

An Analysis of the Instructional Leadership Model at an Institution of Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates

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Received: October 28, 2015 Accepted: November 10, 2015 Online Published: November 23, 2015

doi:10.5539/ass.v11n28p162

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v11n28p162>

Abstract

Leadership remains key to the successful delivery of instruction. The impact of the global economy and the digitalization of higher education continue to level the playing field for institutions of higher education as the competition for enrollment increases. Universities in the United Arab Emirates are not isolated from these changes as many are determined to emulate models of accepted academic leadership and shared governance in order to obtain institutional and programmatic accreditations from outside the region. This research examined the development, implementation and findings associated with the assessment of one institution's instructional servant leadership model. The study employed factor analysis (dimension reduction) techniques to identify the underlying components driving responses to an employee questionnaire designed to measure the fundamental aspects of servant leadership. The results identified two major driving forces: (1) a holistic overview of the leadership style and (2) the soft skills associated with intrapersonal interaction. The research reminds leaders of the need to comprehend the power of any or all decisions to distract their followers and of the need to cultivate strong interpersonal skills such as communication and respect for others.

Keywords: leadership, servant-leadership, higher education, United Arab Emirates

1. Introduction

The widespread digitalization of higher education continues to create opportunities for students to reach outside of traditional educational parameters in order to pursue educational opportunity from an almost unlimited array of mediums and sources. Students with access to the Internet can enroll in online programs and courses from across the globe. Education is now without the limits and boundaries of the past (Lumadue & Waller, 2013a). The availability of so many mediums and sources providing educational services is not without problems. The quality of the educational provider may be suspect due to the tremendous opportunities for educational entrepreneurship. In fact, many consumers of educational services have discovered the true meaning of the Latin phrase, *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware). In response to this dilemma, the legitimacy of the educational provider becomes of paramount importance. For this reason, many educational providers are pursuing recognized international accreditations as a means of demonstrating the quality of their institutions, programs, and services (Lumadue & Waller, 2013b). This study examined the assessment of the servant leadership model employed at an institution of higher education in the United Arab Emirates in response to the pursuit of international and programmatic accreditation.

The subject university is a public institution located in the Northern Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates. The university is coeducational and enrolls approximately 750 students in any given semester. The university offers both undergraduate and graduate courses of study. Program areas include the arts and sciences, business and engineering. The university does not engage in the delivery of online programs and courses; however, the university has identified the need to pursue international institutional and programmatic accreditation as a means of establishing credibility. Accordingly, the emphasis on quality instructional leadership and shared governance is of particular concern. This study examined the development, implementation and findings of an assessment of the universities instructional leadership. Results of this study hold the potential to

guide future research and practice, as the problems associated with the globalization of education will not diminish any time in the near future. Additionally, the dimensions, practices and visioning of education in the United Arab Emirates are subject to rapid transformation (Alhebsi, Pettaway, & Waller, 2015). The investigation of leadership models is of particular importance to the institutions in the region.

2. Examination of the Literature

The United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) has emerged over the past forty years as one of the most prosperous, trend-setting, cutting-edge destinations for the region as well as globally. This growth, although admirable, has not been without its challenges. Academic alignments along cultural, regional and global dimensions have required all contingencies involved to express both patience and flexibility along with a willingness to collaborate across disciplines and paradigms. Since its inception, leadership throughout the U.A.E. has placed a strong and positive emphasis on the importance of education (Alhebsi, Pettaway, & Waller, 2015). The approach towards higher educational efforts within the U.A.E. have been varied and articulated in vastly different ways, possibly due to the cultural and traditional, practices and beliefs prevalent throughout the Arab world.

The vast cultural differences, which exist between people from the Arab world and those from the Western world, might account for these two group's differing epistemological views. However, an epistemological frame must first be established before a conversation about leadership styles can be further explored. The collective communal nature of the families' relationships to each other and the higher tribal order still maintain a high level of relevance within the U.A.E. even today. After considering the U.A.E.'s patriarchal social structures as well as its monarchical styled system of governance (within the historical context of the nation's development) its communal structure not only takes on an expanded relevance, but also suggest the existence of additional alignments with the theoretical construct of social constructivism. Decisions are made in the groups, by tribal representatives in the legislative bodies. Marriage relationship is often arranged within the confines of these relations. Thus, we understand that the cultural attributes of much of the greater social order, experienced by U.A.E. nationals, although ever changing, maintains a strong collectivist dimensions, with regards to their established social order. This collectivist nature of the social order expressed throughout much of the U.A.E. falls in line with an interpretive epistemology. Hence, the alignment with this interpretive epistemology and the social order expressed throughout the U.A.E. provides support on which a theoretical model for research might firmly be established. Subsequently, bring a subjective ontological perspective into further alignment with an interpretive epistemology (Pettaway, Waller, & Waller, 2016).

