

Evaluation of Leadership Styles in the Construction Sector of UAE

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Abstract

The construction industry of UAE is huge and requires effective leadership strategies for its development and growth. For the success of the construction industry, transformational and transactional leaderships are to be followed so that the managers can meet the changing situations effectively. The findings obtained from this study consequently revealed that age, nationality, education, work experience and organizational position of the leader plays a significant role in determining the leadership style he/she applies. However, the gender of a leader has no correlation with the style of leadership.

Keywords: Middle East, construction, leadership, transformational style, transactional style

1. Introduction

The construction industry has suffered from leadership crisis in recent years despite the growth of construction companies (Brouer & Scwedhelm, 2002). This crisis in leadership slowed down the development of the industry as leaders lacked the necessary style to lead and achieve the desired objectives. Effective leadership is vital in organizations to attain goals and promote professional achievements at an individual level. The construction industry is closely related to several players. The process establishing requirements is complex and requires sound leadership style and management skills. The UAE is considered the second largest Arab economy and is among the high-income countries (Schiliro, 2013). From 2000 to 2012, the annual GDP growth rate of the UAE was averaged at 4.7 percent, which was good considering the severe global economic crisis of 2009 (Schiliro, 2013). In 2012, the UAE economy grew 4 percent despite the difficulties created by Eurozone and the negative global prospects (Schiliro, 2013).

According to the Deloitte GCC Powers of Construction 2013 report by CPI Financial, the UAE has overtaken Saudi Arabia as the biggest construction market in the Middle East for the first time since the crash. The economic impact of this news in the construction industry of UAE is immense. The value of the UAE's construction industry for the year 2014 is \$315 billion (Harris, 2014). The property and construction sector in Dubai contributes approximately 21 percent of the Emirate's GDP, which amounts to nearly \$38.38 billion in 2012. The construction industry contributed 10.6 percent in 2008 and 10.3 percent in 2011 to the GDP of the UAE (Dubai Chamber study, 2013). GDP is forecasted to grow from 11.1 percent in 2015 to 11.5 percent by 2021. Moreover, after years of turmoil, the construction industry of the UAE plans to expand its business. According to Harris (2014), investment in infrastructure development is expected to boost the UAE's construction sector. The UAE is projected to spend \$329 billion on major construction projects over the next 15 years up to 2030. Mega construction projects worth \$40 billion are due for delivery in 2016 (Sophia, 2013). Dubai is set to receive 25 million visitors during the Expo while Expo-related expansion plans alone are expected to create 300,000 jobs over the next few years. With the UAE hosting mega events such as Expo 2020, the construction industry is anticipated to grow (Sophia, 2013).

2. Literature Review

Leadership is a subject of extensive interest in various trades. The word leadership is one of the world's oldest concepts. One of the associated links to leadership is the style of leaders. Leaders and styles of leadership may vary based upon age groups (Belal et al., 2010). From a gender perspective, females as argued by researchers, are significantly more risk averse, tend to be less overconfident and await results to take actions. Thus, female's leadership style is more transactional type oriented (Barbuto et al., 2007). Omair (2010) however suggests that

the female leaders are more transformational compared to their male counterpart and are more effective for the organizations. On the other hand, findings indicated that UAE nationals do not tend to articulate a compelling vision or discuss important beliefs and values, which are key characteristics of transformational leaders. Thus, transactional leadership behaviours were found to be stronger in the UAE than in both the USA and Europe (Bealer & Bhanugopan, 2013). Looking at leadership style from the level of education, Mohamad (2012) argues that education is key to determining best-suited leadership style to be implemented in the construction sector of the UAE. The more experience an individual has in performing a professional task, the more likely that the individual would act as an effective transformational leader and implement such leadership style according to Randaree & Chaudhry (2012). At organizational position level, Balasubramanian (2012) argues that leadership style is directly linked to organizational position, and the two aspects cannot be separated.

Hypothesis 1 (Age & Leadership style)

The first hypothesis states that leadership style differs with the age of a leader. Barbuto, Frirz, Matkin, & Marx (2007) view senior leaders, who act according to the situations, generally follow transformational leadership wherein age is an important element as young leaders of the UAE are concerned with gaining the maximum output from an individual project. This type of approach is observed in the transactional form of leadership, wherein the sole objective is to generate maximum efficiency (Barbuto, Frirz, Matkin, & Marx, 2007).

