

Examining the mystery of the ship of Theseus from the perspective of ethical management

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Abstract:

The Ship of Theseus Riddle is a philosophical thought experiment that explores the concept of identity over time. Inspired by the story of the ship of Theseus, a Greek mythological hero, this riddle asks whether an object whose parts are gradually replaced by new ones remains the same as the original object. This question challenges fundamental concepts such as identity, change, continuity, and the relationship between part and whole, and has been answered by a variety of philosophical, religious, scientific, and managerial perspectives. In the field of management, this riddle helps managers better understand and manage the concept of change in organizations. In the field of religion, especially in Islam, the answer to this riddle depends on our definition of “identity”; if identity is considered purely material, then identity also changes as the parts change, but if identity is considered a concept beyond matter, which is also the Islamic view, then despite the change in the parts, identity remains constant.

Keywords: Management philosophy, Theseus' ship, change management, Islamic organization

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1 Introduction

When a philosophical theorem or principle is presented, it is not presented solely for a specific field, but thinkers from different fields of science try to exploit it. Sometimes we do not even know the original source and origin of this concept, who it was from and what book it was, but we use that philosophical view in various branches and scientific subjects.

The philosophical principle of the donkey is a good example of this. The principle of the donkey, also known as the "triangle inequality", is a fundamental theorem in Euclidean geometry that states the relationship between the lengths of the sides of a triangle. In simple terms, this principle says: the sum of the lengths of two sides of any triangle is always greater than the length of the third side. In other words, the shortest path between two points is a straight line. This naming is because it is assumed that if a donkey (donkey) is at one vertex of the triangle and food is at the other vertex, the donkey will choose the shortest path to reach the food. It is not possible to point out who exactly first stated the "donkey principle" in its current form. This principle has its roots in very early and intuitive observations (of the ancient Greeks) about geometry and has been gradually formulated and proven by various mathematicians throughout history. Apart from this, we see the use of this principle in various branches of science. In geometry, this principle is used to prove theorems, to determine the possibility of forming a triangle with three line segments, and to determine the limits of the area and perimeter of triangles. In mathematical analysis, this principle plays a role in defining metric spaces, checking the convergence of sequences and series, and defining soft and Banach spaces. In physics, the triangle inequality is used in mechanics to study the motion of particles and the stability of systems, in special relativity in a generalized form in Minkowski space, and in optics to study the path of light rays. In computer science, this principle is used in routing algorithms to find the shortest path, in graph theory to examine the properties of graphs, and in machine learning to calculate the distance between data points. In addition, this principle is used in surveying, engineering (especially in structural design), and even in some economic models and

rational decision-making. In the footnote, classical and academic sources are mentioned for further understanding and examination of this principle. ^{2 3 4 5}

The philosophical riddle of the ship of Theseus also follows the above assumption, and in other words, its emergence and emergence can be seen in various scientific branches. In this article, we will examine and understand this approach through a managerial and Islamic perspective by quickly reviewing other answers and studies of other scientific branches and other approaches.

The Necessity of Change and Its Dependence on Management

Before we address the mystery of the Ship of Theseus itself, it is good to familiarize ourselves with the change that underlies this concept and also to find the dependence of this change on management ideas.

The factors of change in the present era are a complex combination of rapid technological advances (such as digitalization, automation, and the Internet), economic globalization and increased competition, demographic and social changes (such as increased urbanization and changing values), environmental and climatic changes (such as global warming and pollution), political and geopolitical factors (such as changes in global powers and conflicts), and global crises (such as economic and health crises). These factors, independently and in interaction with each other, cause continuous changes in the lives of humans, businesses, and societies, and adaptation to them is essential for survival and progress. Many scientific materials and resources have been produced about the concept of change and its necessity, some of which are attached in the footnote. ^{6 7 8 9}

The place and necessity of change in management is a vital and fundamental issue in today's dynamic world. Management thinkers have long emphasized that organizations need to adapt to environmental changes and create internal changes in order to survive and progress. Here, we will examine the views of some management thinkers on the various dimensions of change in management:

- Kurt Lewin: He is considered the father of modern change management. His three-stage model (freeze, change, refreeze) is known as a classic framework for understanding and managing organizational change. Lewin emphasized the importance of understanding the driving and restraining forces in the change process. 10
- John Cotter: He presented an eight-stage model for creating change that emphasizes creating a sense of urgency, forming a leadership team, creating a vision, effective communication, empowering employees, creating short-term achievements, stabilizing the change and institutionalizing it in the organizational culture. 11
- Jeff Heath: He presented the ADKAR change model. This model focuses on change at the individual level and includes five stages: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement. 12
- Joseph Schumpeter: He introduced the concept of “creative destruction,” which refers to the process in which new innovations and changes destroy old industries and markets and create new ones. Schumpeter emphasized the role of innovation in economic growth and the competitiveness of organizations. 13
- Clayton Christensen: He is world-famous for his theory of “disruptive innovation.” This theory examines how simple, inexpensive changes and innovations emerge and are eventually replaced by complex, expensive products and services in the market. 14
- Peter Drucker: He considered innovation to be the main task of management and believed that organizations should constantly seek innovation opportunities and allocate their resources effectively to realize them. In other words, he believed that “change is the only constant in today’s world” and that organizations should constantly seek opportunities for change and innovation. 15 16
- Alvin Toffler, in his book “Future Shock,” discussed the high speed of change in the modern world and the challenges of adapting to it. 6

So far, we have come to two assumptions: 1. The philosophy of Theseus's ship can be examined from different approaches (including management). 2. Management and other scientific disciplines consider this philosophy to be dependent on the concept of change. Now, the question is, what is the mystery of Theseus's ship?

2 Discussion

Who was Theseus?

Theseus, the legendary hero and king of Athens in Greek mythology, was a multifaceted figure with a combination of courage, intelligence, and a desire for justice. He was the son of Aegeus, king of Athens, and Aethra, daughter of Pytheas, king of Troezen. Theseus is known for his adventures, including a dangerous overland journey to Athens and battles with monsters such as Priapus, Sines, the wild boar Chromion, Sciron, and Procrustes, as well as his famous battle with the Minotaur in the Labyrinth of Crete. With the help of Ariadne, daughter of King Minos, he was able to defeat the Minotaur and escape the Labyrinth. After returning to Athens, Theseus became king and is considered the founder of Athenian democracy and the unifier of the Attica region. His stories are full of moral and political implications and continue to be studied and studied. He made most of his journeys via his famous ship. For more information about him, see the sources in the footnotes. ^{17 18 19}

Who and in what year was this riddle founded?

This riddle is not exactly set in a specific year, but its roots go back to ancient times and Greek philosophers. The first references to this riddle can be seen in the writings of philosophers such as Heraclitus and Plato around the 5th and 4th centuries BC. So in other words, this riddle has gradually formed and developed over time. To be more specific:

- Heraclitus (around 535 to 475 BC): Heraclitus was a Greek philosopher who was known for his theory of "permanent change". He believed that "no one can step into the same river twice", because the water of the river is constantly moving and changing. This idea forms

the basis of the riddle of the ship of Theseus. If everything is constantly changing, then what remains constant and stable? You can refer to the footnotes for a better understanding. 20
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- Plato: Plato sought to answer fundamental questions about existence, cognition, and ethics with his theory of “forms” or “ideas.” In short, Plato believed that beyond the material and tangible world that we perceive with our senses, there is another world called the world of “forms” or “ideas.” This world is the place of perfect and eternal examples of everything we see in the material world. For example, in the material world, we see different chairs, each of which has a different shape, size, and material. But Plato believed that in the world of forms, there is an “ideal form of chair” of which all material chairs are imperfect copies and shadows. These forms are in fact eternal, perfect, more real, and knowable by reason patterns for everything in the material world, and if that thing in the material world changes, this abstract and mental form does not change. For a better understanding, you can refer to the footnotes. 22 23

But after these foundations, who finally expressed this riddle and philosophy?