Real-time expressions of servant leaderships are often hard to isolate within traditional western organizational models. (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Alternatively, the style of compassionate rulership expressed by many of the monarchies within the U.A.E. is possibly more often an appropriate fit with the servant leadership model as outlined by Greenleaf (1991). Hence, we realize the appropriateness and fit of the servant leadership model utilized by this study to examine the relationship between the employees and upper level administrators as well as the underlining factors associated with these academic divisions

Past research published on leadership behavioral practices within the U.A.E. found correlations between perceived leadership behaviors and positive levels of job performance (Yousef, 2000). While, variables relating to culture were not isolated in this study the findings identified this cultural orientation as a significant factor with respect to leadership behaviors as having a direct impact on employee performance. Culture, although not the focus of this study holds a significant role in our understanding of leadership. Globalization's expressed properties have not only resulted in the collision of multiple cultures, but has also lead to the development of a hybrid, alternative global culture (Kraidy, 2002). The U.A.E. is a highly diverse country with almost 80 percent of its workforce originating from somewhere other than the U.A.E. In light of the U.A.E.'s unique demographic structure, one begins to understand why a dynamic leadership style with the ability to motivate and support productivity is required. These properties of servant leadership not only aligns with the organic leadership styles, traditionally expressed by the tribes indigenous to the U.A.E., the servant leadership style of management also provides a leadership model which fosters the productivity and efficiencies in diverse populations (Yousef, 2000).

The qualities which Greenleaf (1991) used to describe servant leadership were service, nurture and support. Greenleaf's servant leadership style grows out of a desire to lead for the primary purpose of helping others; and might be viewed by some as a vocation or altruistic calling, rather than a mere avocation. Qualities highlighted by servant leaders are the desire to make sure that the needs of others are being addressed. Similarly, Yousef (2000) highlighted this quality of considering others as one of the main factors which support productivity in diverse working populations. Other qualities of servant leadership included organizational stewardship, which is

the belief that the mission of the organization is important because of its contribution to society. It is this self-sacrificing orientation of the leaders which often motivates those under his leadership (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). This altruistic perception of the importance of the work done under a servant leader by the collective can lead to development of a community through the shared vision and their commitment to their leader. Community is facilitated through the efforts of the leadership as well as the workers commitment to each other and healthy productive communication channels (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). The notion of community is of especial importance when we consider this study, due to the unique nature of the settings of universities and colleges. Hence, community not only builds commitment through one's associations with the organizational culture as well as one's perceived alignment with the organizations identity, but also through the development of organizational spirit. All of which is often a result of the symbiotic relationship between the servant leader and the workers whom she/he leads.

Recent studies found that servant leadership, not only facilitated community development, but also promoted both goal and process clarity (Hu & Liden, 2011). Recent studies conducted by Hu, & Liden, (2011) explained that team motivation was promoted by team potency. Team potency is considered one of the elements which support team motivation. Additionally, this element of team potency appears to be greatly enhanced by the servant leadership management styles. The success of the servant leadership management style is attributed to its ability to support, social integration, efficient processes, and smooth communication within teams (Hu & Liden, 2011). Furthermore, team potency also had a positive effect on goal and process clarity as well as organizational citizenship behaviors.

This study promises to enrich understanding of instructional leadership in the servant leadership model within the U.A.E. for the purpose of guiding future research and practice.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Development and Implementation of the Questionnaire

The servant leadership model was implemented in the university as one of several strategies for addressing the need for shared governance between the administration and the faculty. Greenleaf's (1991) servant leadership model identifies the four major leadership attributes of (1) leadership focus, (2) insight and agility, (3) building effective teams and communities, and (4) ethical formation and decision-making. Greenleaf's work and definitions guided the development of the questionnaire. Accordingly, leadership focus was described as the leader's ability to invest him or her in those being led. Insight and agility was described as the ability to synthesize solutions to problems. The ability to build effective teams and communities included the ability to configure the skills and talents of team members to form a cohesive unit capable of achieving success. Ethical formation and decision-making examined the leader's ability to operate in an ethical manner in accomplishing tasks and assignments. The questionnaire was developed in 2003 by one of the researchers utilizing a team of five experts from the field as a means of establishing content validity. The questionnaire included 20 questions relating to the attributes identified by Greenleaf. The attributes were broken into sections. Potential scores ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 3.

