



EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS AND BEHAVIOURS FOR FEMALE DEPARTMENT CHAIRS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract:

The academic department is a fundamental unit for transforming the university's visions and goals into reality. In contrast, higher education undervalues administrative positions in general and department chairs in particular, believing that an administrative role is a temporary task. Little investigation has been conducted into effective leadership approaches in departmental leadership in higher education in general and in higher education in Saudi Arabia in particular. Therefore, the overarching purpose of this study was to identify effective leadership practices, characteristics and behaviors that contribute to the effectiveness of female academic department chairs and the challenges that they face. A qualitative approach informed with grounded theory techniques was used in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with former department chairs, current department chairs and faculty members. Vignettes were the basis of the faculty members' interviews to avoid any ethical concerns and to allay any fears of repercussion from their department chairs. The findings of the study indicate that effective chairs are distinguished by a combination of skills, knowledge, behaviors and attitudes. Although leadership in Saudi Arabia is based on a centralized system, the findings demonstrate the tendency toward more collaborative leadership that promotes collegiality and collective interest. Specific recommendations were made to better prepare department chairs for this crucial position in institutions of higher education. The study came at a time when the country is taking significant reforms in women's issues.

Keywords: leadership; challenges; Saudi higher education; women leadership; departmental leadership; effective leadership

Introduction

Driven by the pressures of globalization, education has become an area of competition as countries follow international trends; thus, they strive to increase the quality and the efficiency of their education. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that have been striving to increase the quality of the education. For instance, considerable attention is being paid to the advancement of higher education institutions. Although the government is allocating significant funding for the advancement of higher education, money alone is not sufficient to ensure the advancement of Saudi universities (Altbach, 2011). Nor is direct management by the government appropriate, as Delener (2013) indicated in his systematic review of the literature to identify the effective leadership practices in higher educations. The officials at higher education institutions are still striving to develop an academic culture with high standards and to develop universities to be competitive internationally (Altbach, 2011).

The university department is a fundamental unit for transforming the university's goals into reality. Hence, the vigorous contribution of each department, which depends in turn largely on the effectiveness of the department chair, is fundamental to the achievement of the university's goals and for the advancement of the entire institution. Ironically, department chairs are in a critical position that links the administration to faculty members and faculty members to the administration, they are lack of leadership background and preparation which become a source of frustration for the chairs. Furthermore, with the increased responsibilities and pressure on chairs, they can lose their sight of the basic leadership principles (Lees, Malik & Vemuri, 2009). In their book *Higher Education in Saudi Arabia* Smith and Abouammoh (2013) noted the need for effective leadership that promotes creativity, innovation and collaboration. Furthermore, with increased numbers of faculty having graduated from foreign universities, some chairs attempt to apply foreign approaches to leading their department; in some cases, this approach affects the department negatively consuming time and resources (Alamri, 2011). Although the roles and responsibilities of department chairs is a topic that has been intensively studied in the last 40 years (Murry & Stauffacher, 2001), yet there is little in the literature that investigates effective leadership approaches in departmental leadership in higher education in general (Bryman, 2007; Trocchi & Andrus, 2003) and in higher education in Saudi Arabia in particular. The majority of studies of leadership effectiveness have been conducted at U.S. universities, although some have been done at UK and Australian universities (Bryman, 2007; Dasmalchian, Javidan & Alam, 2001).

Since women have begun occupying integral administrative positions in higher education in Saudi Arabia, this study of the female academic sector enhances women's effectiveness in administrative and leadership roles. At the same time, inquiring into the challenges that department chairs encounter contributes to the development of different, effective practices to cope with the challenges (Bolden, Petrov, Gosling & Bryman, 2009). Hence, the aim of this study was to identify effective leadership characteristics and practices for female department chairs, which can be proposed for current and potential department chairs in universities in Saudi Arabia. The result of this analysis can be used to prepare current chairs and prepare faculty members for the future positions as Cooper & Pagotto (2003) pointed out, *"The positive outcomes of leadership can best be achieved by properly preparing faculty for these new roles"* (p. 31).

Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, an Overview

Higher education in Saudi Arabia is based on the Islamic code of ethics, the essential ideology that frames the lifestyle in the Kingdom. University education is offered to men and women equally, yet programs are segregated by gender. The segregation means two different faculties: one faculty for male and another for female; however, the males are carrying more weight in the higher council of higher education. The female section, as with many government sectors in the country, operates under the umbrella of men. All the curricula are infused with religious content, and teaching Islamic studies and Arabic is obligatory in every discipline. Although Islamic ideology is the essential element for education, Westernized aspects of education have impacted Saudi education (Elyas & Picard, 2013). The neoliberal element has been pushing for educational reform in the Kingdom. The impact is exemplified in changes to curricula to incorporate more global subjects, the increased numbers of Saudi students studying abroad, the implementation of more English curriculum and the increased focus on scientific and technological development to promote international competitiveness.

In Islamic law education is mandatory for men and women equally, in historical times Saudi women's responsibilities were limited to raising children and household management; their educational opportunities were limited. In the late twentieth century, women's education was recognized as a valuable investment because of their effective role in the country's advancement. In this regard, King Abdullah declared,

"When we talk about general development, we cannot overlook or ignore women's role...Women have achieved the highest levels in the educational field...we are anticipating giving them an active role to develop this nation based on Islamic principles."

(The Ministry of Higher Education, 2012, p. 3)

The educational achievement of Saudi women demonstrates the government's commitment to women's education and presence in critical positions, such as the Highest Council of the country.

Literature Review

Although the pressure for higher education is increasing, and the academic department is the unit where change starts and future leaders and instructors are prepared, there is insufficient research addressing effective leadership at the department level. Most of the literature on leadership in higher education focuses rather on senior and central administration. Furthermore, the literature on department chairs focuses on the roles, tasks and responsibilities of department chairs without giving adequate consideration to the characteristics that assist department chairs to perform effectively, or the effective practices for excellence in this role.

The literature confirmed that the effective characteristics and behaviors of leadership are contextual. What is considered effective leadership in one context can be ineffective in another (English, 2008; Grint, 2005; Knight & Trowler, 2001; Raines & Alberg, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2001; Pillai, Scandura, & Williams, 1999). Another fact that emerged from the search of the literature is the scarcity of studies that focus on the departmental level, although there is considerable emphasis on the critical position of department chairs. In addition, most of the literature on leadership in higher education is based on studies in Western industrialized countries, as noted by authors such as Bryman (2007); Dastmalchian, Javidan and Alam (2001) in their literature review of leadership studies. Very few studies of academic leadership have been conducted in other parts of the world. Looking closely to Saudi culture, the literature on leadership in Saudi culture is very small. Metcalfe and Mimouni (2011) articulated, *"There is a remarkable scarcity of solid studies on leadership theory and practices in Saudi Arabia"* (p. 180). A computer search in many databases shows that even the existing literature about leadership in Saudi Arabia came from the business sector. Accordingly, conducting this study in a Middle Eastern country adds a new perspective to the knowledge of leadership in higher education and denotes how culture influences and shapes leadership practices.

Departmental Leadership

Several external forces contributed to the development, and increase, of academic departments in the 1880s and 1890s. The demand for specialized education and research from business, industry, and government sectors was one factor (Dyer & Miller, 1999). The rapid expansion in knowledge increased the need for departmental

distinctions and growth (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch & Tucker, 1999). Accordingly, since the 1880s the position of academic chair was established to assist academic units to operate proficiently. In the early 1900s, the position evolved into one of the most critical positions in universities (Dyer & Miller). Since then, the academic department has played an integral role in the establishment and development of higher education institutions. In addition, each department has to be responsive to the ongoing demands for change in today's world. Most of the literature on departmental leadership emphasizes that the department's goal cannot be accomplished through individual effort alone; thus, collective strategic work with department members is a crucial factor for departmental success.

The position of department chair is vital, as it represents a link between faculty and higher administration. The department chair is a conduit to convey faculty concerns to the upper administrators and convey the upper administrators' decisions to their faculty. Some of the phrases used in the literature to describe the chair position express this aspect of the role. The chair is likened to Janus, a Roman mythological deity known for having two faces, which indicates being a colleague and administrator (McArthur, 2002). With regard to the position Tucker, in his work in departmental leadership, described it in 1981 as "first among equal," meaning that the position of departmental chair is occupied by a faculty member (Riley & Russell, 2005). However, this position is considered to be in a grey area, both because of its inherent ambiguities, and in the methods of selecting chairs. (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch & Tucker, 1999).

