Shi'a doctrine into the very fabric of governance, thereby reshaping organisational structures, authority, and cultural norms in enduring ways. Safavid leadership practices were characterised by strong centralisation and a hierarchical system in which loyalty to the Shah was both a political and religious obligation. The integration of clerical authority into the governance framework legitimised royal power, while simultaneously establishing a new institutional balance between monarchy and the Shi'a religious establishment. Culturally, the Safavid period reinforced collectivist and hierarchical norms, while organisationally it expanded bureaucratic and military institutions to administer a growing, multi-ethnic empire. The outcomes of this leadership model were profound: the Safavids forged a distinct Iranian national identity anchored in Shi'a Islam, strengthened state centralisation, and institutionalised a model of religious-political legitimacy that has continued to influence leadership traditions in Iran well into the modern era. As such, the Safavid Dynasty stands as a defining moment in the interplay of religion, politics, and culture in shaping organisational leadership.

5.4.1. Leadership Characteristics

Leadership under the Safavid Dynasty was defined by a distinctive fusion of charismatic monarchy and religious legitimacy, creating a model of authority that transformed both the political and cultural landscape of Iran. The Safavid Shahs drew their legitimacy not only from dynastic and charismatic claims but also from their role as champions of Shi'a Islam, which they institutionalised as the official state religion. This decisive move embedded Shi'a ideology into the foundation of governance, reinforcing the Shah's authority as both a temporal ruler and a spiritual leader. In doing so, the Safavids forged a unique national identity that permanently linked Persian statehood with Shi'a doctrine, shaping the political and cultural trajectory of Iran for centuries to come.

Cultural norms under the Safavids reflected high power distance and strong hierarchical loyalty, with allegiance to the Shah framed as both a political duty and a religious obligation. Organisationally, the dynasty expanded and centralised both the military and the bureaucracy, ensuring administrative cohesion and reinforcing the Shah's dominance over a diverse empire. At the same time, the incorporation of clerical oversight into governance enhanced the regime's legitimacy, creating a dual system in which political authority was continuously validated by religious sanction. The outcomes of this leadership model were significant and enduring.

By grounding political authority in Shi'a Islam, the Safavids not only secured legitimacy and stability through hierarchical centralisation but also institutionalised a religious-political model of leadership that has continued to influence Iranian governance to the present day. This legacy established enduring patterns of authority in which religion, politics, and culture remained inseparably intertwined (See Table 5.4.1).

Table 5.4.1: Safavid Leadership Features

Dimension	Characteristics
Authority Type	Charismatic / Religious
National Identity	Persian Shi'a identity consolidation
Religious Influence	Shi'a ideology integrated with political power
Cultural Norms	High loyalty, hierarchical obedience
Organisational Structures	Centralised bureaucracy, clerical oversight
Outcomes	Religious-political legitimacy, governance stability

5.5. Qajar Dynasty (1789–1925)

The Qajar Dynasty represents a transitional yet deeply contested phase in the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran, situated between the Safavid model of religious-political centralisation and the modernising ambitions of the Pahlavi state. Rising to power in the aftermath of the chaotic post-Safavid period, the Qajars sought to consolidate authority through dynastic legitimacy, tribal alliances, and continuity of hierarchical governance. However, their leadership was continually challenged by internal fragmentation, foreign intervention, and economic dependency, all of which exposed the structural weaknesses of their centralised but fragile system.

Leadership during the Qajar era was marked by a reliance on traditional and charismatic authority rather than rational-bureaucratic institutionalisation, with rulers emphasising dynastic lineage and patrimonial loyalty to sustain their power. While Shi'a Islam remained an important source of legitimacy, the Qajar Shahs were often less successful than their Safavid predecessors in integrating religious authority into governance, leading to periodic tensions between the monarchy and the ulama (religious scholars). Cultural norms of high-power distance and hierarchical loyalty persisted but were increasingly undermined by corruption, nepotism, and inefficiencies within administrative structures. Organisationally, the dynasty maintained a centralised bureaucracy and military, but these institutions lacked the professionalisation and resilience required to withstand both domestic reformist pressures and external imperial encroachments. The outcomes of this leadership model were thus characterised by instability and vulnerability: while the Qajars preserved continuity in dynastic authority and hierarchical governance, they also oversaw a period of political decline, culminating in the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911), which challenged autocratic leadership and introduced early debates on modern forms of political legitimacy and institutional reform. In this respect, the Qajar period stands as a critical juncture in Iranian leadership history, representing both the persistence of traditional authority and the emergence of reformist discourses that paved the way for modernisation under the Pahlavi.

5.5.1. Leadership Characteristics

Leadership under the Qajar Dynasty was primarily anchored in traditional authority, sustained by dynastic lineage and patrimonial loyalty, yet increasingly supplemented by fragile bureaucratic structures that lacked the institutional strength of earlier Persian empires. The Qajar monarchs projected

continuity of Persian identity through dynastic rule. However, this national identity was continually undermined by internal weakness, corruption, and heavy foreign interference, particularly from British and Russian imperial powers (Ansari, 2012). Unlike the Safavid model, where religious authority was deeply integrated into governance, the Qajars maintained a more limited clerical influence, as the monarchy sought to centralise control while simultaneously accommodating the growing influence of secular and reformist discourses.