The questionnaire was administered in spring 2015 to all personnel of the university employed in the division of academic affairs via digital survey software. Responses were anonymous. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research ensured that responses were not monitored or tracked. After responses were obtained, the results were transferred into Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis and the online data set was deleted. Permission was given by the researcher for the university to utilize the instrument contingent on permission for the researcher to examine the findings for broader dissemination.

3.2 Research Questions

The questionnaire was administered and analyzed for the purpose of examining the effectiveness of the instructional leadership in complying with the expectations of Greenleaf's (1991) model. Accordingly, the following research questions guided the study.

Research Question 1: What are the employee responses to the Spring 2015 Administrative Performance Evaluation in the areas of leadership focus, strategic insight and agility, building effective teams and communities, and ethical formation and decision-making?

Research Question 2: Do relationships exist between or among the employee responses on the Spring 2015 Administrative Performance Evaluation?

Research Question 1 was designed to obtain the appropriate descriptives associated with the administration of the survey instrument. Research Question 2 was designed to foster examination of the potential existence of

correlational relationships between or among the responses to determine underlying causal factors guiding the specific responses.

3.3 Research Hypotheses

Research Question 1 required the identification of appropriate descriptives for the question responses. No advanced statistical analysis was required to answer Research Question 1. Research Question 2 required the development of null and alternate hypotheses to determine if relationships existed between or among the employee responses on the Administrative Performance Evaluation instrument. Accordingly, Research Question 2 required the utilization of the following hypotheses (Lumadue & Waller, 2013c). The null and alternate hypotheses associated with Research Question 2 follow.

Ho: No relationships exist between or among the employee responses on the Spring 2015 Administrative Performance Evaluation.

Ha: Relationships exist between or among the employee responses on the Spring 2015 Administrative Performance Evaluation.

3.4 Research Methodology

Descriptive of the responses were identified to answer Research Question 1. Research Question 2 required the review of the indicated null and alternate hypotheses. Examination of the research hypotheses was conducted via factor analysis (dimension reduction) protocols and techniques for the purposes of identifying the underlying factors associated with the responses. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was utilized to determine if significant relationships existed between or among the various responses. Significance was established at .05. Once Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicated the need to reject *Ho* in favor of *Ha*, dimension reduction findings with Eigenvalues at or above 1.0 were deemed significant. The utilization of factor analysis was deemed an appropriate methodology to examine for relationships between or among the various responses (Waller & Lumadue, 2013).

3.5 Limitations, Assumptions, and Delimitations

Limitations of the study included those generally associated with respondent questionnaires. The reliability of the responses was assessed utilizing a Chronbach's split alpha with an acceptance threshold of .80 (Waller & Lumadue, 2013). The assumption was made that the respondents truthfully and honestly answered the questions without fear of reprisal. Every effort was taken to assure the respondents of anonymity; however, the limitations associated with self-disclosed responses still apply. The study was delimited to all full time employees of the division of academic affairs. An assumption was also made that the findings of the study held the potential to be of use in determining the need for further research and/or guiding practice in the field.

4. Research Findings

The survey instrument was administered in Spring 2015 and included the evaluation of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs and each of four Academic Deans charged with the oversight of the Schools of Arts & Sciences, Business and Engineering. The responses were then combined into one data set for the 20 questions utilized in the questionnaire. Employees in the academic division evaluated the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs and the respective Dean over their specific area of service only. They did not evaluate the Deans outside their area of service. Accordingly the existing data set replicates the employees' evaluations of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs and their respective Dean.

Chronbach's alpha was utilized to examine the reliability of the responses. The analysis yielded a score of .981 well beyond the established threshold of .80. The responses to the questionnaire met expectations of reliability.