Hypothesis 2 (Gender & Leadership style)

The second hypothesis states that transformational leadership is more likely to be observed in female leaders than males in the construction companies of UAE. In this regard, Omair (2010) suggested that the women leaders are more transformational in nature than the men as they are observed to remain much honest in their work. This aspect is also seen in the construction segment of UAE, wherein the female leaders are found to remain ethically concerned and honest while making effective decisions. This certainly led towards raising the motivation level of employees by directing them with the appropriate working procedures or guidelines. Thus, as a result, female leaders are found out to be more effective in the organizations, resulting in deciphering the transformational leadership skills of the female leaders (Omair, 2010). The observation made by Kemp et al. (2013) showed that female leaders are found to be more effective in the context of building greater communication within the team members of an organization. This aspect is quite important for a leader in UAE to take into consideration as regards to the complex political and social conditions prevailing in the nation. The female leaders are more effective in communicating with the political personalities of the nation and hence, there lays the probability of gaining greater political advantages. This is also applicable in the case of controlling various societal aspects. Female leaders are equally efficient in communicating with the people of the nation. This would enable the female leaders to control the complex social issues and thereby it would lead to promoting transformational leadership at large (Kemp et al., 2013). Furthermore, according to Davis et al. (2000) female leaders are more collaborative in nature than their male counterpart.

Hypothesis 3 (Nationality & Leadership style)

The third hypothesis states that transformational leadership is directly related to local individuals in the form of leaders with regard to the construction sector of UAE. In this regard, Toor & Ogunlana (2008) suggested that the modern construction companies are facing more cross-cultural projects. This certainly has led towards raising the demand of local individuals who are more aware of the local culture. Similarly, there is a need for the flexible decision making about the local scenario of construction sector belonging to UAE. It is also to be noted that local leaders are more aware of the local needs and demands with regard to the above-stated segment. They are also familiar with the local laborers and their mode of working among others. These aspects certainly lead towards forming effective and transformational leadership based practices in the construction of projects in UAE (Toor & Ogunlana, 2008). Likewise, according to Toor & Ofori (2008), the construction companies belonging to UAE possess several obligations that are related to political, cultural and social challenges. These challenges make the construction-related work activities or projects to be quite tough for the leaders. Controlling such aspects need a higher level of transformational leadership. Furthermore, as per the standpoints of Ofori & Toor (2009), UAE possess a complex social and cultural atmosphere. Any indiscipline in the construction process that may affect the social and cultural norms of the nation may lead to chaos. Thus for the nation like UAE relating to its construction sector, the effectiveness of a foreign leader is uncertain. In this regard, transformational leadership is directly correlated with the local leaders (Ofori & Toor, 2009).

Hypothesis 4 (Education level & Leadership style)

The fourth hypothesis states that transformational leadership is directly or positively related to the education level of the leaders. According to Leithwood & Jantzi (2000), there exist certain evidence of effective and

transformational leaders to possess a higher educational qualification in their respective profiles. Moreover, there also lay the evidence of several educational institutes in UAE that develop the leadership skills of the students by making them class leaders for a certain period. As a result, students are more acquainted with the skills of effective and transformational leadership. This makes them eventually become transformational leaders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). As per the viewpoints of Hallinger (2003), there are several schools in UAE that take the initiatives of designing extracurricular activities including different sports for the students. These sports that are played in groups develop team efforts in the mindset of students who desires to contribute to the team. This psychology of team building eventually helps them to become leaders of an organization as in the construction industry that demands a higher level of team cohesion. These leaders are seen to be more transformational in nature. Thus, it can be ascertained that the higher level of degree and qualification attained from a few of the top schools and universities of UAE eventually lay the creation of transformational leaders in the construction sector in UAE (Hallinger, 2003). Furthermore, according to Macpherson et al. (2007), leaders possessing the higher level of educational qualifications are more likely to possess the technical aspects related to the construction companies of UAE. This would certainly lead towards the generation of the confidence level of leaders, and hence, they are more likely to possess a transformational form of leadership.