The essence of departmental leadership is the ability to build collective functioning in the department that fulfills the objectives of both the department and the institution (Chu, 2006; Gmelch, 2000; Hecht, 2006; Lucas & Associates, 2000). Accordingly, department chairs are tasked with numerous disparate roles and responsibilities.

Effective leadership by department chairs. The literature shows that the effective characteristics and practices of department chairs vary depending on the context. Hence, there is no formula that develops or precisely describes the effective department leadership. Yet, consensus was noticed in the literature that the leadership style of department chairs impacts departmental effectiveness (Gomes & Knowles, 1999). Furthermore, some principles for effective chairs were identified frequently in the literature, such as effective communication skills, conveying vision, and building trust and respect. In their study to compare leadership behaviors across 19 departments in 11 research-intensive universities, Gibbs, Knapper and Piccinin (2008) found, after interviewing the participants, that different behaviors were practiced by academic leaders to achieve leadership excellence. Accordingly, they argued that department heads have to pay considerable attention to the context, rather than applying general leadership theories.

Methodology

Most researchers who have studied this topic have either developed their own survey, or used another leadership survey. The use of a given survey presents participants with predetermined characteristics to rate. The drawbacks to this approach are that significant questions may be missed, some questions may not apply to the setting being studied, so participants may choose unrelated answers, or that the choices offered may present options unsuited to the institution's circumstances. Providing the participants the opportunity to express their views through interviews allowed them to ground the data on an authentic platform of relevant experience.

Accordingly, for this study semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain information from three groups of participants: five former department chairs, four current department chairs and four faculty members. The length of each interview was approximately between 20 to 45 minutes. Follow-up interviews were conducted with some participants to obtain deeper insight into the information they provided in the first interview. Department chairs were asked questions related to their perceptions of leadership and effective leadership; the characteristics, qualities and behaviors of effective department chairs; their own experiences in leading their departments; and finally the challenges that they faced.

Vignettes were used as the basis for the interviewing faculty members. This approach helped avoid any ethical issues associated with the possibility that faculty members might be inclined to express their opinions regarding their current or former department chairs. Vignettes describing hypothetical situations in an imaginary women's department of education at an unnamed Saudi university gave them freedom to express their thoughts without any concern. The interviews were, for the most part, conducted face to face in Saudi Arabia; however three interviews were conducted by phone upon the participants' request. All except two of the interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated into English, which assisted the researcher in analysis. Having a transcript of the interview allowed immersion in the data, and facilitated the constant comparison of the data, as will be explained later in this chapter.

In analysing the data, the techniques elaborated by Charmaz (2006) for data analysis in grounded theory was used. The strength of grounded theory lies in the analytical process which demonstrates how meaning and social life are constructed (Charmaz). In grounded theory, research, data collection and analysis have to be done simultaneously; in this case the process of data collection nourishes the process of analysis. A research journal was used, which included memos, reflections, and observations; it helped as a lens that sharpened the researcher's perspective. Birks and Mills (2011) compared the use of memos to adding lubricant to cogs in a machine to enable it to move smoothly.

Charmaz's procedures incorporate two stages of coding, open coding and focused coding; the use of memoing; and a constant comparative approach. After translation and review of all the transcriptions, the data was imported into a software data analysis program, NVivo. Using computer software also assisted in storing the data, locating text associated with particular codes, making comparisons among code labels, and writing and storing memos (Creswell, 2013). The use of software usually promotes the credibility of the work because it reduces the inevitable human errors inherent in manual analysis (Welsh, 2002).

After all the data was coded, the next stage of coding, which is the focused coding phase, was used. In this phase, the most significant categories, and any related ones, were selected and placed under central themes. This step does not mean ignoring some of the data, rather it helps to focus on the information relevant to the study, and organize related codes under themes to facilitate analysis. The constant comparative approach proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was also used in this phase. The approach means comparing different participants' perspectives, data to data, categories to data, and categories to categories. It was employed to compare data to data, data to codes, and codes to data. This approach assisted in identifying similarities, differences, and patterns in the data, and in identifying the main themes. In addition, throughout the coding and categorizing process, memo was also used to assist placing the codes in tentative conceptual categories.

Findings

The data collected in this study yielded the following elements for effective department chairs, which have been characterized as skills, knowledge, behaviours and attitudes important for the effectiveness of department chairs. This list is in no particular order.