Research Question 1:

Research Question 1 required examination of responses on the Spring 2015 Administrative Performance Evaluation. Findings for the 3-point scale survey are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Question responses on the spring 2015 administrative performance evaluation

Question	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Articulates and promotes high expectations.	185	2.23	.874
2. Inspire others to higher levels of performance.	185	2.29	.873
3. Maximizes opportunities to accomplish tasks.	185	2.25	.934
4. Completes work related activities as required.	185	2.26	.960
5. Promotes the success of all components of the university.	185	2.27	.904
6. Communicates the mission and vision of the university.	185	2.28	.925
7. Aligns plans and actions.	185	2.23	.900
8. Is quick to adapt to new challenges and/or opportunities.	185	2.13	.969
9. Identifies and communicates the ramifications of decisions.	185	2.15	.924
10. Accepts full responsibility for the actions of his/her area.	185	2.19	.951
11. Creates shared responsibility and solidarity.	185	2.10	.962
12. Treats people fairly, equitably and with dignity and respect.	185	2.30	.900
13. Communicates with others to solicit the best solutions.	185	2.31	.859
14. Welcomes, engages and supports employee contributions.	185	2.29	.860
15. Is respectful of divergent opinions.	185	2.22	.931
16. Demonstrates ethical, trustworthy and professional behavior.	185	2.42	.825
17. Applies policies & procedures in a fair manner.	185	2.25	.918
18. Demonstrates appreciation for diversity.	185	2.30	.863
19. Does his/her share of completing any task or project?	185	2.37	.837
20. Demonstrates loyalty to the university.	185	2.36	.862

For the 185 responses, mean scores ran from a high of 2.42 on question 16 related to the demonstration of ethical and professional behavior to a low of 2.10 on question 11 relating to the creation of shared responsibility and solidarity. Three additional questions scored at or above 2.30. These addressed (1) the administrator's demonstrated work ethic in doing his or her share on the work in a timely fashion, (2) the fair and equitable treatment of personnel, and (3) the appreciation of diversity in the workplace. Similarly, three additional questions scored at or below 2.20. These addressed (1) the acceptance of full responsibility for the actions of the area for which oversight was given, (2) the identification and communication of the ramifications for decisions, and (3) the ability to quickly adapt to new challenges and/or opportunities. The standard deviations range from a low of .825 on question 16 to a high of .969 on question 8. The standard deviation values are relatively similar and demonstrate an approximate homogeneity of variance. Examination of the skewness and kurtosis values indicated the all questions resided within acceptable boundaries (Waller & Lumadue, 2013). The data sets complied with expectations regarding normality and were deemed to be approximately normally distributed.

Research Question 2:

Research Question 2 required the examination of null and alternate hypotheses to determine if relationships existed between or among the employee responses on the Administrative Performance Evaluation. Sample adequacy was assessed by use of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sample Adequacy with acceptance established at .80. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was utilized to examine the null and alternate hypotheses. Significance was established at .05 (Waller & Lumadue, 2013). Findings are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's test for sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test of Sampling Adequacy		.959
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Squared	4,754.4
	df	190
	Sig.	< .0001

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test of Sampling Adequacy returned a value of .959, well above the expectation of .80. This finding indicates that the sample was adequate to meet the expectations associated with factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicated a significance of less than .0001, well below the threshold of .05. Accordingly the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternate hypothesis. Relationships were found to exist between or among the employee responses on the Spring 2015 Administrative Performance Evaluation.

The study next employed factor analysis techniques to determine the nature of the relationships. Findings are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Total variance explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1	14.475	73.723	73.723	14.475	73.723	73.723
2	1.049	5.247	78.971	1.049	5.247	78.971

Note. Extraction Method: Principle Component Analysis

As provided in Table 3, the factor analysis process identified two factors underlying the responses to the questionnaire. These two factors accounted for 78.971% of the variance in the data set. Factor 1 accounted for the larger portion, 73.723%, of the variance while factor 2 accounted for 5.247%. This analysis did not account for 21.029% of the variance in the data set. These findings established not only the existence of relationships between or among the responses on the Spring 2015 Administrative Performance Evaluation but identified two underlying factors guiding the responses.

The component loadings for the two identified factors were next examined. The values for these two components are provided in Table 4. Component values at or above .300 were deemed significant (Waller & Lumadue, 2013).