Hypothesis 5 (Work experience & Leadership style)

The fifth hypothesis reveals that the more an individual is experienced in performing a professional task, it is more likely that the individual would act as an effective transformational leader, resulting in implementing transformational leadership style at large. This particular hypothesis can be recognized by the survey conducted by Randeree & Chaudhry (2012). The survey was mainly conducted amid 600 individuals belonging to the top three construction departments specifically in UAE. According to the survey, 50 percent of the respondents stated that because of the prevailing transformational leadership based on the number of years of experience within their respective organizations, their satisfaction level towards varied assigned jobs raised to a considerable level. Furthermore, most of the respondents also cited that with the experience of leaders, they are more effective in maintaining projects and also in managing the team to perform effectively (Randeree & Chaudhry, 2007). According to Fatwoe & McCaffer (2000), transformational leadership is proved to be quite essential for a construction company for accomplishing its predetermined business or operational targets. In this regard, the country UAE, which holds significant development in the construction sector, crucial concerns regarding the aspect of environmental change often trigger the need for building effectual transformational leadership, based practices in general. Apart from this, professional competency is also required for contending in this competitive business market linking to the construction sector. This might be duly considered as one of the reasons for which the experienced leaders observed a changing scenario of the global environment in the construction sector, and resulted in adopting more firm and effective decisions. Also with the experience of leaders, their professional competencies can be determined, which in turn, depicts the quality of transformational leadership based practices (Fatwoe & McCaffer, 2000).

Hypothesis 6 (Organizational position & Leadership style)

The sixth hypothesis states that a leader with a higher position in an organization is more likely to adapt transformational leadership. In this regard, according to Toor et al. (2007), there are several aspects that a project manager or leader of a construction company need to consider. Toor's concept is similar to the construction segment of UAE, wherein the sector is identified to be growing tremendously in this modern day context. With the position of the leaders moving higher, it is quite indispensable that they are more likely to follow and apply successful transformative leadership approaches. This is mainly because the higher leaders are positioned, they are more expected to undertake reliable as well as effective decisions. Considering the competitive scenario of UAE in the construction industry, a leader with higher authority or power will be more accustomed to the transformational leadership skills based on the above-stated aspects (Toor et al., 2007). From the viewpoint of Balasubramanian (2012), leaders with higher positions have more power to undertake certain decision that are beneficial to the construction companies in UAE with due consideration to the prevailing political, social along with cultural issues within the nation. This might be owing to the reason that leaders possessing higher authorities are more likely to possess rapport with top political leaders or political personalities of the nation. It is widely anticipated that a leader with higher position can easily resolve the above-discussed issues by undertaking mutual benefits of the two involved parties. This is because the leaders with higher authority and position are more likely to fulfill the requirements of all the subordinates in the organizations at large (Balasubramanian, 2012).

From literature review and table discussion highlighted in the previous section, a number of questions have been prepared. Since the aim of this research is to understand the nature of construction leaders in the UAE and what

qualities they have, the following hypothesis are put forward:

H₁: Leadership style differs by age of the leader

H₂: There is a significant correlation between gender of the leader and Transformational leadership style

H₃: There is a significant correlation between nationality of a leader and Transactional leadership style

H₄: Leadership style differs by education level of a leader

H₅: There is a significant correlation between years of work experience of a leader and Transformational leadership style

H₆: There is a significant correlation between organizational position of a leader and Transactional leadership style

3. Research Methodology

Data collection for this study was undertaken with civil engineers working in UAE in the second quarter of 2014. Because the construction industry of the UAE has a uniquely diverse group of contractors, for the study, three internal contractors and three external contractors from different origins were selected to cover such diversity. Three companies were originating from UAE, and one company was from the United Kingdom, one company was from South Africa, and one company was from South Korea. This study covers only large size construction companies with yearly turnover ranging from USD 300 million to USD 500 million, and with a range of employees from 3,000 to 25,000. The multiple leadership questionnaire (MLQ) is used in an organization to recognize the character of the leaders with transformational and transactional qualities. This form of questionnaire is used to identify the leadership behaviour that the organization should incorporate and most suited to identify the type of leadership style implemented within an organization (Bass, 2000).

