

Leadership in Project Managed Environments: Employee Perceptions of Leadership Styles within Infrastructure Development in Dubai

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Dubai is a regional leader in infrastructure development. Rapid growth has led to project management gaining tremendous importance in the construction sector. Employees are an important part of any industry and their job satisfaction and organisational commitment affects the turnover rate and productivity of a company (Benkhoff, 1997; Randeree and Chaudhry, pending). Leadership has a strong influence on employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Lok & Crawford, 1999). Thus, it is vital to examine leadership styles in a rapidly growing industry in what is also such a cosmopolitan city. Hence, the research undertaken aims to study leadership styles in construction project management in Dubai. The findings show that employees feel that Consensus and Team Management leadership styles are predominant in the industry and employees have shown preference for working under these leadership styles.

Field of Research: Organisational Behaviour, Leadership, Project Management

1. Introduction

The UAE economy is a high growth economy (Ministry of Planning, 2005) and it is rapidly diversifying into areas of tourism, manufacturing, logistics, banking and finance. To promote all these industries a huge construction boom is being witnessed. The country's construction industry is valued at \$221 billion (about Dh811.73 billion) - the highest in the region. This highlights the fact that planned construction is the focus of the Emirates, particularly in Dubai.

Dubai, being a metropolitan city of the UAE, accommodates the largest population of the country which is approximately 1,321,453 (Census, 2005) out of 3.1 Million. The construction industry in Dubai employs approximately 393,535 individuals, which makes the construction industry the largest sector in the emirate (Census, 2005). The emirate's ambitions continue to grow with over \$100bn worth of projects in the pipeline. Large property developers, such as Nakheel, Emaar, Dubai Properties and Dubai International Properties, have announced projects worth \$26 billion (about Dh95.49 billion), while Dubai Municipality, DEWA and the Department of Civil Aviation are planning projects costing another \$20 billion (about Dh73.46 billion). Some of the main development activities underway in Dubai are the world's biggest man-made islands (Palm Islands), the world's tallest building (Burj Dubai), Dubailand city, Arabian Canal, Waterfront, Jumairah Towers, and a world's high-tech metro network in the city.

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The shortage of indigenous manpower in the construction industry has attracted a large influx of foreign workers. Neighbouring Arab countries, apart from Gulf Council Countries (GCC) are contributing effectively towards the shortage of resources in the local market. This is due to political stability in the UAE as compared to other countries in the Middle East. The construction industry is mostly dependent on the foreign workers from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka), other Arab countries and European nations.

Thus, leading and managing of such a multinational workforce in a vibrant city is a critical factor in the success of any country. Earlier research has contented that leadership behaviour is determined culturally and hence varies markedly from culture to culture (e.g. Aram and Piriano, 1978; Burger and Bass, 1979; Wright, 1981; Adler, 1991; Muna, 1980; Al-Jafary and Hollingsworth, 1983; Ali, 1993; 1997). Yousef (2000) has examined the relationship between organisational commitment, job satisfaction and performance in the UAE and found significant results. To attain the research aim, different theories on leadership styles have been explored. A qualitative survey investigates existing leadership styles and preferred leadership styles of employees.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership Style

One of the most effective definitions of leadership was presented by Kim & Maubourgne (1992), which stated that leadership is the ability to inspire confidence and support among the people who are needed to achieve organisational goals. Leadership is not only found among people in senior positions, but is needed at all levels in an organisation and can be practiced to some extent even by a person not assigned to a formal leadership position (Dubrin, 2004). Leadership style is a leader's combination of attitude and behaviour which leads to certain regularity and predictability in dealing with group members (Dubrin, 2004). Leadership style is the relatively consistent pattern of behaviour that characterizes a leader. The study of leadership style is an extension of understanding leadership behaviours and attitude. Most classifications of leadership style are based on the dimensions of initiating structure and consideration (Dubrin, 2004).

There are several styles of leadership such as: autocratic, bureaucratic, laissez-faire, charismatic, democratic, participative, situational, transactional, and transformational leadership (Mosadeghrad 2003b, 2004). Not everyone agrees that a particular style of leadership will result in the most effective form of organisational behaviour. Different styles are needed for different situations and each leader needs to know when to exhibit a particular approach. No one leadership style is ideal for every situation, since a leader may have knowledge and skills to act effectively in one situation but may not emerge as effective in a different situation (Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006).