Culturally, leadership practices remained marked by high power distance and expectations of loyalty to the Shah. However, the legitimacy of this model eroded over time as socio-economic crises, foreign concessions, and inefficiencies weakened public confidence in dynastic rule. Organisationally, the Qajar state was characterised by weak bureaucratic institutions and patrimonial governance, in which personal loyalty and familial networks often outweighed meritocratic or institutionalised systems of authority. This hindered the dynasty's ability to modernise effectively or resist external pressures.

The outcomes of this leadership model were thus mixed. While the Qajars preserved hierarchical governance and the traditional Persian monarchical structure, they achieved only limited modernisation, and their reliance on patrimonial authority exposed the dynasty to both internal reformist challenges and external domination. Ultimately, the leadership characteristics of the Qajar period illustrate the tensions between continuity and decline, reflecting the persistence of hierarchical structures without the institutional strength to adapt to modernising pressures (See Table 5.5.1)

Table 5.5.1: Qajar Leadership Features

Dimension	Characteristics
Authority Type	Traditional and weakly bureaucratic
National Identity	Continued dynastic legitimacy; weakened by corruption and foreign intervention (Ansari, 2012)
Religious Influence	Reduced clerical integration compared to the Safavids; rising secular and reformist influence
Cultural Norms	High power distance; loyalty central but increasingly contested
Organisational Structures	Weak bureaucracy; patrimonial governance dominated by familial and tribal networks
Outcomes	Limited modernisation; preservation of hierarchy without institutional resilience

5.6. Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–1979)

The Pahlavi Dynasty marked a transformative period in Iranian leadership, characterised by a decisive shift from traditional patrimonial authority toward a more centralized, secular, and technocratic model. Reza Shah and later Mohammad Reza Shah pursued ambitious modernisation and state-building projects, embedding Western-inspired rational-legal principles into governance while maintaining strong hierarchical control. National identity was reconstructed around secular nationalism, with

a focus on industrialisation, centralised administration, and state-driven economic development. Religious influence was deliberately curtailed compared to the Safavid era, as the monarchy sought to establish the primacy of secular authority and technocratic expertise. Cultural norms continued to reflect high power distance and strong hierarchical obedience, but were now reinforced through formalised education, military institutions, and state bureaucracy. Organisational structures became more institutionalised, with ministries, civil services, and modernised military forces implementing centralised decision-making and operational efficiency. Leadership outcomes during this period included strengthened state capacity, administrative consolidation, and significant strides toward socio-economic modernisation. However, the top-down approach, combined with limited political inclusivity, fostered tensions that would later contribute to the 1979 revolutionary upheaval. This period exemplifies the integration of rational-legal authority with centralised leadership, illustrating both the potential and limitations of adopting Western-inspired governance frameworks within the Iranian sociocultural context.

5.6.1. Leadership Characteristics

During the Pahlavi Dynasty, leadership was primarily defined by rational-legal authority, reinforced with authoritarian traits to maintain centralised control over the rapidly modernising state. National identity was actively reconstructed around secular nationalism, emphasising industrialisation, economic development, and the consolidation of centralised governance (Katouzian, 2009). Religious influence was deliberately diminished as secularisation policies curtailed the political role of the clergy, replacing traditional legitimising mechanisms with technocratic and bureaucratic rationality. Cultural norms continued to reflect high power distance but were now complemented by a meritocratic orientation within the civil service and state institutions. Organisational structures underwent significant reform, with Western-inspired bureaucracies, professionalised military forces, and technocratic management systems implementing standardised administrative procedures and centralised decision-making. Leadership outcomes included accelerated modernisation, improved bureaucratic efficiency, and the introduction of Westernised leadership practices; however, limited grassroots participation and authoritarian centralisation created a top-down governance style that alienated segments of society (See Table 5.6.1)

Table 5.6.1: Pahlavi Leadership Features

Dimension	Characteristics
Authority Type	Rational-Legal / Authoritarian
National Identity	Secular nationalism
Religious Influence	Limited
Cultural Norms	Hierarchical, meritocratic bureaucracy
Organisational Structures	Modernised military, technocratic bureaucracy
Outcomes	Modernisation, bureaucratic efficiency, centralised control

5.7. Post-1979 Islamic Republic

The post-1979 Islamic Republic of Iran represents a profound transformation in organisational leadership, blending religious legitimacy with state authority and technocratic governance. Leadership in this period is characterised by a hybrid model that integrates clerical oversight, revolutionary ideology, and managerial expertise, reflecting the complex socio-political landscape of the Islamic Republic. National identity is closely intertwined with Shi'a Islamic principles, which provide both ideological guidance and political legitimacy, while cultural norms continue to emphasise hierarchical authority, loyalty, and collectivism. Organisational structures combine centralized bureaucracy with sector-specific technocratic management, particularly in strategic domains such as the military, nuclear industries, and state enterprises. Leadership outcomes are shaped by this synthesis, producing resilient institutions capable of navigating internal and external pressures, maintaining ideological cohesion, and fostering sectoral innovation within a framework of religious-political legitimacy.