Table 4. Component matrix

Question	Component	
	1	2
1. Articulates and promotes high expectations.	.864	-.235
2. Inspire others to higher levels of performance.	.917	-.013
3. Maximizes opportunities to accomplish tasks.	.868	-.166
4. Completes work related activities as required.	.856	-.166
5. Promotes the success of all components of the university.	.878	-.066
6. Communicates the mission and vision of the university.	.869	-.095
7. Aligns plans and actions.	.847	-.299
8. Is quick to adapt to new challenges and/or opportunities.	.875	-.314
9. Identifies and communicates the ramifications of decisions.	.893	-.194
10. Accepts full responsibility for the actions of his/her area.	.813	-.300
11. Creates shared responsibility and solidarity.	.836	-.156
12. Treats people fairly, equitably and with dignity and respect.	.827	.421
13. Communicates with others to solicit the best solutions.	.863	.333
14. Welcomes, engages and supports employee contributions.	.875	.302
15. Is respectful of divergent opinions.	.839	.219
16. Demonstrates ethical, trustworthy and professional behavior.	.880	.278
17. Applies policies & procedures in a fair manner.	.877	.172
18. Demonstrates appreciation for diversity.	.843	.222
19. Does his/her share of completing any task or project.	.811	.044
20. Demonstrates loyalty to the university.	.835	.021

Extraction Method: Principle Component Analysis with Two Components Extracted

Examination of the component loadings for Factor 1 indicated that responses to all questions composed the factor. Factor 1 was deemed to be a holistic view of the administrator's leadership. Factor 2 was composed of questions 8, 10, 12, 13, and 14. These dealt with the ability to adapt to new challenges, acceptance of responsibility, fair and equitable treatment of employees, communication with employees and support for employee contributions. Factor 2 appeared to focus on leader/employee soft skill areas and was designated as soft skill interpersonal interaction.

6. Discussion and Implications

Findings of the study led to the rejection of the null hypothesis in favor of the alternate hypothesis. Relationships were found to exist between or among the employee responses on the Spring 2015 Administrative Performance Evaluation. Two major underlying factors were identified. These factors were identified as (1) a holistic overview of the administrative style and (2) assessment of the administrator's interpersonal soft skills. These findings contradict earlier analysis of the Administrative Performance Evaluation instrument conducted in the United States. In these previous administrations, three to four factors were identified. These paralleled the intent of the team that developed the instrument. These differences might be explained in light of the substantial cultural and national identities of the faculty participating in the studies. Participants in the United States tended to be more homogeneous in cultural and nationality while those in the United Arab Emirates truly constituted a global population coming from a wide range of countries, nationalities and cultures.

The identified underlying factors guiding responses on the Spring 2015 Administrative Performance Evaluation are very significant for the organization. First, the identification of a holistic overview of the administrator as guiding general perception of administrative performance is very significant and explained just over 73% of the variance in the data set. This means that the respondents did not differentiate the between or among the four domains as intended by the developers of the instrument. The respondents rated the questions based on their holistic perception of the administrator. While instructional administrators may view the impressions of their competence by those who report to them as founded on the examination of a host of strengths or weaknesses, the opposite is true. This means that actions perceived as negative in one area are likely to taint perceptions of performance in another area. The distinction of areas is not clearly separated. Minor actions that an administrator may view as unimportant may significantly impact the employee's impression of the administrator's leadership. Simply put, all decisions matter. Any decision, even a small or limited decision, can promote a poor perception. Once the poor perception is in place, strengths in a host of areas may not be capable of dislodging it. Administrators must be very careful in regard to the ramifications of any or all decisions and/or actions.

The second factor explained just over 5% of the variance. This factor indicated the importance of interpersonal skills in promoting a positive assessment of instructional leadership. The components of this factor fell solidly into the soft skill sets required for building and leading work teams thus highlighting the importance of developing and engaging teams and a team mindset in the leadership of instruction. The manner in which the administrator modeled a strong work ethic and engaged others constituted an important part of perceived leadership ability beyond the holistic perception. Fundamentally, this finding indicates that the treatment of employees is important in leading instructional areas. Employees are more likely to perceive leadership from a positive perspective if they are treated as peers. Issues of mutual respect, communication and the traditional role of the leader accepting responsibility for actions of the unit may go far in promoting a positive assessment of the competency of the administrator. The existence of this factor indicates that perceptions of leadership ability are molded by perceptions of interpersonal skills. Instructional administrators can improve perceptions of their leadership abilities by treating employees with respect, communicating issues with them and demonstrating an appreciation of their opinions and views.

Findings of the study are indicative of the subject university. Care should be taken in generalizing the findings to a broader arena though much of what the analysis indicated was strongly supported by the literature. The researchers encourage additional research in this area and remain open to sharing the survey to promote further investigation in the field. The findings are deemed important as they clearly demonstrate the importance of envisioning instructional leadership from a holistic perspective while taking care to emulate the soft skill sets traditional required in the development of work teams. Perceptions of instructional leadership remain subject to complex interactions yet may be shaped and molded for the good of the institutions involved.

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