Organisational success in obtaining its goals and objectives depends on managers and their leadership style. By using appropriate leadership styles, managers can affect employee job satisfaction, commitment and productivity. Leadership style can be viewed as a series of managerial attitudes, behaviours, characteristics and skills

based on individual and organisational values, leadership interests and reliability of employees in different situations (Mosadeghrad, 2003c). It is the ability of a leader to influence subordinates to perform at their highest capability. This factor captures the extent to which management respects workers, operates with honesty and integrity, promotes efficiency and has open lines of communication with employees (Aronson *et al.*, 2003).

2.2 Factors Determining Leadership Style

Literature is rich in determining the factors affecting the choice of leadership style and their development. However, in the real world it has been noted that no single leadership style is exerted by a manager, rather a combination of leadership styles is evident. There are many factors which determine or affect the application of a leadership style.

Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) have long maintained that three forces affect the choice of the appropriate leadership style. These are forces in the leader himself, those in the subordinates and those in the situation. Yukl (1981, 1994) lists the following factors as determinants of leadership style: level in the authority hierarchy, function of the organisational unit, size of the organisational unit, task characteristics and technology, lateral interdependence, crisis situation, stages in the organisation life cycle and, finally, subordinates' competence and performance.

On the other hand, Herbert (1981) argues that leadership style is a function of the need for participation, the result of commitment, and closeness of supervision required. Maheshwari (1980) argues that the style of decision making in an organisation is the result of a complex interaction of several factors, including the context and characteristics of the organisation, the nature of the decisions and the attributes and preferences of the decision makers. Blanchard and Wakin (1991) point out that the degree of difficulty of the task plays a significant role in determining the right leadership style. Whyte (1988) argues that the choice of leadership style depends on the nature of the task, the power available to the leader, the experience of the subordinates, the culture of the organisation, the preferred style of the leader, the style preferred by subordinates and time available for task completion.

Flowers *et al.*, (1975) divided human values categorically into two general categories, each consisting of three values. The first is the "outer-directed" with tribalistic, conformist and sociocentric values. The outer-directed manager is adaptive to his/her situation in life, likes structure and accepts rules, policies and group norms. The outer-directed manager prefers a stable environment and job and tends not to set goals, but also tends to live according to someone else's plan. The second category is "inner-directed" with egocentric, manipulative and existential values. Managers in this category tend to be assertive and expressive, bending the rules to accomplish what they want. The inner-directed person is always attempting to influence his or her environment and make change to it. To achieve this, the inner directed manager sets goals and pursues them energetically (Hughes and Flowers, 1978). The values are briefly defined as follows:

- **Tribalistic:** submissiveness to authority and/or tradition.
- **Conformist:** has a low tolerance for ambiguity, adheres to prevailing norms and values and needs structure and rules to follow.
- **Sociocentric:** a high need for affiliation and little concern.

- **Egocentric:** aggressive, selfish, restless, impulsive, and in general, not inclined to live within the limits and constraints of society's norms.
- **Manipulative:** materialistic, expressive, and self-calculating to achieve an end.
- **Existential:** a high tolerance for ambiguity and for those who have different values, usually expresses self but not at the expense of others.

2.3 Affect of Culture on Leadership Styles

In the last decade the development of global markets has created numerous cross-cultural teams and the ensuing dialogue has formed the basis for transacting global business (Adler, 2002). Literature has contented that leadership behaviour is culturally determined and hence varies markedly from culture to culture (e.g. Aram and Piriano, 1978; Burger and Bass, 1979; Wright, 1981; Adler, 1991). Robbins (1993) suggests that national culture plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of leadership style. Similarly, Adler (1991), Badaway (1980) and Bass *et al.* (1979) have all argued that national boundaries make considerable differences in leadership style. Bass (1990) also concludes that culture does influence leadership. In some cultures leaders are respected when they take strong decisive action, whereas in other cultures consultative and participative decision making approaches are more valued. According to Den Hartog *et al.* (1999), in a culture where authoritarian leadership is valued it would be pointless acting in a way more characteristic of a participative or democratic leader. But in a culture that endorses a more nurturing and humanistic leadership style, being sensitive and considerate as a leader could be functional. Hofstede (1983) proposed a four dimension approach by which national cultures vary. These eventually affect the selection of leadership style (McKenna, 2006).