1. Skills related to time management, problem solving, organizational skills to meeting management and interpersonal skills.
2. Having knowledge in leadership theories and practices, knowing their responsibilities and rights, and knowing the policies, rules and regulations of their organization.
3. Their behaviors encompass: appreciating, respecting and motivating people, delegating, trusting and involving people, engaging with people, consultation, team building, reinforcing relationships, clear communication, convincing/justifying decisions, asking questions, practicing and/or being close to the administrative roles, doing no harm to anybody, and being a good listener.
4. The participants indicated that chairs need to be confident, creative, innovative, accepting of change, patient, persistent, passionate, working according to their vision, leading by example, having commitment, being fair and being flexible.

Many other important findings emerged from analyzing the data which are:

1. The research reveals an increased tendency towards leadership that enhances the growth of followers, and fosters a cooperative and collegial environment.
2. Although Saudi organizations are based on a centralized system, and people expect to be told what to do, leaders are encouraged to justify their decisions to foster a culture of respect, collegiality and cooperation.
3. Despite the claim that their faculty's work is autonomous, leaders in higher education need to encourage a sense of engagement, collegiality and cooperation to promote personal development, and the overall effectiveness of their organization.
4. The position of department chair is critical for the success of higher education, yet no formalized preparation is offered to chairs.
5. Servant leadership is emphasized in Islamic thought, and some of the traits identified in effective department chairs can be characterized as servant leadership.
6. A style built on collegiality, cooperation, appreciation, and considering collective interest over self-interest is a potent force toward effective leadership at the departmental level.
7. The title of department supervisor, or facilitator, is preferred over department chair, because the latter denotes a sense of domination.
8. Department chairs believe in the value of leadership knowledge, and must have theoretical as well as practical knowledge relating to effective leadership. They must also know the policies, rules and regulations of the organization and the responsibilities and rights of their position.
9. Chairs need to bring certain attitudes to their work. These attitudes increase the likelihood of being effective.
10. Department chairs identified a larger number of skills, such as people skills, problem solving skills, and meeting management skills, than did the faculty members.
11. Although empowerment is a component of some contemporary leadership approaches, it is not indicated as a quality for a leader in the literature in Saudi context. However, providing opportunities for development and willingness to delegate, which are forms of empowerment, are expected and considered a quality for an effective chair.
12. Chairs face two categories of challenges: challenges with people and challenges with rules and regulations. Evaluating faculty members, dealing with diverse personalities and student/faculty complaints are examples of challenges with people. The challenges with rules and regulations include: unclear rules and regulations, technological challenges, and the pressures of work.

13. Retaining faculty members and managing limited resources are not challenges in the context of Saudi higher education.
14. Department chairs need to dig deeper to find and understand the rules and regulations. Although the regulations and responsibilities in many organizations are not available to the public, they must be easy to find and interpret.

Department Chairs' Views vs. Faculty Members' Views

Although the study found much consistency in the perceptions of department chairs and faculty members regarding characteristics and practices of effective department chairs, there were also a number of differences that emerged between the two groups in the analysis. Table 1 shows the areas identified by the two groups within the categories and themes. It appears there is considering agreement between the two groups regarding the behaviors and characteristics which help establish and maintain collegiality in a department. As the Table indicates they agreed on the importance of time management skills; on knowing policies, rules, and regulations; on appreciating/respecting/ motivating/involving people; team building; and nurturing relationships. There was consensus too on the need for clear communication, and for a willingness to explain decision. Again, the importance of self-confidence, patience, fairness and flexibility, as well as being a good listener was stressed by both faculty members and chairs.

The greatest discrepancies appeared in the areas relating to the skills and knowledge that effective department chairs should have. Department chairs identified a larger number of skills--such as people skills, problem solving skills and meeting management skills--than did the faculty members. In relation to knowledge, the participants department chairs indicated the importance of having knowledge in leadership and knowing their responsibilities and rights. These differences may not have emerged because the latter areas are unimportant in the opinion of faculty members. There are at least two possible explanations for the differences. First, the faculty members appeared to be more narrowly focused on the relationship with their department chairs, and what the qualities and behaviors they perceived to be essential for effective chairs were based on their daily interactions. The additional points identified by the chairs can be explained because of their wider range of interactions with different groups, such as upper administration, students, and the public. A second possible reason can be found in the fact that the chairs were actually doing the work of chairs, or had done so in the recent past, and so their responses came from a different perspective than did those of faculty members. Not surprisingly they pointed out the need to be willing to learn from others and from experience; the need to be able to

delegate effectively; the importance of persistence, commitment, and passion; and of being well organized.

