

Leadership Styles of UAE Deans and Department Heads

Darwish Abdulrahman Yousef

United Arab Emirates University, UAE

Abstract. This study investigated the deans and department heads' self-perception of their leadership styles at three universities in the UAE and whether these leadership styles differ by demographic characteristics. Twenty-two deans and forty-three department heads at the chosen Emirati universities voluntarily completed an online questionnaire. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used to measure participants' leadership style. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Deans and department heads perceived their leadership style to be transformational. Further, participants' perceptions did not significantly vary across demographic characteristics such as gender, nationality (Emirati vs. non-Emirati), age group, marital status, rank, experience in present job, and job title (Dean vs. Department Head). This study is unique because it is the first attempt to explore the leadership styles of deans and departments heads in an Arab setting, which is different from Western and Eastern settings.

Keywords: leadership, multifactor leadership questionnaire, MLQ, higher education, UAE.

1. Introduction

Leadership and leadership styles have long been the subject of investigation among researchers and practitioners primarily because leadership and its impacts influence personal outcomes of subordinates as well as organizational outcomes. However, few scholars have investigated leadership styles of leaders in higher education institutions (Whitsett 2007, Morris and Miller 2009, Hassan 2013, Mushtaq and Akhtar 2014).

Deans and department heads play a vital role in higher education institutions, where critical decisions are made at the department and college levels. For example, at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), some of the deans' duties and responsibilities include: "efficiently and effectively manage the college and its educational and research programs; oversee the development of goals, initiatives and action plans in the college's strategic planning, and ensure widespread engagement of the college's faculty, staff, students and other stakeholders in this process; regularly report to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs) and Vice Chancellor on progress towards achieving the college's goals; ensure continuous improvement in the college's activities,

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through a systematic process of outcomes assessment and program review; oversee and guide the recruitment, retention, continuing professional development, and promotion processes for faculty”. (UAEU 2015, pp. 7-8). On the other hand, some of the department heads duties and responsibilities include: “lead the development of the department’s teaching, research and service activities, as approved by the department council, and ensure that the department’s activities support the college in achieving its strategic goals; organize the department’s activities, assign duties and responsibilities, and establish committees, task forces and working parties as necessary; propose the allocation of faculty teaching loads and timetable of classes for each academic semester, for discussion by the department council and approval by the dean; handle day-to-day management matters, such as travel requests, leaves of absence, sick leave; convene and chair department council meetings, and follow up on the implementation of council’s decisions”. (UAEU 2015, pp.29-30).

Understanding the leadership styles of deans and department heads benefits the administrative and academic functions of the university; thus, deans, department heads, departments, colleges, and top administration of higher education institutions would gain from research investigating deans and department heads leadership styles.

A comprehensive review of the literature shows a reasonable number of researches published worldwide over the last few decades concerning leadership styles of deans and department heads. Nonetheless, there was extremely limited examination of deans and department heads’ leadership styles in the UAE, which markedly differs from Western and Eastern contexts in which much of the research has been conducted. The UAE’s culture is characterized by collectivism, high power distance, femininity, and high uncertainty avoidance. It is similar to the cultures of Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Taiwan in the collectivism–individualism cultural dimension (collectivism) and in the power distance cultural dimension (large power distance); of Egypt, Ghana, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Taiwan in the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension (femininity); and of Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Taiwan in the uncertainty avoidance cultural dimension (high uncertainty avoidance). However, the UAE’s culture is different from the US culture in the collectivism-individualism cultural dimension; from Pakistan, Taiwan, and the US cultures in the power distance cultural dimension; from Ethiopia, Lebanon, and the US cultures in the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension; and from Lebanon, Malaysia, and the US cultures in the uncertainty avoidance cultural dimension (See Appendix 1 for country cultural dimension).

As Madgali (2013) stated, work on leadership in higher education in the Arab world is severely lacking. Moreover, the literature has demonstrated that leadership behavior is culturally determined (Jackofsky *et al.* 1988, Adler 1991, Hofstede 1993, Robbins 1993, Triandis 1993). Given that UAE culture is

different from Western and Eastern cultures, it is expected that leadership behaviors of deans and department heads in the UAE context might be different from those in the Western and Eastern nations. Therefore, it is worthwhile investigating deans and department heads leadership styles in the UAE context. This study is set to address the following two research questions:

RQ1: What are the dominant leadership styles of the deans and department heads at the UAE universities?

RQ2: Are there statistically significant differences in the deans and department heads' perceptions of their own leadership styles because of their demographic characteristics?

2. Theoretical Background

Leadership style has been defined as managerial attitudes, behaviors, characteristics, and skills based on individual and organizational values, leadership interests, and reliability of employees in different situations (Mosadeghrad 2003). It is also a consistent behavioral pattern as perceived by individuals around a leader as well as the outcome of a person's philosophy, personality, and experience (Yesuraja and Yesudian 2013). Hersey and Blanchard (1993) defined it as a pattern of behaviors that leaders display during their work with and through others, while Miller *et al.* (2002) viewed leadership style as a pattern of interactions between leaders and subordinates.

A number of leadership styles models have been developed and used over the last few decades. One of those models is the Bass and Avolio's (1995) model of leadership styles, which has been widely used in the literature to assess leadership behaviors of deans and department heads. The present study adopted this model; it has been tested in the Arab culture, known to perform well, and it has provided strong support for its validity and reliability (Alsayed *et al.* 2012). According to this model, there are three types of leadership: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership.

Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership theory was introduced by Burn (1978) and enhanced by Bass (1985, 1998). Burn (1978) viewed transforming leadership as a process where "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation;" meanwhile, Bass (1985) described a transformational leader as an individual who possesses certain characteristics that are posited to motivate followers to move beyond their self-interest and commit themselves to organizational goals, thus performing beyond expectations. According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership has five components: (1)