

# Exploring the Relationship Between Learning Styles and Leadership Styles: A Study in the United Arab Emirates

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**Abstract.** This study seeks to explore the relationship between managers' learning styles and leadership styles. Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) was used to identify managers' learning styles, and Bass and Avolio's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used to identify their leadership styles. One hundred and forty-one questionnaires were completed by managers of local government departments of the Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) emirate in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The study used descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the collected data. The results demonstrated that participating managers have a moderate preference for the activist learning style, a strong preference for the reflector and pragmatist learning styles and a very strong preference for the theorist learning style. Furthermore, participating managers exhibited transformational and transactional leadership behaviors fairly often, and passive avoidant leadership behavior once in a while. There are statistically significant differences in the mean scores across the four learning styles due to certain managers' demographics. On the other hand, there are only limited differences in the mean scores across the three leadership behaviors due to managers' demographics. There are also statistically significant correlations between learning styles and certain constructs of the three leadership styles. Implications, limitations and lines of future studies are discussed.

**Keywords:** learning, leadership style, Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ), Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), United Arab Emirates (UAE), Ras Al Khaimah (RAK).

## 1. Introduction

Learning styles and leadership styles have attracted the attention of academics and practitioners for a long time. Consequently, a sizable number of publications dealing with either learning styles or leadership styles have been published over the past decades. Such attention stems from the importance of these research streams for both leaders and organizations. Understanding managers' leadership styles enable leaders to predict the influence of managers' leadership styles up on the personal outcomes of their subordinates such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, burnout, empowerment, trust, self-efficacy, motivation, team level learning and related performance. By understanding the impact of leadership styles on these outcomes, leader can influence employee

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behavior in a way to make the behavior has positive impact on the organization. Likewise, understanding managers' leadership styles enable leaders to predict the influence of managers' leadership styles up on organizational outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior, organizational culture, and organizational effectiveness. On the other hand, understanding the relation between managers' learning and leadership styles is of significant importance for leaders and organizations alike. Research has demonstrated that, managers' learning styles influence their leadership styles and organizational outcomes (e.g. Brown and Posner 2001, Michie and Zumitzavan 2012). Therefore, understanding the relation between learning styles and leadership styles can provide leaders with valuable insight related to both employees and organizational behavior. Furthermore, as Toms and Kovacs (2010) pointed out, an increase in the knowledge of the relationship between learning styles and leadership styles might contribute to an organization's efforts to train and develop leaders. However, there is limited published research on the relation between learning and leadership styles of managers of local government departments, particularly in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Thus, it would be worthwhile investigating this area of research in the context of the UAE in particular because it differs in many ways to that of the Eastern and Western settings where much of the previous research has been conducted. As literature has demonstrated, leadership behavior is culturally determined (e.g. Jackofsky *et al.* 1988, Adler 1991, Hofstede 1993, Triandis 1993) and so are learning styles (Haghirian 2003, Yamazaki 2007, Yamazaki and Kayes 2007, Yamazaki and Kayes 2010).

Michie and Zumitzavan (2012) cited literature which highlighted the importance of the role of both learning and leadership within organizations. Furthermore, Tomas and Kovacs (2010) argued that convergence of learning styles and leadership styles presents an interesting intersection for studying the abilities or behaviours of leaders. They also argued that more attention was directed towards leadership abilities of leaders and little attention has been devoted to their learning styles.

The present study is set to contribute to the literature of learning and leadership through analyzing the relation between learning and leadership styles of managers of local government departments of the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) in the UAE.

The paper is organized in the following manner. First, a literature review of previous research related to the study is presented. The subsequent section describes the research methodology and the process of data gathering. The results are then presented and discussed. The paper concludes with implications, limitations, and identification of potential lines for further research.