Most recent research in cross-cultural studies of management maintains that managers adopt different decision styles, depending on the pattern of organisation, their individual characteristics (Ali, 1989a; Blyton, 1984; Tayeb, 1988). Furthermore, Ali (1989b) finds that leadership decision style differs significantly by country. Al-Faleh (1987) points out that Arab culture has certain distinctive characteristics that dominate managerial thinking and behaviour. Evans *et al.* (1989) have argued that leadership style is a function of the level of industrialisation, but cultural characteristics play a significant role in tempering its effects.

Campbell *et al.* (1993) note that leadership style itself and eventual task outcome had a strong impact on perceptions of appropriateness of leadership style, whereas gender and organisational setting had no substantive impact. Buckham (1990) argues that the type of industry sector (private or public) and an organisation's size play important roles in the determination of the effectiveness of management style. Studies of leadership styles have revealed that there are not only differences in the styles preferred by followers in different cultures, but the specific behaviours which reflect these styles may vary from culture to culture (Smith and Peterson, 1988). Cultural differences may also limit the universality of the new leadership paradigms, such as the theory of transactional and transformation leadership introduced by Bass (1985) and later revised by Bass and Avolio (1994), who stated that this theory has some degree of universality, as it holds up considerable universal potential.

2.4 Leadership Styles in Arabian Gulf Countries

A number of previous studies have examined leadership style in the Arab world. For example, Ali *et al.* (1995) investigated the decision-making styles of UAE national managers and Arab and foreign expatriates. The results suggest that the consultative style was predominant. Similarly, Ali (1993) examined the decision styles of Arab Gulf executives. The results also point to a strong preference for the consultative style. Furthermore, Ali (1989b); Al-Jafary and Hollingsworth (1983) and Muna (1980) examined the decision-making styles of Arab executives. They report that Arab executives are highly committed to the consultative style.

Dahhan (1988) studied the decision styles of Jordanian top managers. She found that Jordanian top managers follow an authoritative management style, a finding that is also reported by Badaway (1980) for Middle Eastern managers. However, Kaur (1993) reports that the autocratic style prevails among Indian managers. The findings shows that employees in the investigated organisations are highly committed to their organisations, highly satisfied with their jobs, and their performance is high, indicating that these employees perceive their superiors as adopting consultative or participative leadership behaviour (Yousef, 2000). A number of studies have been carried out in the Arab world which suggest that leadership in Arab culture nurtures consultative and participative tendencies (e.g. Muna, 1980; Al-Jafary and Hollingsworth, 1983; Ali *et al.*, 1993; 1997). This preference demonstrates the influence of Islamic and tribalistic values and beliefs, since both Islamic and tribal law reinforce consultation in all aspects of life (Ali, 1989a).

3. Methodology

A questionnaire was designed to collect qualitative data, so that employee perception of leadership styles can be determined. The questionnaire was aimed at office workers in the construction industry of Dubai, because they are the most direct employees which are affected from the top management's leadership style through a trickle down effect. The workers at sites seldom get a chance to know the leadership style of the company and hence are least concerned about its affect on their job satisfaction.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections with the focus of this paper related to parts A and B only;

- A) Personal information (age, gender, nationality, work group)
- B) Leadership style
- C) Factors affecting your job satisfaction
- D) Factors affecting your organisational commitment

The survey was carried out by pick and drop method. Thus, 600 hard copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the three selected companies. 150 questionnaires were distributed in the Client organisation, 250 questionnaires were circulated in the Consultant's company, and 200 questionnaires were distributed in the Contractor firm. Then, the completed questionnaires were collected by visiting the companies a month after the delivery. The useable survey forms received back were 251 out of 600 distributed, thus giving an overall response rate of 41.83%, which is considered satisfactory in the Middle East region, particularly in a construction industry survey.