In total, 570 questionnaires were distributed, and 393 were returned, representing a response rate of 69%. The questionnaire survey contained two distinct sections. The respondents' age breakdown was: 22% (n=87) aged between 18 to 29 years old, 53% (n=207) aged between 30 to 44 years old, 20% (n=77) aged between 45 to 55 years old and 5% (n=21) aged above 55 years. The respondents' gender breakdown was: 91.6% (n=358) male and 8.2% (n=32) female. The respondents' years of experience breakdown was: 14% (n=56) had less than a year's work experience in the current organization, 26% (n=101) had work experience between 1 to 3 years in the current organization, 30% (n=119) had work experience between 3 to 7 years in the current organization and 30% (n=117) had more than 7 years of work experience in the current organization. Respondents' level of education breakdown was: 2% (n=9) were high school graduates, 11% (n=44) were diploma-in-engineering holders, 58% (n=227) were bachelor degree holders and 28.6% (n=112) had post-graduate qualification. Respondents' nationality breakdown was: 13% (n=50) were local Emirati citizens and 87% (n=340) were non-locals.

4. Findings

4.1 Age and Leadership Style (n=1)

As per the views of Politis (2006), age is an important aspect of determining the effectiveness of leadership. Observably, young leaders are more aggressive and take a prompt decision, hence follow the transactional form of leadership. On the other hand, senior leaders, who act according to the situations, generally follow transformational leadership wherein age is an important element as young leaders of the UAE are concerned with gaining the maximum output from an individual project. The purpose of this experiment was to examine whether the age of a leader has any significant influence on his leadership style in the construction industry. The dependent variable (leadership style) includes transformational leadership style and transactional leadership styles, whereas an independent variable included in this experiment is the age of a leader. An ANOVA test showed that age of a leader makes a significant overall difference between transformational leadership style ($M = 2.8607$, $SD = .46113$, $F = 8.930$, $p < .000$) and transactional leadership style ($M = 1.9664$, $SD = .45240$, $F = 11.116$, $p < .000$). Pearson's correlations were performed to test the relationship between the age of a leader, and the style of leadership. A significantly positive correlation has been found between age of a leader and the transformational style of leadership ($r = .161$; $p = .001$). That means a senior age leader is more likely to practice transformational leadership style. On the other hand, a significant negative correlation has been found between age of a leader and transactional style of leadership ($r = -.27$; $p = .001$). Therefore, it could be concluded that a young leader tends to use a more transactional style of leadership compared with a senior age leaders.

Table 1. Hypothesis (based on AGE)

Hypothesis (Based on AGE) – Table 1		Supported
H_{1a}	Leadership style differs by age of the leader	Yes
H_{1b}	There is a significant correlation between age of a leader and Transformational leadership style	Yes
H_{1c}	There is a significant correlation between age of a leader and Transactional leadership style	Yes

4.2 Gender and Leadership Style (n=2)

Omair (2010) suggested that the female leaders are more transformational in nature than the males because the female leaders are more honest in their work. This aspect is also observed in the construction segment of the UAE wherein the female leaders are found to remain ethical and honest while making effective decisions. The purpose of this experiment was to examine whether the gender of a leader has any significant influence on his leadership style in the construction industry. The dependent variable (leadership style) includes transformational leadership style and transactional leadership styles, whereas an independent variable included in this experiment is the gender of a leader. Both an ANOVA and Pearson's correlations test failed to show any significant the relationship between the gender of a leader, and the style of leadership. However, only 8.2% (n=32) respondents were female, and it could be a reason for the insignificant results.

Table 2. Hypothesis (based on Gender)

Hypothesis (Based on Gender) – Table 2		Supported
H_{2a}	Leadership style differs by gender of the leader	No
H_{2b}	There is a significant correlation between gender of the leader and Transformational leadership style	No
H_{2c}	There is a significant correlation between gender of the leader and Transactional leadership style	No

