Cross Cultural Leadership in Higher Educational Institutions – A Study with Special Reference to Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on need and role of a Leader by exploring which one would be the most suited Leadership style in the cross cultural context for Higher Educational Institutions in Oman. The Leadership style explored and studied in this paper is - Transformational and Distributive Leadership styles. The paper highlights the Leadership roles of Heads of the institution for transformation in the cross cultural context.

Keywords: Cross cultural context, Transformational and Distributive Leadership

1. Introduction

Cross cultural Leaders of Higher Educational Institutions (HEI's) working as Dean, Director of Head of the Departments in different Institutions where students of different nationalities exist, face challenges on day to day basis for its re- innovation, reengineering and re- vision oriented. (Cross cultural means relating to or involving two or more different cultures or countries) Wilkenson, Fourie, Stydom, van der Westhuizen and van Tonder (2004), confirms the above statement and state that Higher Educational Institutions are required to reform their mission so that academic resources may be utilized in the best possible manner to meet the challenges posed to Higher Educational institutions in the 21st century. Since many years, social, cultural, political and technological changes have taken place globally which has forced to reform the educational systems globally. (Abdullah M. Abu-Tineh, Samer A. Khasawneh and Aieman A. Al-Omari (2008). A lot of reforms have taken place in education sector in Oman due to Omanization policy because of which many of the expat faculties are being replaced with the new trained Omani faculties. (Omanization is a campaign meant not only to ensure job for each citizen but also to reduce dependence on expatriates in search of self-reliance in human resource) (MONE, 2012). The person who acts as Head of In charge to run Higher Educational Institutions are constantly changing the way to deal with different situations as demands have increased due to increasing responsibilities that the governments have imposed upon them (Lam and Pang, 2003). It is in this context the topic is of utmost importance in today's changing environment in Oman.

2. Problem formulation

In Oman there were 34 Public and 27 Private Higher educational institutions in the academic year 2012 – 13. (http://www.heac.gov.om/downloads/AdmissionStatasticalReports/StaticalRep2012-2013.pdf) where faculties, students and staff belong to different nationalities like U.K., Jordan, Iraq, Middle East, Europe, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Japan and Africa. Students with scholarships and grants enrolled outside Oman according to country and gender in Higher Educational Institutions in Oman comprise of 0.6% from U.A.E., 0.85 from Bahrain, 0.1% from Saudi Arabia, 1.75 from Kuwait, 1.0% from Qatar, 1.6% from Australia, 2.2% from Germany, 14.05 from United Kingdom of Great Britain, 6.8% from Australia, 0.6% from India, 38.05 from U.S.A, 3.5% from Poland, 5.9% from Turkey, 6.4% from Ireland, 2.9% from Malta, 5.5% from Malaysia, 1.3% from New Zealand and 6.4% from Netherlands. (http://www.heac.gov.om/downloads/AdmissionStatasticalReports/StaticalRep2012-2013.pdf) With such a students from diverse background, it poses a problem to the Heads of the Higher Educational institutions to cope up on day to day basis; hence it is quite evident that Heads of Institutions are required to have a capable Leadership to handle the students from diverse background.

3. Objectives of the research

The objective of this research is to find which leadership styles would be effective for Higher Educational Institutions in dealing with students and faculties in the cross cultural context in Oman.

We chose two leadership style i.e. Transformational and Distributed leadership for our study since positive correlation was found between these two variables in the previous researches done in cross cultural context in higher educational institutions in western countries. So the objective is to explore whether these two leadership styles would be suited and if yes, then which one of them would be the best Leadership styles in cross cultural context in higher educational institutions in Sultanate of Oman.

4. Developments in Oman Higher Education

Many developments have taken place in Oman Higher Educational system since its inception. Many private higher educational institutions have come up; Government has started giving incentives for youth to gain education by providing them scholarships. Many employees working in the Ministries, Government departments and other private industries have started taking admissions to enhance their education by taking admission in Higher Education Institutions as part – time students. Many students who were send abroad to U.K. or U.S.A. for educations by the Government on scholarship are being accommodated as faculty in Higher Educational Institutions. So in many Higher Educational institutions where Omanization has not taken place fully, faculties exist are from diverse background and it is because these developments, the researcher wanted to explore the Leadership styles most suited in the cross cultural context.