The general characteristics of the survey are illustrated in the Table 1. Some of the major findings noted in the general characteristics of the construction industry in Dubai are as follows:-

- The results indicate that employees from the Indian Sub-continent (South Asia) make them the largest employee group in the office environment of the industry by nationality.
- Male gender seems to dominate the construction industry in the office.
- In the age group category, a moderate mix of employees is found.
- Majority of office employees are educated to degree level.
- The survey results indicate that about 39% of office employees have not changed their jobs frequently.

Table 1: General Characteristics of the Survey

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Nationality Group		
<i>UAE National</i>	17	6.8%
<i>Arab National</i>	40	15.9%
<i>Indian Sub-continent</i>	129	51.4%
<i>European</i>	44	17.5%
<i>American</i>	2	0.8%
<i>Canadian</i>	1	0.4%
<i>Far East Asian</i>	18	7.2%
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	217	86.5%
<i>Female</i>	34	13.5%
Age Group		
<i>21-25</i>	29	11.6%
<i>26-30</i>	90	35.9%
<i>31-35</i>	59	23.5%
<i>36-45</i>	62	24.7%
<i>46-55</i>	8	3.2%
<i>>55</i>	3	1.2%
Marital Status		
<i>Single</i>	70	27.9%
<i>Married</i>	179	71.3%
<i>Divorced</i>	1	0.4%
Educational Status		
<i>High School</i>	0	0.0%
<i>Diploma</i>	57	22.7%
<i>Graduate</i>	158	62.9%
<i>Post Graduate</i>	34	13.5%
<i>PhD</i>	1	0.4%
Years of professional experience		
<i>0-3</i>	42	16.7%
<i>4-5</i>	61	24.3%
<i>6-10</i>	56	22.3%
<i>10-15</i>	63	25.1%
<i>16-20</i>	19	7.6%
<i>20-30</i>	8	3.2%
<i>>30</i>	2	0.8%
Number of previous employers		
<i>1</i>	98	39.0%
<i>2</i>	46	18.3%
<i>3</i>	48	19.1%
<i>4</i>	25	10.0%

5	31	12.4%
6-8	3	1.2%
8-10	0	0.0%
>10	0	0.0%

The second section of the questionnaire (Part B) inquired about the existing leadership style in the organisations and their extent. Respondents were asked to mark the extent of the leadership styles on a scale of 1 to 5, only if it was present. Thus, Table 2 summarises the percentage and mean of the responses.

Table 2: Results illustrating Prevailing Leadership Styles

Leadership styles	1=Rarely present		2=Occasionally present		3=Moderately present		4=Noticeably present		5=Highly present		Mean	SD
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Autocratic	80	31.9%	32	12.7%	84	33.5%	45	17.9%	6	2.4%	2.5	1.19
Consultative	8	3.2%	47	18.7%	57	22.7%	104	41.4%	31	12.4%	3.4	1.04
Consensus	8	3.2%	19	7.6%	56	22.3%	125	49.8%	33	13.1%	3.6	0.93
Democratic	23	9.2%	96	38.2%	68	27.1%	25	10.0%	34	13.5%	2.8	1.18
Authority-Compliance	78	31.1%	44	17.5%	55	21.9%	64	25.5%	3	1.2%	2.5	1.22
Country Club Management	68	27.1%	38	15.1%	87	34.7%	44	17.5%	2	0.8%	2.5	1.11
Impoverished Management	129	51.4%	29	11.6%	48	19.1%	26	10.4%	7	2.8%	2.0	1.20
Middle-of-the-Road Management	90	35.9%	48	19.1%	64	25.5%	32	12.7%	5	2.0%	2.2	1.15
Team Management	8	3.2%	20	8.0%	97	38.6%	46	18.3%	76	30.3%	3.7	1.10
Transformational Leadership	18	7.2%	33	13.1%	92	36.7%	73	29.1%	20	8.0%	3.2	1.03

The mean analysis of the survey reveals that mostly consensus and team management leadership style is moderate to noticeably present in the office environment of the construction industry.

Almost 40% respondents felt that consultative leadership style, while about 50% of the respondents believed consensus leadership style are noticeably prevalent. However, about 30% respondents are of the opinion that team management leadership style is highly present in the office environment of the construction industry in Dubai.