5.7.1. Leadership Characteristics

The leadership characteristics of the post-1979 Islamic Republic reflect a uniquely hybrid model that combines religious, political, and managerial authority to govern a complex socio-political landscape. Authority is legitimised through Shi'a Islamic principles, deeply embedded in both state institutions and organisational hierarchies, while revolutionary ideology reinforces cohesion and national identity. Cultural norms such as high-power distance, collectivism, and loyalty to both the state and religion shape leadership behaviours and decision-making processes.

Organisational structures include the military—particularly the Revolutionary Guard—nuclear and strategic industries, the state bureaucracy, and an evolving private sector, each operating under varying blends of hierarchical control and technocratic expertise. The outcomes of this hybrid system are multifaceted, producing leadership models that integrate transactional and transformational traits, promote institutional resilience, foster strategic innovation, and develop national capabilities across critical sectors, illustrating the synthesis of historical Persian traditions with contemporary Islamic-revolutionary governance (See Figure 5.7.1).

Table 5.7.1: Post-Revolution Leadership Features

Sector	Leadership Style	Authority Basis	Outcomes
Military (IRGC)	Authoritarian / Transactional	Religious + National Loyalty	Strategic resilience, centralised control
Nuclear / Strategic Industries	Hybrid / Transformational	Technocratic + Religious	Innovation, national capability
Bureaucracy / Public Sector	Transactional / Paternalistic	Rational-Legal + Religious	Centralised efficiency, loyalty
Private Sector / Start-ups	Transformational / Participative	Meritocratic + Cultural Values	Innovation, partial modernisation

5.8. Summary of Historical Evolution

Across Iran's historical trajectory, certain continuities in organisational leadership are striking. Centralised authority, high power distance, loyalty to leadership, and hierarchical structures remained enduring features from the Achaemenid Empire through to the post-1979 Islamic Republic, reflecting deeply embedded cultural and institutional norms. However, distinct ruptures also emerged, most notably the secularisation and Western-inspired modernisation initiatives of the Pahlavi dynasty, and the post-1979 integration of religious legitimacy with technocratic and managerial practices, producing a uniquely hybrid leadership system. Contemporary Iranian leadership exemplifies this hybridity, combining religious authority, political power, technocratic expertise, and selective adoption of Western management principles, especially within strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industries. These patterns carry significant implications for organisational leadership theory, highlighting the limitations of purely Western frameworks and underscoring the necessity of contextual adaptation. Practical analysis and application of leadership models in Iran—and comparable non-Western settings—requires an appreciation of how historical legacies, religious ideologies, and cultural norms dynamically interact to shape hybrid and sector-specific leadership practices.

Chapter 6: Theoretical Analysis and Integration

6.1. Introduction

This chapter situates the historical evolution of Iranian organisational leadership (Chapter 5) within Western leadership theories and develops an integrated contextual framework. The analysis aims to explain how leadership practices in Iran reflect a hybrid of traditional, religious, and modern managerial logics, highlighting convergence and divergence from classical leadership models.

6.2. Western Leadership Theories in the Iranian Context

6.2.1. Weberian Authority

Weber (1947) distinguished traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal authority. Applying this framework to Iran: Achaemenid and Sassanid periods: Leadership primarily traditional and charismatic, legitimised through dynastic authority and Zoroastrian ethics (Briant, 2002; Boyce, 2001). Safavid era: Charismatic authority combined with religious legitimacy, reflecting Shi'a ideology (Newman, 2006). Pahlavi period: Rational-legal authority dominated with bureaucratic modernisation and technocratic governance (Katouzian, 2009). Post-1979 Islamic Republic: Authority is hybrid, combining rational-legal, religious, and charismatic elements (Alvandi, 2020).

Table 6.1: Weberian Authority Across Iranian History

Period	Authority Type	Characteristics
Achaemenid (550–330 BCE)	Charismatic / Traditional	Dynastic legitimacy, centralised bureaucracy
Sassanid (224–651 CE)	Charismatic / Traditional	Zoroastrian ethics, hierarchical loyalty
Safavid (1501–1736 CE)	Charismatic / Religious	Shi'a religious legitimacy, political control
Pahlavi (1925–1979)	Rational-Legal / Authoritarian	Western-inspired bureaucracy, technocracy
Post-1979 Islamic Republic	Hybrid	Religious, political, and managerial integration

6.2.2. Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Transactional leadership: Evident in military, bureaucratic, and state-owned sectors, emphasising hierarchy, rules, and rewards/punishments (Bass, 1990). Transformational leadership: Found in revolutionary leadership, private sectors, and strategic industries, emphasising vision, motivation, and adaptability (Burns, 1978).