5. Transformational leadership in HEI's

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership where the leader is charged with identifying the needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in tandem with committed members of the group. (http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/transformational-leadership.html) We chose transformational leadership for our study because previous researches have shown that Transformational leadership is adopted by most of the Head of higher educational Institutions so that adaptation can be completed to meet the constantly changing economic and academic environment. Aitkin (1998) and Bass (1999) argued the power of the educational leaders can be used effectively when the leader (Dean, Vice-chancellor or Director of HEI's) have a vision, have a sense of mission and agenda. Leaders who encourage and support transformation leadership share power, are willing to learn from others, and are sensitive to each team member's needs for achievement and growth (Gous, 2003).Those attributes need to come from inside and not from the university itself from reflection from one's personal value (Aitkin, 1998). According to Bass (2000), transformational leadership refers to the leader's moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration. Idealized influence is described as charisma of a leader. Leaders who are Charismatic, try to project their self-confidence into others (Sarror and Santora, 2001). This construct constitutes the charismatic factor of transformational leadership in which leaders become role models for ethical behavior by their followers (Avolio and Bass, 2002). Influence or Charisma generates the faith, pride and respect that leaders encourage their subordinates to have in them, while inspiration is the ability to motivate followers through communication of high level expectations (Garcia-Morales, Matias-Reche and Hurtado- Torres, 2008). In intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders stimulate their followers to be innovative and creative by reframing problems, diagnosing old problems and questioning assumptions in new ways. (Avolio and Bass, 2002). Individualized consideration is described as the leadership behaviors of dealing with followers as important contributors to the organization

6. Distributed leadership in Higher Educational Institutions

Distributed leadership was chooses to study because previous literature have shown that Distributed leadership is practiced in most of the higher educational institutions. Some of the authors have found that there is direct impact of changes on specific leadership roles in Universities and college. Leithwood etal (2006) determined that in educational institutions systems, the core leadership functions that often get 'distributed' by the Head of the Institutions using distributive leadership include Setting direction, Redesigning Organization, Managing Instructional Program and Developing People. Distributive leadership focuses on interdependency by the leaders sharing responsibility with subordinates (Harris, 2003). In distributive leadership, every individual can be a part of and demonstrate leadership in their organizations (Goleman 2002). Distributive leadership is a holistic approach where leaders streamline the activities in which organizational constituents find themselves entangled (Gronn, 2000). This theory promotes the concept of decentralization of the leader as collective episodes in the organization (Harris, 2003). It does not imply that everyone in a group is a leader, but opens the possibility for a more collective leadership approaches (Harris, 2003). In setting direction the vision of the college is used for setting the direction and its goal.

7. Research Methodology

Leadership styles of Head of Intuitions were measured in two ways. First how the Head of the Institutions perceived themselves and secondly how the departmental heads perceived the Head of the Institutions. A quantitative research methodology was used for measuring variables that occur in sequence, with one of the variable being predecessor to another variable (Creswell, 2009). All data were collected from the same group of participants i.e. 30 Heads and departmental heads from 12 colleges of Muscat. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998), sampling adequacy of 0.7 and above as determined by the means of the Kaiser-

Meyer-Olkin measure, is required for acceptability. In our research the value of KMO measure of sampling adequacy was found to be 0.95. Questionnaire was designed by using the transformational and distributed questions from Multi Factor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1992). Previous studies on MLQ's validity and internal consistency have demonstrated that it is effective in identifying Transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles, though the scaling methods are somewhat modified (Den Hartog, Van Muijen, & Koopman, 1997) but in our research we used only Transformational and Distributed questions. Data was analyzed with descriptive statistics (central tendency- mean and standard deviation) and correlation analysis. This was done to explore the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

8. Research Findings

In the age group from 40 to 60 years in a sample of 30 respondents, it was found that approximately 68% belonged to the age group of 40 to 45 years, approximately 15% belonged to the age group of 46 to 50 years, and approximately 10% belonged to the age group of 51 to 55 years age group and approximately 75 belonged to the age group of 56 to 60 years. We did not cover the respondents above 60 years of age as it was presumed that the retirement age universally is 60 years. Approximately 56% of the respondents belonged to India, around 6% belonged to Pakistan, approximately 3% belonged to Bangladesh, 2% belonged to Germany, around 31% belonged to Oman and around 4% where from different nationalities. Around 3% of the respondents had less than 5 years of service experience, around 2% had service experience between 6 to 10 years of years of service experience, around 56% had 11 to 15 years of service experience, around 31% had service experience between 16 to 20 years, around 6% had experience between 21 to 25 years, around 3% had service experience between 25 to 30 years and 2 % had service experience above 30 years.