4. Conclusions

The success in achieving an organisation's goals and objectives depends on managers and their leadership style (Mosadeghard, 2003). Though there are several styles of leadership such as autocratic, participative, transactional and transformational, not everyone agrees that a particular style of leadership will result

in the most effective form of organisational behaviour. The research has explored earlier work in the field of leadership styles (Stewart; 1994; Blake & Mouton, 1985; Bass, 1985), which is defined by Dubrin (2004) as a leader's combination of attitude and behaviour which leads to certain regularity and predictability in dealing with group members. There are a number of previous studies which have examined leadership style in the Arab world (Ali *et al.*, 1995, Al-Jafary and Hollingsworth, 1983; Muna, 1980, Yousef, 2000), which suggest that Arab culture nurtures consultative and participative styles. Preference for these type of leadership styles in the Arab world is associated to the influence of Islamic and tribalistic values and beliefs by some researchers (Ali, 1989a; Yousef, 2000), since both Islamic and tribal law reinforce consultation in all aspects of life.

The analysis indicates that the construction industry has Democratic, Consensus, and Team Management leadership styles. One reason is the multicultural workforce in the industry, due to which leaders tend to lead by mutual consultation and try to integrate concerns for production and people at the same time. Cultural aspects play a decisive role in determining effective leadership for construction organisations in Dubai. As previous researchers confirm, leadership styles differ significantly from country to country and also different decision styles are adopted based on the pattern of organisation and their individual characteristics (Blyton, 1980; Tayeb, 1988 Ali, 1989; Evans *et al.* 1989). Whilst reviewing the available literature and results from the survey it was found that employees in the construction industry of Dubai would prefer to have Consensus and Team Management leadership styles.

The investigation of Ali *et al.* (1995) and Yousef (2000) indicate that most predominant leadership styles in UAE are consultative and participative styles, which validates the studies of Al-Jafary and Hollingsworth (1983) and Muna (1980) in the Arab world. The results of the present study indicate that office employees in the construction industry feel that Consensus and Team Management leadership styles are predominantly prevalent in the industry, which are similar to the earlier findings. It implies that leaders in the industry encourage participation, involvement, and commitment before making decisions. They facilitate group discussions and decisions are made on general agreement of employees. A reason could be that since the industry in the Dubai is a mix of multicultural employees, the leaders prefer to have general consensus before reaching a decision. Further analysis of the results indicates the prevailing leadership styles in Client, Consultant, and Contractor's organisation as summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Prevailing Leadership Styles according to the Type of Organisation

Type of Organisation	Prevailing Leadership styles
Client (Private Developers)	Consensus, Team Management, Transformational leadership
Consultant (Engineering Design organisations)	Consultative, Consensus, Team Management
Contractor (Engineering construction)	Consensus

Brozik (1994) argues that no one type of management style is best in all situations and that the leader, the subordinates and the environment or the task determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of each style. Likert and Likert (1976) argue that the

participative style is more productive in any culture. Al-Jafary and Hollingworth (1983) also found a significant correlation between the facets of the management system (e.g. support, team building, goal emphasis, help with work, involvement) and that of the measures of organisations' effectiveness.

Latest research by Toor and Ofori (2006) concludes that there is no one leadership style which can be claimed as all time best and this correlates to earlier research studies. The uniqueness of the construction projects and distinct critical factors on every project makes it difficult to determine the best leadership style (Toor & Ofori, 2006). The results shown in Table 4 indicate that in general, employees prefer Democratic, Consensus and Team Management type of leadership styles.

Table 4: Top Three Leadership Styles preferred by Employees in each Type of Organisation

Overall	Client organisation	Consultant organisation	Contractor organisation
Democratic	Team Management	Consultative	Democratic
Consensus	Democratic	Consensus	Transformational
Team Management	Consultative	Team Management	Consensus

Literature has contented that leadership behaviour is culturally determined and hence varies markedly from culture to culture (e.g. Aram and Piriano, 1978; Burger and Bass, 1979; Wright, 1981; Bass, 1990; Adler, 1991). Robbins (1993) suggests that national culture plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of leadership style. Campbell *et al.* (1993) note that leadership style itself and eventual task outcome had a strong impact on perceptions of appropriateness of leadership style, whereas gender and organisational setting had no substantive impact. The type of industry sector (private or public) and an organisation's size play important roles in the determination of the effectiveness of leadership style.

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