Figure 6.2.2: Sectoral Leadership Styles in Iran

Sector	Transactional (%)	Transformational (%)
Military	70	30
Nuclear / Strategic Industries	60	40
Bureaucracy	80	20
Private Sector / Start-ups	40	60

Analysis: The Iranian context blends transactional and transformational leadership, forming hybrid models that adapt to sectoral and cultural requirements.

6.2.3. Cultural Dimensions: Hofstede and GLOBE

Iranian leadership is shaped by national culture, impacting decision-making, hierarchy, and organisational behaviour (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004). High power distance: Centralised decision-making and hierarchical authority. Collectivism: Loyalty to institutions and leaders; group cohesion over individualism. Low gender egalitarianism: Male-dominated leadership structures; gradual expansion of female participation. Moderate uncertainty avoidance: Balances risk management with innovation, especially in nuclear and military sectors.

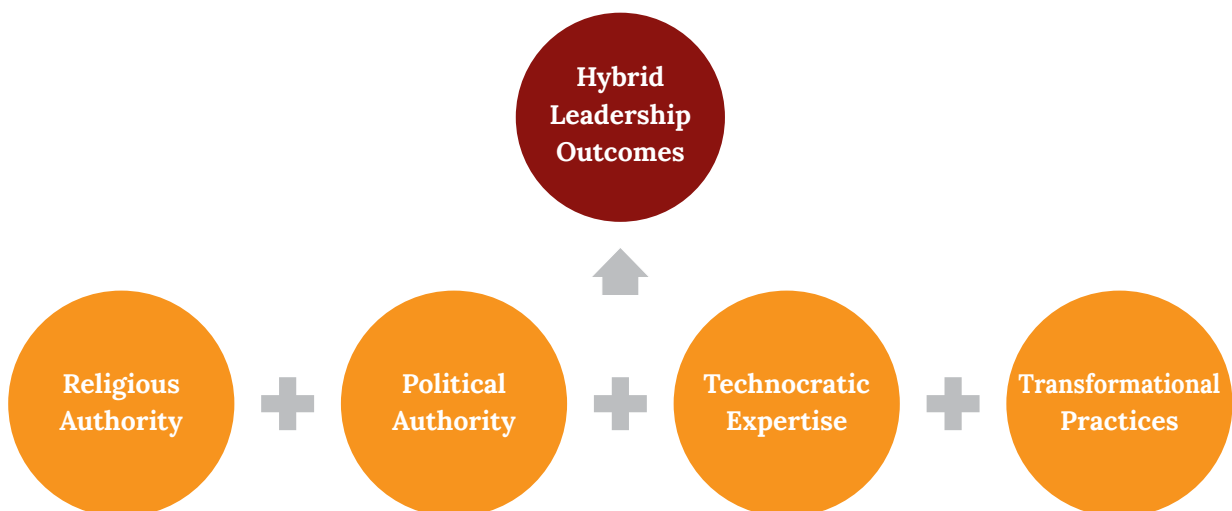
Table 6.2: Cultural Dimensions and Leadership Implications

Dimension	Level	Implications for Leadership
Power Distance	High	Centralised authority; strong hierarchy
Collectivism	High	Loyalty, cohesion, group-oriented decisions
Gender Egalitarianism	Low	Male-dominated leadership
Uncertainty Avoidance	Medium	Balance between planning and adaptability
Performance Orientation	High	Achievement-driven, especially in technical sectors

6.3. Hybrid Leadership Models in Iran

In the post-1979 Islamic Republic, Iranian organisational leadership exemplifies a hybrid model that integrates multiple sources of authority and expertise. Religious authority, particularly the oversight of Shi'a clerics, remains deeply embedded in strategic sectors and high-level decision-making, providing moral legitimacy and ethical guidance for organisational conduct (Alvandi, 2020). Political authority is reinforced through revolutionary legitimacy, ensuring that national security imperatives and state priorities are closely aligned with leadership practices. At the same time, technocratic and managerial expertise plays a critical role, especially in the military, nuclear, and industrial sectors, where technical knowledge and strategic planning are essential for organisational effectiveness. Complementing these elements, transformational leadership practices are increasingly observed in the private sector and innovative industries, fostering creativity, participatory engagement, and strategic change. Together, these dimensions form a complex, context-specific leadership paradigm that blends religious, political, and managerial authority while balancing hierarchical control with adaptive, innovation-driven practices.