Challenges Encountered by Department Chairs

The research was also intended to identify the challenges that department chairs encountered. As the literature suggests, information about challenges could encourage the search for approaches to cope with such challenges. The interviews revealed the following challenges faced by department chairs in the following areas:

1. Evaluating faculty members;
2. Leading peers and negotiating the generation gap;
3. Leading diverse personalities;
4. Managing faculty and student complaints;
5. Working with unclear rules and regulations;
6. Working with constant technological change;
7. Coping with the magnitude of the workload;
8. Administrating and learning within the limited authority.

Discussion

The Findings in the Light of Islamic Views of Leadership

Leaders must motivate their followers to accomplish a mutual goal; when the values and ethics of the followers and their leaders are shared, moving toward the goals become easier. In other words, when values are attached to the practice of leadership, the leader's effectiveness is enhanced accordingly. Sergiovanni (2001) also underscored that people respond more effectively to norms based on values and beliefs than to administrative control.

In Islam, there is no separation between spiritual life and temporal life; hence, it is apparent why the behaviours of leaders are informed by Islamic teaching. The preservation of Islamic values such as integrity, honesty and humility reinforce the effectiveness of department chairs.

In Islam, there is no separation between spiritual and temporal leadership behaviours (AlSarhi, Salleh, Mohamed & Amini, 2014). For instance, Aabed (2006), in his study of leadership theory and practice in a K-12 Islamic school in Michigan asserted that according to Islamic views, effective leadership has to be established by implementing Islamic principles in leaders' practices and behaviors. However, presenting religious values in practice is not necessarily an indication of the spirituality of the person. For instance, an atheist could display values such as integrity, honesty and humility, which might be characterized as religious values. In Greenleaf's writing

on servant leadership, he equated a leader's behaviours in serving others to spiritual values.

Throughout the interviews, participants on several occasions related their behaviours to Islam. In addition, the present study found no contradiction between the principles associated with leadership in the Islamic view and the participants' insights. Since Islam is the state religion of Saudi Arabia, we should not be surprised to find that the participants indicated that they were influenced by Islamic teachings and manifest Islamic values and behaviours in their workplace. The compatibility of their behaviours with Islam is either a result of their beliefs, or because of the way they were raised in an Islamic society. Many of the participating chairs specifically related their work to their faith, and indicated that their faith motivates them to give more because they know that the rewards come from God, not from people. In addition, wherever it occurs, leadership in Islam must be established on trust and accountability. The participants agreed that it is important that trust be present in the department. In addition, accountability, which implies accountability to God as well as to the university and the faculty, was also cited by the participants. They indicated that whenever they work, they try to satisfy God first and then consider the general interest.

The Findings and Leadership in the Light of Saudi Culture

Culture usually shapes the practice of leadership and determines how leaders are expected to behave (Hofstede, G. H., Hofstede, G. & Minkov, 2010; House, 2004; Schein, 2004; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2000). The findings of the study support the literature in this regard. The findings clearly demonstrate that Islam and Saudi culture have an impact on shaping the characteristics and behaviors of effective department chairs in higher education. In addressing the findings in comparison to Saudi culture, Hofstede's (2010) five dimensions of Saudi culture were used as a framework.

Hofstede's five dimensions of culture is a valuable tool for understanding national cultures, which helps in describing the differences and similarities between cultural groups. The five dimensions are:

1. Power Distance (PDI).
2. Individualism/Collectivism (IDV).
3. Masculinity/Femininity (MAS).
4. Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI).
5. Long/Short Term Orientation (LTO).

Although empowerment is a component of some contemporary leadership approaches, such as transformational leadership, the literature on the Saudi higher education system, which is a centralized system, does not indicate that empowerment is a characteristic of effective leaders (Alamri, 2011; Alkhazim, 2003; Elyas & Picard, 2013; Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). The first dimension of Hofstede's study on national

culture and human behaviors deals with power distance, which indicates the extent to which people accept the unequal distribution of power, and how willingly they accept orders given by their superiors. In Hofstede's findings, Saudi Arabia scored high in this dimension, which may explain why the literature does not mention the word empowerment as one of the qualities of the leaders in higher education. Furthermore, Alahmadi (2011), in her study of the challenges facing women leader in Saudi Arabia, indicated that empowerment, which means leadership training opportunities and freedom in decision making, is not fully achieved in women sectors. In spite of the literature that does not indicate that empowerment is a characteristic for an effective leader, and even though most Saudi organizations are hierarchical in structure, the participants in this study indicated that they expect a leader to provide developmental opportunities, and be able to delegate. Both delegation, and providing developmental opportunities, are forms of empowerment, although the term empowerment was not specifically mentioned by the participants.