4.3 Nationality and Leadership Style (n=3)

The UAE national leaders are noticeably more aware of the local needs and demands concerning the above-stated segment (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Therefore, transformational leadership would be more effective with UAE national leaders or individuals (Bass & Avolio, 2000). The purpose of this experiment was to examine whether nationality of a leader has any significant influence on his leadership style in the construction industry. The dependent variable (leadership style) includes transformational leadership style and transactional leadership styles, whereas an independent variable included in this experiment is the nationality of a leader (two major groups were included namely local and expatriates). An ANOVA test showed that nationality of a leader makes a significant overall difference between transformational leadership style ($M = 2.8603$, $SD = .46104$, $F = 7.505$, $p < .006$) and transactional leadership style ($M = 1.9647$, $SD = .45278$, $F = 33.979$, $p < .000$). Pearson's correlations were performed to test the relationship between nationality of a leader, and the style of leadership. A significantly positive correlation has been found between nationality of a leader and the transformational style of leadership ($r = .138$; $p = .001$). A closer look shows that expatriates ($M = 2.88$) are practicing more transformational leadership style compared with local leaders ($M = 2.69$). On the other hand, a significant negative correlation has been found between nationality of a leader and transactional style of leadership ($r = -.284$; $p = .001$). Mean score demonstrated that local leader ($M = 2.23$) tends to use a more transactional style of leadership compared with expatriate leaders ($M = 1.91$).

Table 3. Hypothesis (based on Nationality)

Hypothesis (Based on Nationality) – Table 3		Supported
H_{3a}	Leadership style differs by nationality of a leader	Yes
H_{3b}	There is a significant correlation between nationality of a leader and Transformational leadership style	Yes
H_{3c}	There is a significant correlation between nationality of a leader and Transactional leadership style	Yes

4.4 Educational Level and Leadership Style (n=4)

According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2000), some evidence suggests that effective and transformational leaders possess high educational qualifications in their respective profiles. The purpose of this experiment was to

examine whether the education level of a leader has any significant influence on his leadership style in the construction industry. The dependent variable (leadership style) includes transformational leadership style and transactional leadership styles and an independent variable included in this experiment is the education level of a leader. An ANOVA test showed that education level of a leader makes a significant overall difference on transformational leadership style ($M = 2.8607$, $SD = .46113$, $F = 12.866$, $p < .000$) but no significant difference on transactional leadership style ($M = 1.9684$, $SD = .45299$, $F = .367$, $p = .777$). Pearson's correlations were performed to test the relationship between the education level of a leader, and the style of leadership. A significantly positive correlation has been found between the education level of a leader and the transformational style of leadership ($r = .267$; $p = .001$). A closer look shows that postgraduates ($M = 3.0746$) are practicing the highest degree of transformational leadership style followed by bachelor degree holders ($M = 2.7814$). On the other hand, no significant correlation has been found between the education level of a leader and transactional style of leadership. That implies, the higher education a leader will have, a better chances to adopt transactional leadership style, but the transactional style of leadership is not being influenced by the level of education of respective leaders.

Table 4. Hypothesis (based on education level)

Hypothesis (Based on Education Level) – Table 4		Supported
H_{4a}	Leadership style differs by education level of a leader	Yes
H_{4b}	There is a significant correlation between education level of a leader and Transformational leadership style	Yes
H_{4c}	There is a significant correlation between education level of a leader and Transactional leadership style	No

4.5 Work Experience and Leadership Style ($n=5$)

The more experience an individual has in performing a professional task, the more likely that the individual would act as an effective transformational leader in implementing such leadership style. The purpose of this experiment was to examine whether the number of years of work experience a leader has made any significant influence on his leadership style in the construction industry. The dependent variable (leadership style) includes transformational leadership style and transactional leadership styles, and an independent variable included is years of work experience of a leader. An ANOVA test showed that the years of work experience of a leader makes a significant overall difference on transformational leadership style ($M = 2.8607$, $SD = .46055$, $F = 7.338$, $p < .000$) and moderately significant difference on transactional leadership style ($M = 1.9678$, $SD = .45259$, $F = 2.681$, $p = .047$). Pearson's correlations were performed to test the relationship between the years of work experience of a leader, and the style of leadership. A significantly positive correlation has been found between the years of work experience of a leader and the transformational style of leadership ($r = .199$; $p = .001$). A closer look shows that leaders with above seven years of work experience in the current organization ($M = 2.9825$) are practicing the highest degree of transformational leadership style followed by leaders with above three years of work experience in the current organization ($M = 2.9003$). On the other hand, no significant correlation has been found between the number of year work experience of a leader and transactional style of leadership. That implies, the longer a leader will work in an organization, there are better chances of adopting transactional leadership style, however, transactional style of leadership is not being influenced by the years of work experience of respective leaders.