Figure 6.2: Hybrid Leadership Model Framework



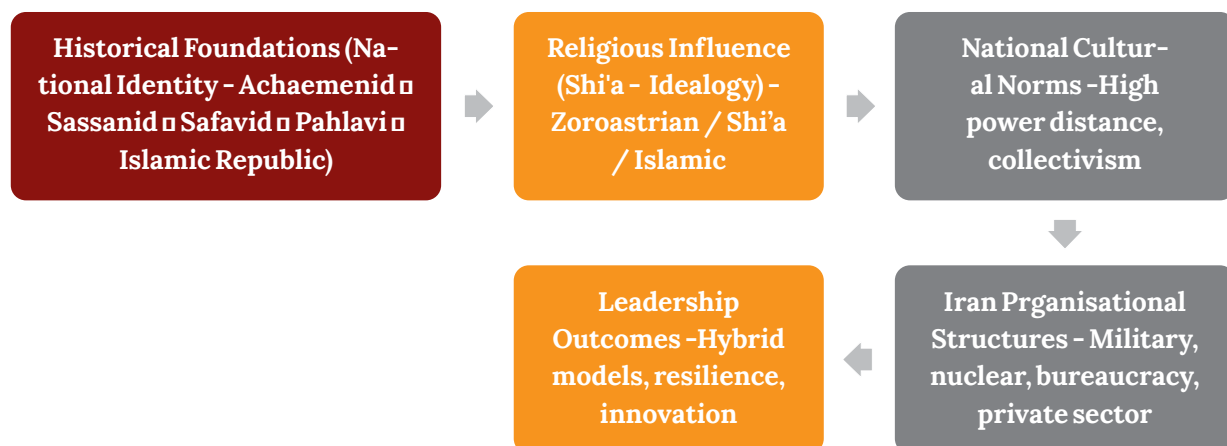
Leadership Outcomes:

Iranian organisational leadership has consistently demonstrated resilience, particularly under the pressures of international sanctions and complex geopolitical challenges. This resilience is coupled with strategic innovation, especially within high-tech and military sectors, where leaders integrate advanced technologies and adaptive strategies to maintain competitive and defensive capabilities. Leadership practices also prioritise national capability development, exemplified by Iran's nuclear and defence programs, which reflect a long-term commitment to self-reliance and strategic autonomy. Simultaneously, there is a selective integration of global leadership norms, such as meritocratic management, participatory decision-making, and transformational approaches, which are adapted to align with local institutional logics, cultural expectations, and the broader political-religious framework. Together, these outcomes illustrate the uniquely hybrid and context-sensitive nature of Iranian leadership, combining historical legacies, cultural norms, and contemporary strategic imperatives.

6.4. Contextual Framework Integration

The contextual framework links historical evolution, cultural norms, and organisational structures to leadership outcomes (Sections 3–5):

Figure 6.3: Contextual Framework for Iranian Leadership



Analysis:

The study of Iranian organisational leadership reveals that Western-centric theories alone are insufficient to capture its complexity.

Leadership practices are deeply embedded in historical, religious, and cultural contexts, producing hybrid models that blend authoritarian authority, religious legitimacy, and modern managerial logic. These hybrid forms are particularly evident in strategic sectors, where considerations of national security, technological innovation, and organisational resilience converge. By combining these diverse influences, Iranian leaders navigate both domestic institutional expectations and external pressures, creating a context-specific leadership paradigm that challenges conventional Western frameworks while demonstrating adaptive effectiveness in high-stakes environments.

6.5. Emerging Leadership Paradigms

In Iran, resilience-oriented leadership has been a defining feature in critical sectors such as the military and nuclear industries, enabling organisations to withstand external pressures, sanctions, and geopolitical challenges. Leadership in STEM and scientific domains combines advanced technical expertise with managerial authority, ensuring both innovation and operational control in highly specialised environments. Experimental approaches, such as principles applied in quantum and plasma research, demonstrate a unique integration of decentralisation, collaborative problem-solving, and innovation, reflecting adaptive leadership practices tailored to high-tech sectors. These developments underscore the broader implication that non-Western contexts like Iran challenge the assumed universality of Western leadership models. Instead, they generate context-specific, hybrid paradigms that blend indigenous cultural norms, historical legacies, religious authority, and sectoral expertise, offering valuable insights for comparative and global leadership studies.

6.6. Summary

Iranian organisational leadership is historically rooted, culturally embedded, and religiously influenced. Leadership evolution demonstrates a trajectory from traditional and religious authority to hybrid models integrating technocratic, transformational, and transactional practices. Western leadership theories provide useful analytical tools but must be adapted to account for the interplay of history, religion, culture, and organisational structures. The developed contextual framework links historical evolution to contemporary hybrid leadership outcomes, offering insights for theory, practice, and policy in Iran and comparable non-Western contexts.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Implications

7.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings from the historical-theoretical analysis of Iranian organisational leadership and interprets their significance. It highlights how national identity, religion, cultural norms, and organisational structures have produced hybrid leadership models and explores their implications for leadership theory, organisational practice, and national strategic development.

7.2 Continuities and Ruptures in Iranian Leadership

7.2.1. Continuities

Across Iran's historical and contemporary leadership landscape, several enduring patterns emerge. Centralised authority has persisted throughout dynasties and regimes, reflecting deeply ingrained hierarchical structures, high power distance, and cultural norms of loyalty (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004). Religious legitimacy has consistently influenced leadership, even during secular periods such as the Pahlavi era, where religious identity continued to shape societal expectations and cultural perceptions of authority (Katouzian, 2009). Resilience and strategic innovation have been hallmarks of Iranian leadership from the Achaemenid administrative system to the post-1979 military and nuclear sectors, demonstrating an enduring capacity to develop adaptive strategies for organisational survival, national security, and capability enhancement (Cordesman, 2009).