Although empowerment may not be seen in the literature as an essential characteristic of an effective leader in the Saudi context, and leaders could potentially be seen to lead effectively by delegating tasks without delegating any authority, this study indicated that chairs saw that they needed to be able to engage their faculty members meaningfully in decision making and in carrying out tasks, collaboratively and collegially when necessary. Furthermore, chairs believed that their effectiveness would be improved if they were able to explain their decision to their faculties, and if they engaged them in the development and delegation process--all forms of empowerment.

The findings indicate that delegation is one of the most important characteristics of an effective chair. The participants differentiated between two types of delegation. The first, which is not effective delegation according to the participants, is delegation of an entire task without follow-up to ensure its completion. The second type, which is characterized by the participants as effective delegation, is delegation plus follow-up.

This classification of the degree of delegation is supported in the literature. Schriesheim and Neider (1988) suggested three forms of delegation: advisory, informational and extreme. Advisory delegation means that subordinates can take action or make decisions after obtaining the leader's approval. Informational delegation means that subordinates can take action and make decisions after acquiring all the pertinent information from the leader. The last form is extreme delegation, in which subordinates perform the entire task without input from the leader. The findings supported the first and second forms of delegation, in which the leader is aware of the progress of the task delegated.

In the dimension of individualism versus collectivism, Saudi Arabia is considered a collective culture in which the interest of the group is predominant over

the individual's interests. Thus, the participants repeatedly emphasized that the interest of the department has to be prioritized over personal interest, and, they indicated, whenever personal interest was higher, leadership was in jeopardy. The participants identified behaviors which nurture the sense of collectivism. They indicated that effective chairs nurture a sense of trust, consulting and involving others. These characteristics reinforce relationships, and assist in team building. Participants also asserted that the interest of the group has to be above the individual's interest.

Hofstede's third dimension has to do with masculinity versus femininity. It indicates the degree to which the dominant values in society lean toward masculinity or femininity. According to Hofstede, the dominant values in a masculine culture are achievement, heroism, assertiveness and competition; whereas the values in a feminine culture are cooperation, caring for others, and modesty. Although, according to Hofstede's findings, Saudi Arabia is considered a highly masculine society, the findings of the current study indicate a valuing of a combination of what are claimed to be masculine and feminine values. In this study, the participants demonstrated a tendency toward achievement, assertiveness, and a willingness to change and modernize, and these qualities support Hofstede's findings that Saudi culture is a masculine culture. However, the participants also leaned toward the feminine values of caring, modesty and cooperation. This may suggest that the masculine/feminine dichotomy may be inappropriate in contexts such as that in which the current study was conducted. Effective leaders in this study indicated that, in order to be effective they needed skills, characteristics and behaviors from both sides of Hofstede's dichotomy. These findings are supported in the literature. For instance, Thompson (2000) pointed to Gipson's 1995 study, which investigated gender-based differences in leadership across four countries, while Young (2004) and Thompson asserted that there are no gender differences in leadership. They found the impact of culture is higher than the impact of gender.

Hofstede's dimension of uncertainty avoidance reflects the degrees to which a society accepts ambiguity and uncertainty. Saudi culture, he asserts, generally tends towards uncertainty avoidance. It is a rule-oriented society, working under central control with many rules and regulations. The findings of the study supported this, as the participants strongly emphasized the significance of knowing the rules and regulations, and working within their framework. In addition, participants were critical of the lack of clarity and vagueness of the rules and regulations. They reported that interpreting rules and regulations was sometimes a challenge. They were hopeful that greater explanatory detail might be provided pertaining to the rules and regulations. This dimension also explained the reason behind the views of one of the participants, who emphasized that her approach was to monitor the carrying out of tasks, even when she had delegated them, because she likes to be certain about everything.