9. The Extent to which Transformational Leadership is prevalent in Heads of Institutions

The mean scores of transformational factors for Head of Institutions and departmental heads rated themselves ranged from 3.23 to 3.77 (on a scale of 0-5). Mean scores for the outcomes of leadership reflected similar findings, with mean scores ranging from 4.35 to 5.46. In this 30 sample study from 8 colleges of Head of Institutions and departmental heads felt their leadership style was more transformational and the scores for outcomes of leadership were also higher. This supports our first hypothesis that Transformational leadership approach will be adopted by the head of the institutions of different colleges and universities in higher educational institutions in Oman. This was in congruent with previous researches which found that Transformational leaders produce higher levels of these three outcomes of leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The answer to second question (To find which component of Transformational Leadership is more pronounced in HEI's of Oman) was - The major component contributing to Transformational leader was Individualized Consideration since its mean was 3.67. This means that Head of Institutions and departmental heads consider dealing with followers as important contributors to the organization and they hold subordinates' trust, maintain their faith and respect, show dedication to them, appeal to their hopes and dreams, and act as their role model. Transformational Leadership was found in those institutions where expats were more in number than other nationality staff and students who were less in number. Some of the respondents answered that it may be due to the external pressure by the Government i.e. Ministry of Higher Education, to facilitate educational improvement and improve quality in their institutions for which transformation was required in their institutions. The mean scores for the transactional factors ranged from 1.18 to 1.61, while the lowest score was for the Laissezfaire leadership factor at 0.29. The answer to third question (To find the relationship between different components of Transformational leadership) we found strong positive correlations ($p<.01$) exists between all seven leadership factors and the two outcomes of leadership.

10. The Extent to which Distributive Leadership is prevalent in HEI's

Distributed Leadership approach was found in those institutions where expats were less in number and Omani students were more in number. This was found in some of the Government colleges because their heads wanted to promote the concept of "Faculty ownership". It was also found that distributed leadership style was higher among the Heads of the departments of some colleges. This supports our second hypothesis that Distributed leadership approach will be practiced by the head of the institutions of different colleges and universities in higher educational institutions in Oman. The answer to the fifth question (To find which component of Distributed leadership is more pronounced in HEI's of Oman) was – "Setting direction", as it had the highest average mean of 3.6 across all items compared to the other distributive leadership functions. Managing the instructional program had the mean of 3.7 and redesigning organization had the mean of 3.5 Developing people had the weakest response rate average mean of 2.8 across all items because many colleges do not have the program for "Developing people". It is interesting to note that, on average, over 78% of the respondents either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with items related to distributive leadership and setting direction. On average, over 69% of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with items related to managing the

instructional program. On average, over 64% had either a large role or it was their primary role in related to distributive leadership redesigning organization. Lastly, over 59% of the respondents had a small role or no role at all regarding components of developing people within distributive leadership components. To answer the sixth research question (To find the relationship between different components of Distributed leadership) Pearsons correlations were computed among the four distributive leadership functions. The results of the correlation analyses indicate whether the particular correlations are significant. In this case, all correlations are significant at the $p < .01$ level and range from 0.39 to .57 and are moderately correlated. In Distributive leadership function "setting direction" and "Developing people" have the strongest correlation. It means the Head of the institution should focus on developing people due to higher degrees of accountability by introducing programs for professional learning outcomes.

11. Conclusion

In cross cultural Higher Educational Institutions Transformational Leadership was found to be predominant in those educational institutions where expats were more in number whereas Distributed Leadership approach was found to be practiced in those institutions where Omani student and staff were more in number and expats were less in number. Transformational leadership in Higher Educational institutions would result in good performance, deeper trust, higher cohesion among the staff and students along with greater commitment. We conclude that though transformational leaders may be best suited leadership style in the cross cultural context in Higher Educational Institutions, Distributed Leadership along with the strategic change would be better oriented in future times to come after the paradigm shift in cross cultural environment in Oman.

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