- Plutarch (around 46 to after 120 AD): Plutarch was a Greek writer and philosopher who specifically refers to the story of Theseus' ship in his book "Life of Theseus" and raises the main question of the riddle: "If the planks of Theseus' ship are replaced with new planks over time, is that ship still the same ship of Theseus?" 24

In today's world, various people have raised this issue from different scientific, literary, and... perspectives. Here we will mention one case:

- Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886): A short novel that explores the duality of human personality and the challenges of identity. The story follows a doctor named Henry Jekyll who creates a chemical substance with the goal of separating the good and bad sides of a person. Using this substance, he releases his evil side in the form of a character named Edward Hyde. At first, Dr. Jekyll is able to switch between the two

personalities, enjoying the unfettered and evil life of Mr. Hyde while maintaining the appearance and reputation of Dr. Jekyll. Gradually, however, this transformation becomes more difficult to control, and Mr. Hyde becomes more powerful and more sinister. Eventually, Dr. Jekyll loses control completely and is unable to return to his original state. The story raises important points about identity. First, the duality of personality shows how a person can have two completely different sides. This raises questions about a person's "true identity": are Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde two separate people or two sides of the same person? Second, the story shows how a change, even an internal change, can have a profound effect on a person's identity. Does a person's identity change as their personality changes? Does anything about the person remain constant? Third, the story addresses the issue of moral responsibility. Is Dr. Jekyll responsible for Mr. Hyde's actions? If two characters live in the same body, who is responsible for each of their actions? The connection between this story and the riddle of Theseus is that both deal with the issue of change and stability in identity. In the riddle of Theseus, the question is whether the ship is still the same ship after all its parts have been replaced. In the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the question is whether Dr. Jekyll is still Dr. Jekyll after becoming Mr. Hyde? Do changes in appearance and behavior change a person's fundamental identity? Both of these examples help us think more deeply about and gain a better understanding of complex concepts such as identity, change, stability, and moral responsibility. This story is still considered one of the most important and influential works of world literature because of its deep understanding of these concepts, as well as its fascinating and frightening style.

3 Findings

Explanation of the Ship of Theseus Problem

So, in short, the Ship of Theseus Riddle is a famous thought experiment in philosophy that asks a fundamental question about identity and change: Does an object whose parts are replaced with new ones over time still remain the same object? The riddle is taken from a story about Theseus, a Greek mythological hero. According to the story,

Theseus' ship was kept by the people of Athens as a souvenir after his return from his voyage. Over time, the planks and other worn-out parts of the ship were replaced with new ones. The question is: When all the original parts of the ship are replaced with new ones, is the ship still the same Ship of Theseus?

This riddle raises several questions in the following dimensions. (Of course, we have mainly used the word object here, but this word can be generalized to humans, organizations, etc.)

- Identity

What is identity? Is it simply a collection of its parts, or is there something more than that? What makes an object remain the same object? Is it simply its material or something else, such as its shape, function, or history? Another question is, if we were to collect all the old and original parts of the ship of Theseus and rebuild it, which ship of Theseus would it be? The repaired ship or the reassembled ship?

- Change

Does changing the components of an object necessarily change its identity? If so, how much change is acceptable? In other words, at what point can we say that the ship is no longer the ship of Theseus? How do gradual changes affect the identity of an object? Is there a moment when the object is no longer the same object? If the ship continues to have the same function and function after changes, can it be considered the same ship, even if all its components have changed?

- Continuity and continuity

How can the continuity of the identity of an object be maintained over time and despite changes? What is the concept of continuity? How can we define the continuity of an object over time, despite constant changes?

- Part and whole

What is the relationship between parts and whole? Is the identity of an object simply the sum of the identities of its parts, or is the whole something greater than the sum of its parts?

The references cited in the footnotes are very useful in understanding and expanding on this.^{25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32}

The Relationship of Management with the Philosophy of Theseus' Ship

The concept of change, especially in the form of the riddle of Theseus' Ship, is closely related to the science of management. As stated, change is an inevitable reality in life as well as in organizations and businesses. Change management is a process that helps organizations effectively adapt to changes and their various factors. This process includes planning, implementing, and monitoring changes in a way that causes minimal disruption to the organization's performance.

The riddle of Theseus' Ship can help managers better understand the concept of change and its management. We can examine this issue in the following dimensions:

- **Organizational Identity**

Like Theseus' Ship, organizations also change over time. Employees come and go, structures change, and new products and services are introduced. The question is, what maintains the organization's core identity? Managers must answer this question and ensure that changes are managed in a way that preserves the organization's core identity and values. McDonald's is McDonald's everywhere in the world, with any kind of change.