Table 5. Hypothesis (based on years of work experience)

Hypothesis (Based on years of work experience) – Table 5		Supported
H_{5a}	Leadership style differs by years of work experience of a leader	Yes
H_{5b}	There is a significant correlation between years of work experience of a leader and Transformational leadership style	Yes
H_{5c}	There is a significant correlation between years of work experience of a leader and Transactional leadership style	No

4.6 Organizational Position and Leadership Style ($n=6$)

High-level leaders are more likely to follow and apply an effectual transformative leadership approach. This is mainly because high-level leaders are more likely to undertake reliable and effective decisions (Fatwae & McCaffer, 2000). The purpose of this experiment was to examine whether the organizational position a leader

holds has any significant influence on his leadership style in the construction industry. The dependent variable (leadership style) includes transformational leadership style and transactional leadership styles, and an independent variable included is the organizational position of a leader. An ANOVA test showed that the years of organizational position of a leader makes a significant overall difference on the transformational leadership style ($M = 2.8601$, $SD = .46245$, $F = 9.340$, $p < .000$) and a significant difference on transactional leadership style ($M = 1.9651$, $SD = .45260$, $F = 5.979$, $p = .000$). Pearson's correlations were performed to test the relationship between the organizational position of a leader, and the style of leadership. A significantly positive correlation has been found between the organizational position of a leader and the transformational style of leadership ($r = .172$; $p = .001$). A closer look shows that first line managers ($M = 3.0235$) are practicing the highest degree of transformational leadership style followed by middle managers ($M = 2.9451$). On the other hand, a significant negative correlation has been found between the organizational position of a leader and transactional style of leadership.

Table 6. Hypothesis (based on organizational position)

Hypothesis (Based on organizational position) – Table 6		Supported
H_{0a}	Leadership style differs by organizational position of a leader	Yes
H_{0b}	There is a significant correlation between organizational position of a leader and Transformational leadership style	Yes
H_{0c}	There is a significant correlation between organizational position of a leader and Transactional leadership style	Yes

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed various relevant facts regarding the dependency of leadership approaches and the similar choices made by the leaders of the contemporary era within the construction industry. As compared to the many factors assumed to be responsible for influencing choices of leaders in adopting the most suitable leadership styles, age, gender, organisational positioning, work experience, nationality and educational levels were perceived as more important in this study. Based on quantitative research approach, the study identified varying results with consideration to the correlation between the stated variables and the leaders' choices of leadership styles in the construction industry. For instance, depicting a strong correlation between the age of leaders and their adopted style of leadership, the results obtained from the study revealed that aged leaders usually make choices within transformational and transactional styles of leadership. This in turn proved the fact that age has a strong effect on leadership styles adopted by the leaders. However, when searching for similar facts in the secondary sources available online and those considered for this study, limited availability of data obstructed the clarity and refinement of the quantitative results detailed. On one hand, it shows a gap in the literature, but on the contrary, it also demands further research that would help prove the fact with greater transparency and reliability. In both terms, the gap shows the scope of this research to test further the result obtained from hypothesis testing. Correspondingly, their gender variances when considered, leaders depicted limited or no differences in their choice of leadership styles. In particular, no correlation was found between the gender of the leaders and their leadership approaches. This in turn shapes their leadership styles as different from that adopted by male leaders. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning in this framework that such interrelation was witnessed in the context of the UK, rather than in UAE. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct further researches in this domain, especially in the UAE construction industry to obtain a more firm understanding of the correlation. The study also focused on testing the correlation between nationality of the leaders in the UAE construction industry and their adopted leadership approaches. It was in this context that the study revealed a positive correlation between nationality and the choice of leadership styles among leaders of the construction industry. The study findings thus revealed that national leaders depicted a different selection while international leaders reflected their preferences for a different leadership pattern, which was again supported by researchers such as Toor and Ogunlana (2008) and Bass and Avolio (2000). Further findings obtained revealed a positive correlation between organizational positioning, work experience, and educational levels, as the leaders begin developing their judgment, evolving to be leaders gradually overcoming their limitations of followership tendencies.

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