7.2.2. Ruptures

During the Pahlavi era, secularisation reshaped Iranian leadership by diminishing clerical influence and introducing modern bureaucratic and technocratic practices inspired by Western models. In contrast, the post-1979 period witnessed a hybridisation of leadership, integrating religious authority, revolutionary legitimacy, and technocratic expertise into complex organisational models that diverge from purely Western frameworks. These patterns illustrate that Iranian leadership is highly contextually adaptive, blending historical traditions, cultural norms, and religious legacies with contemporary organisational imperatives.

7.3. Hybrid Leadership Models

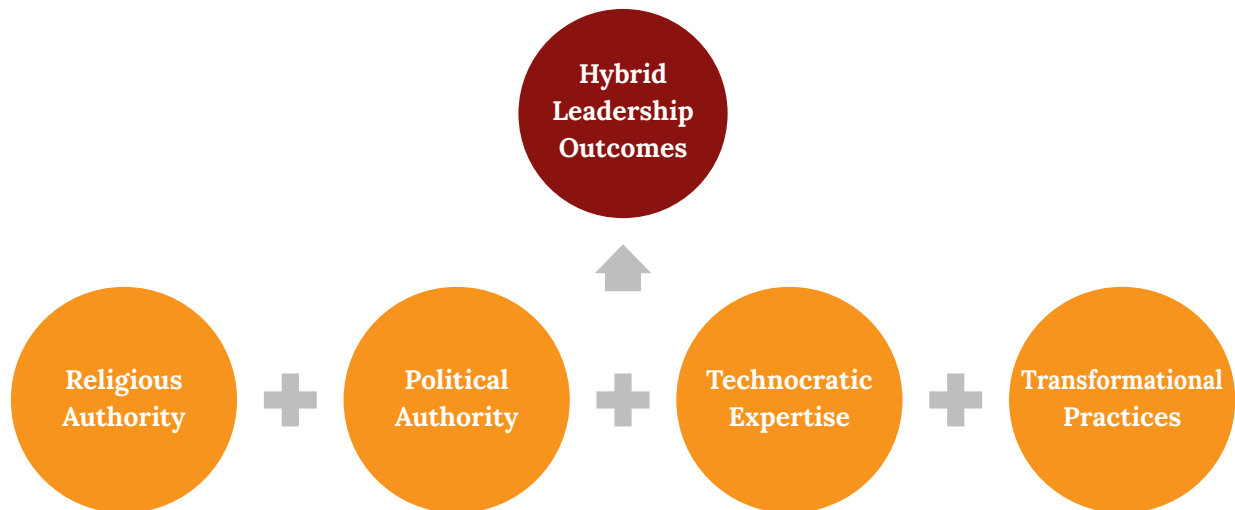
Hybrid leadership models in Iran represent the synthesis of multiple sources of authority and managerial approaches, reflecting the country's unique historical, cultural, and socio-political context. These models integrate religious legitimacy, political authority, and technocratic expertise, while incorporating elements of both transactional and transformational leadership.

In strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear and high-tech industries, and state bureaucracy, leaders balance hierarchical control and loyalty with innovation, expertise, and adaptive decision-making. Hybrid leadership manifests in several distinctive ways. Religious authority, rooted in Shi'a ideology, provides moral legitimacy and social cohesion, particularly in post-1979 institutions. Political authority, derived from revolutionary and state structures, ensures centralised decision-making and coordination across organisations. Technocratic expertise allows leaders to navigate complex technical environments, especially in scientific and strategic domains, blending managerial rationality with sector-specific knowledge. This hybridisation challenges conventional Western leadership frameworks, demonstrating that effective organisational leadership in non-Western contexts requires flexibility, contextual awareness, and the ability to integrate seemingly divergent leadership logics. Consequently, Iranian hybrid models exemplify how history, religion, culture, and organisational demands converge to produce leadership practices that are simultaneously locally grounded and globally relevant.

7.3.1. Defining the Hybrid Model

The Iranian hybrid leadership model represents a multi-layered integration of authority and managerial approaches. It combines religious authority, with Shi'a clerical influence providing ethical guidance and legitimising organisational decisions; political authority, rooted in revolutionary legitimacy and centralised state control, ensuring hierarchical coherence and policy alignment; and technocratic expertise, where leaders employ managerial and technical skills to navigate complex strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear, and high-tech industries. Additionally, transformational practices—particularly in the private sector and entrepreneurial environments—encourage participation, innovation, and adaptive problem-solving. Together, these elements create a context-specific leadership paradigm that blends traditional, religious, and Western-inspired managerial logics, producing resilience, strategic capability, and organisational adaptability unique to Iran.