- **Incremental Change Management**

Changes in organizations often occur gradually, like replacing parts of the ship of Theseus. Managers must carefully monitor these gradual changes and ensure that they do not ultimately lead to unwanted change or loss of the organization's identity.

- Communication with stakeholders

When making changes, managers must effectively communicate with various stakeholders, including employees, customers, and shareholders. They must explain the reasons for the changes and ensure that everyone has a common understanding of the goals and expected results. Because this is highly dependent on the organization's ultimate identity and even its continued operation.

- Flexibility

In today's fast-paced world, organizations must be flexible and able to adapt quickly to change. Managers must create a culture in the organization that welcomes change and encourages innovation. In other words, change must be accepted and embraced. Because failure to adapt to change will cause the death and elimination of that identity and that organization. Of course, the opposite is also true.

So, in short, the Theseus puzzle is a useful tool for thinking about the concept of change and how to manage it in organizations. By understanding this puzzle, managers can better understand how to manage change in a way that preserves the organization's core identity and values and allows the organization to succeed in today's changing world.

Ultimately, from a management perspective, there is no definitive answer to the Theseus puzzle about how much to stay the same and how much to change. In other words, it is a management issue that must be chosen and determined by management in the context of that organization. But this puzzle helps us think more deeply about important concepts such as identity, change, and continuity, which are very important in management science.

The Relationship of Islam to the Philosophy of the Ship of Theseus

The riddle of the ship of Theseus is a philosophical problem that has not been specifically addressed in Islamic texts. This riddle has been raised more in Western philosophy,

especially in the works of philosophers such as Heraclitus, Plato, and Plutarch. However, it is possible to look at this riddle and provide answers using Islamic philosophical principles and foundations.

First, it is good to point out change from the Islamic perspective. In Islam, change is accepted as part of the system of creation. The world is constantly changing and evolving, and these changes are considered a sign of God's power and wisdom. 33 Changes and their form are also expressed in Islamic narrative books and hadiths, as well as the opinions of Islamic scholars. However, in Islam, there is also a concept called "constancy of principles." This means that the fundamental principles and values of religion, such as monotheism, prophecy, and resurrection, are fixed and unchangeable. These principles provide a framework for human life that gives stability and direction while accepting changes in worldly life.

The answer to the question of the ship of Theseus, from an Islamic perspective, depends on how we define "identity." If we consider identity simply as a set of material components and elements, then identity also changes as these components change. However, if we consider identity as a concept beyond material components, including principles, values, and beliefs, which is also the Islamic view, then identity may remain constant even as material components change. For a more comprehensive answer, it is good to mention a few cases in more detail to analyze this issue:

- Rationale

The Islamic answer to the riddle of the ship of Theseus is based on a rational axiom: despite changes, there is a fixed and single identity for everything. This principle can be understood by every individual, regardless of background, and is confirmed by religious texts and scientific findings. This fixed identity is a universal reality and is not limited to religious teachings. While some religious teachings require revelation to understand, the existence of this fixed identity can also be understood by reason and is experienced conscientiously and definitively by all individuals.

- Emphasis on the concept of “essence” and “extent”

In Islamic philosophy, a distinction is made between “essence” and “extent”. Essence is the essence and truth of an object, which is fixed and permanent, while the extent is the outward characteristics and attributes of an object, which may change. From this perspective, it can be said that although the appearances (parts of the ship) have changed, the essence (the identity of the ship) may remain. For example, if the purpose and function of the ship (which could be part of its essence) are still preserved, it can be said that it is still the same ship.

- The concept of “hādūth” and “baqā”

In Islamic theology, there is a discussion about “hādūth” (origin) and “baqā” (persistence). God Almighty creates phenomena and maintains them at every moment. From this perspective, it can be said that the identity of an object depends on the divine will and it is God who gives that object its identity and maintains it. Therefore, even with the changing parts of the ship, God can maintain its identity.

- “Unity in Multiplicity”

In Islamic mysticism, the concept of “unity in multiplicity” is referred to. This concept means that despite the changes and multiplicity in the world, there is a deep unity and harmony. From this perspective, it can be said that the change of parts of the ship is a kind of plurality, but there is still a unity and coherence in the identity of the ship.