Figure 7.1: Iranian Hybrid Leadership Model



7.3.2. Sectoral Applications

In Iran, hybrid leadership manifests differently across organisational sectors, reflecting the interaction of authority, culture, and functional requirements. In the military and Revolutionary Guard (IRGC), leadership is primarily authoritarian and transactional, emphasising hierarchical control while integrating resilience-focused innovation to adapt to sanctions and external pressures (Cordesman, 2009). Nuclear and strategic industries exhibit a hybrid and transformational style, combining technical and managerial expertise with national security imperatives to ensure both operational effectiveness and strategic alignment (Kassiri, 2016). Bureaucratic institutions operate under paternalistic, hierarchical, and rule-driven leadership, blending rational-legal authority with religious and ethical oversight to maintain institutional cohesion (Katouzian, 2009). The private sector demonstrates a growing adoption of participative and transformational leadership, integrating global management practices while remaining sensitive to local cultural norms and collectivist expectations, fostering innovation and adaptability in emerging entrepreneurial contexts (Ramin, 2011).

7.4. Implications for Leadership Theory

1. Challenging Western-Centric Models:

These observations indicate that traditional Western leadership frameworks—Weberian authority, transactional, and transformational models—require contextual adaptation to capture the dynamics of Iranian leadership fully. Indigenous hybrid models, which integrate religious legitimacy, political authority, technocratic expertise, and culturally embedded norms, exemplify non-Western pathways to achieving both leadership legitimacy and organisational effectiveness, highlighting the importance of socio-historical and cultural specificity in leadership theory.

2. Integration of Culture and Religion:

Cultural norms and religious ideologies are central to leadership practice, suggesting that leadership theories must incorporate sociocultural and historical dimensions.

3. Emergence of Sector-Specific Leadership Paradigms:

Strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industry require resilience, innovation, and hybrid authority models. Lessons from these sectors can inform leadership development in other non-Western, high-stakes contexts.

7.5. Implications for Organisational Practice in Iran

1. Leadership Development:

Hybrid models highlight the need for training programs that integrate technical, ethical, and political competencies.

2. Strategic Sectors:

Military and nuclear organisations demonstrate adaptive leadership in high-uncertainty environments, which can inform public policy and crisis management.

3. Private Sector Innovation:

Firms must balance transformational leadership and cultural loyalty norms to enhance productivity and innovation.

4. Gender and Leadership:

The gradual inclusion of women in managerial roles requires cultural sensitivity alongside organisational reform (Shakib, 2015).

7.6. Policy and National Development Implications

1. National Capability Building:

Hybrid leadership models facilitate resilience and innovation in defence, nuclear, and technological sectors, reinforcing national strategic autonomy.

2. Global Integration:

Leadership practices that combine Western management principles with indigenous norms allow Iran to participate in global innovation systems without abandoning local identity.

3. Institutional Reform:

Policymakers can leverage insights from historical and contemporary leadership patterns to strengthen bureaucracy, innovation capacity, and organisational culture.

7.7. Contributions to Knowledge

This study advances the understanding of Iranian organisational leadership by developing a comprehensive contextual framework that links national identity, religious ideology, cultural norms, organisational structures, and leadership outcomes. It demonstrates that Iranian leadership models are inherently hybrid, adaptive, and sector-specific, challenging the universality of Western-centric theories. The analysis highlights the importance of historical continuity and rupture, showing how past dynastic, religious, and revolutionary legacies shape contemporary leadership practices in non-Western contexts. Finally, the study offers practical insights and policy recommendations, particularly relevant to strategic sectors, innovation-driven industries, and broader leadership development initiatives. It illustrates how contextualised leadership frameworks can guide effective organisational practice.

7.8. Summary

Iranian organisational leadership reflects a dynamic, multi-layered interplay of historical legacies, religious authority, cultural norms, and organisational structures that together shape distinctive patterns of governance and managerial practice. Across dynasties and political regimes, leadership has been simultaneously adaptive and resilient, balancing centralised authority with sector-specific innovation, and blending traditional, religious, and Western-inspired elements into hybrid forms. These hybrid leadership models exemplify the contextual adaptation of Western theories—such as Weberian authority, transactional, and transformational frameworks—while also exposing the limitations of applying purely Western models to non-Western contexts.

They demonstrate how leadership effectiveness in Iran is contingent upon the integration of local cultural expectations, religious legitimacy, historical continuity, and contemporary organisational needs. Insights from the Iranian experience provide valuable lessons for leadership theory by highlighting the importance of context, for organisational practice by illustrating ways to reconcile hierarchical structures with innovation, and for policy by informing approaches to governance, strategic industries, and national capability development. This chapter, therefore, serves as a bridge between the historical-theoretical analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6 and the practical implications for modern organisations, sectors, and national development, offering a nuanced understanding of how leadership in complex, high-stakes environments can be both culturally embedded and strategically adaptive.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1. Introduction

This chapter summarises the study's key findings, highlights its theoretical and practical contributions, discusses its limitations, and proposes recommendations for organisational leadership practice and future research. Building on the historical-theoretical analysis (Chapters 5–6) and the discussion of hybrid leadership models (Chapter 7), this chapter emphasises the significance of contextualised leadership frameworks in Iran.

8.2. Summary of Key Findings

1. Historical Evolution of Leadership

Leadership in Iran evolved from dynastic and religious authority in the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods to religiously legitimised political authority under the Safavids, followed by secular-modern bureaucratic structures under the Pahlavi. Post-1979, organisational leadership became hybrid, integrating religious, political, and technocratic authority with selective transformational practices.

2. Role of National Identity and Religion

National identity consistently reinforced leadership legitimacy, whether through dynastic continuity, revolutionary ideology, or Islamic principles. Religious influence evolved from Zoroastrian ethics to Shi'a ideology and post-1979 Islamic governance, directly shaping organisational structures and sectoral leadership outcomes.

3. Cultural Norms and Organisational Structures

High power distance, collectivism, and loyalty have persisted across historical periods. Organisational structures vary by sector: hierarchical in the military and bureaucracy, hybrid in the nuclear and

strategic industries, and increasingly transformational in the private sector.

4. Hybrid Leadership Models

Contemporary Iranian leadership reflects a blend of transactional, transformational, religious, political, and technocratic authority, particularly in strategic sectors. Sector-specific hybridisation enables resilience, innovation, and national capability development, especially in high-stakes industries.

5. Applicability of Western Leadership Theories

Western frameworks (Weber, Burns, Bass, Hofstede, GLOBE) are partially applicable but must be contextually adapted. The Iranian case highlights the limitations of purely Western-centric models in non-Western, culturally and historically complex environments.

8.3. Theoretical Contributions

1. Contextual Framework Development

This study developed a comprehensive contextual framework linking historical foundations, national identity, religious influence, cultural norms, organisational structures, and leadership outcomes. Provides a roadmap for analysing leadership in non-Western contexts.

2. Hybrid Leadership Model Conceptualisation

Identified sector-specific hybrid leadership models combining religious, political, and managerial logics. Expands leadership theory by integrating historical, cultural, and religious dimensions, offering a non-Western perspective.

3. Bridging Historical and Contemporary Analysis

Demonstrates the continuity and rupture of leadership practices across dynasties and regimes. Offers empirical grounding for comparative leadership studies in historical and contemporary contexts.

8.4. Practical Implications

1. Organisational Leadership Development

Training programmes should integrate technical expertise, ethical/religious awareness, and political and cultural competence. Leadership curricula in universities and institutions can benefit from the hybrid framework.

2. Strategic Sector Management

Military, nuclear, and strategic industries should emphasise resilience, adaptability, and innovation, informed by hybrid leadership principles.

3. Private Sector and Innovation

Encourage transformational leadership practices while respecting cultural and loyalty norms. Gradual inclusion of women and youth in leadership can enhance organisational dynamism.

4. Policy Development

Policymakers can leverage historical insights to strengthen bureaucratic efficiency, innovation capacity, and national capability development.

8.5. Limitations

1. Secondary Data Reliance:

Some organisational and strategic sector information is inaccessible, limiting the depth of empirical evidence.

2. Interpretive Bias:

Historical and religious texts may be subject to interpretive variation, which is mitigated by triangulating multiple sources.

3. Context-Specific Findings:

Hybrid leadership models are highly context-dependent; generalisation to other non-Western countries should be cautious.

8.6. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Empirical Validation of Hybrid Models

Conduct primary field studies in Iranian organisations to validate the proposed hybrid leadership framework.

2. Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies

Compare Iran with other Middle Eastern or Asian countries to explore both convergence and divergence in non-Western leadership.

3. Sector-Specific Analysis

In-depth studies of military, nuclear, or technology sectors to understand the application of hybrid leadership in high-stakes environments.

4. Gender and Leadership Research

Examine female leadership pathways in Iran's evolving organisational landscape.

5. Integration of Emerging Leadership Paradigms

Explore the applicability of resilience, quantum, and STEM leadership models in Iranian organisations.

8.7. Conclusion

Iranian organisational leadership is a dynamic, historically grounded, and culturally embedded phenomenon that has evolved over millennia, shaped by successive dynasties, revolutionary transformations, and socio-political shifts. Across periods—from the Achaemenid and Sassanid empires to the Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi dynasties, and into the post-1979 Islamic Republic—leadership has reflected an intricate balance of centralised authority, cultural norms, religious legitimacy, and organisational structures. Contemporary hybrid models, which integrate religious, political, and managerial authority, have emerged as adaptive strategies enabling resilience, innovation, and the development of national capabilities, particularly in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industries, and high-tech enterprises. While Western leadership theories—such as Weber's authority typologies, Burns and Bass's transactional and transformational frameworks, and Hofstede and GLOBE's cultural dimensions—provide valuable analytical tools, their applicability is limited without contextual adaptation to Iran's unique historical, cultural, and religious environment. This study contributes to leadership theory by highlighting the importance of hybridisation and contextual sensitivity; to Iranian organisational studies by mapping historical trajectories onto contemporary practices; and to policy development by offering insights for governance, strategic management, and sectoral leadership in high-stakes, culturally complex environments. By synthesising historical, theoretical, and empirical perspectives, it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding leadership in non-Western contexts, illustrating how indigenous approaches can coexist with, adapt to, and even challenge conventional Western paradigms.

Final Statement:

Iran exemplifies how historical, cultural, and religious contexts shape organisational leadership, offering lessons for leadership theory, organisational practice, and strategic national development in the 21st century.

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