- Soul

In Islam, the discussion of the originality of the soul in relation to the body is one of the important theological and philosophical discussions. By examining the verses and narrations, it can be concluded that the soul is the main essence of man and precedes the body. Some of these cases are mentioned below:

In several verses of the Quran, the blowing of the divine spirit into man is mentioned. For example, in Surah Al-Hijr, verse 29 it is stated: "So when I have shaped him and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down to him in prostration." (So when I have shaped him and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down to him in prostration.) This verse shows that the soul has a divine origin and is the main essence of man. 33

Similar to this theme is also found in other verses, including: Surah Sajdah, verse 9: Thank you" Surah S, verse 72: "So it was sweet and blew into his soul, so they prostrated themselves before him." Also, Surah Al-A'raf, verse 172: "And your Lord took from among the people. My man Their descendants will appear and they will bear witness against themselves: "Did you not say by your Lord, 'Yes, we bear witness,' lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed, we were unaware of this.'" 33

In addition to the Quran itself, this issue can also be found in the hadiths. For example:

The creation of souls before bodies:

This topic has been mentioned in numerous hadiths. One of the most famous of them is from Imam Sadiq (AS) who said: "Indeed, Allah created souls two thousand years before bodies." The exact source of this narration is in various books of hadith. 34 35

Soul, the reality of man:

This theme has also been mentioned in various words by the Imams (AS). For example, it is attributed to Imam Ali (AS) who said: "The soul is the essence of man and the body is its form." 36

The survival of the soul after death:

This issue has been emphasized in many verses and narrations. For example, the Holy Quran mentions life in the Barzakh and the Resurrection. The hadiths also deal in detail with questions and answers in the grave, the blessings and torments of the barzakh, etc. For example, the hadiths related to the world of barzakh in Allama Majlisi's Bihar al-Anwar. 37

For a better understanding of these materials, a complete list of sources related to these concepts is mentioned in the footnote. 38

Finally, it can be said that the experiment of Theseus' ship and the Islamic view of change both invite us to think more deeply about fundamental concepts such as identity, change, and stability. This thinking can help us better understand the world and our place in it, so that we can come to the understanding that the essence of phenomena is not only material. (In other words, this view distances us from atheistic existentialism, materialism, socialism, and communism, which sees the world only as material.) Of course, here there are also conflicts with the existentialist view, "existence precedes essence," or also the view of reincarnation, so we have avoided stating these additional points in order to reduce the volume of discussions.

4 Conclusion

The text shows that this conundrum is not merely an abstract philosophical issue, but has practical and theoretical implications in various fields. In particular, two areas are examined:

Management

In this context, the conundrum helps managers gain a deeper understanding of the concept of “change” in organizations. This understanding helps them improve how they manage change in order to preserve their “organizational identity” and its core values. This includes managing gradual changes, engaging effectively with stakeholders (including employees, customers, and shareholders), and creating a culture that is adaptable to change and innovation. In effect, the conundrum forces managers to ask, “What constitutes the essence of the organization and how can this essence be preserved in the face of change?”

Theology (Islam)

From an Islamic perspective, the answer to the conundrum depends on the definition of “identity.” Using Islamic philosophical concepts such as “essence and extension,” “occurrence and permanence,” and “unity in plurality,” the text demonstrates that if “identity” is a concept that goes beyond material components and includes principles, values, and beliefs, it can remain constant while material components change. This perspective helps to better understand concepts such as “constancy of principles” in religion while accepting changes in the material world, and shows how one can create harmony between apparent change and fundamental stability. In short, the text concludes that the riddle of the ship of Theseus is a powerful tool for thinking about the fundamental concepts of “identity,” “change,” and “continuity.” The riddle challenges us to reexamine our understanding of these concepts in various fields, including management and theology, and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how identity is defined and maintained in today’s dynamic and changing world. The important point is that this puzzle does not have a definitive and single answer, but its value lies in creating a platform for deeper and multifaceted thinking about these key concepts. However, the similarity between the Islamic view of the answer and the view of Western management thinkers is palpable.

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