Hofstede pointed out that his findings indicate that Saudi culture is generally oriented to short term, which refers to the tendency towards future, but fairly immediate, rewards. In Saudi culture, people tend to want fast results, and achievement primarily in the short term. The findings of the study support this. The participants indicated that they have to work according to plans, and deal with the short-term tasks first, while having an overall vision of what they are working towards. In addition, they indicated the power of constant support and encouragement, whether in the form of tangible rewards or verbal praise, because they believe that short-term rewards activate, motivate and energize faculty members.

Implications

One benefit of research is that it may suggest implications for theory, for new research directions, and for practices. This study added significant contributions to the leadership literature in higher education in Saudi Arabia. It was undertaken with the goal of contributing to the development, and reinforcing the leadership competency, of the department chair. It identified the characteristics, behaviors and practices for effective department chairs. The literature on effective educational leadership does not appear to focus sufficiently on the department chairs in higher education institutions (Bryman, 2007; Trocchi & Andrus, 2003). As women have begun occupying more important administrative positions in Saudi Arabia, and in higher education in that country in particular, the findings of the study in the female academic sector can enhance women's effectiveness in academic roles. The findings of this study can provide support for current department chairs, and provide guidance for faculty members who aspire to become department chairs. It can serve as a catalyst for policy makers to design leadership programs which encompass practices and qualities that promote department chairs to lead effectively.

The study is useful to those interested in comparative studies. As the study looks closely at a context which is influenced by Islamic and traditional Saudi culture, it can provide an opportunity to compare this particular context with others.

After reviewing the literature, and based on the findings of this study, further research seems to be still needed in the area of leadership at the departmental level in higher education institutions. Considering the delimitation of this study which was conducted in certain departments of just one university, this does not permit a generalization of the findings. Therefore, further research is needed to include other departments.

In addition, further research must consider examining universities in different regions of the country, to ascertain whether different regional cultures affect how chairs should act. Research could also examine whether the size of the university influences

characteristics of effective department chairs. Specific studies could be conducted to see how different academic disciplines affect the behaviour of chairs. It would also be interesting to examine how different disciplines affect the general atmosphere of the departments. The information obtained could assist chairs to interact effectively with their department.

Further research could focus on how the system, and structure of an organization, can affect the leadership of department chairs. This information can assist in selecting the appropriate training and development programs for the chairs, so that they can serve effectively within the structure of their particular organization.

Additional research is needed to identify appropriate approaches for training department chairs. The information can help increasing leadership expertise, and reinforce professional relationships.

Given the Saudi policy of encouraging faculty members to obtain degrees from overseas universities, studies could investigate whether chairs with an international background are more, or less, effective in leading academic departments.

Department chairs are usually leading their peers, and leading peers is one of the common challenges the chairs encounter. Research on this issue could help identify effective approaches for leading among peers without playing favourites, or disaffecting them.

Recommendations

Policymakers need to rethink, and give extra consideration to, the position. They need to design a program to prepare department chairs prior to occupying the position. Not only before the appointment, but also throughout their tenure as chair; they need frequent development programs and they need to be given opportunities for meetings and exchanges with fellow chairs. These meetings would give them an opportunity to share their experiences, express their views, and discuss emerging issues and challenges. This can assist and support them in relieving and reducing their stress, and contribute to enhancing their own work environments as well as those of their colleagues. A leadership development program has to take into consideration the challenges that confront the chairs, and could contribute to the development of more innovative and effective responses.

The development and training program for department chairs has to include courses in using continuously evolving technology. Lack of experience in using technology is a barrier for some department chairs, to the detriment of departmental working processes. In addition, chairs have to be given reasonable tasks, and adequate time for accomplishing these, so that they do not experience undue work pressure or frustration.

Higher education in Saudi Arabia is highly structured with many rules and regulations. These regulations have to be provided to chairs with more detailed descriptions for practical applications. Furthermore, sufficient interpretation and detail should accompany any new policies and regulations, so that chairs do not have to experience the frustration of ambiguity. In addition, discussing the rules and regulations at chairs' meetings could contribute to greater consistency in how they are interpreted, understood, and applied.

The findings of the study can help in the selection of new department chairs. They can assist the interviewers in focusing on the skills, knowledge, behaviors and attitudes that were identified as being necessary for effective department chairs. They could also assist in refining the criteria for selecting a new chair.

Since the Ministry of Higher Education initiated the Academic Leadership Centre (ALC) in Riyadh in 2009, expanding the focus of this center to involve development opportunities for department chairs is recommended. Also it is recommend opening new branches, or similar centers, in every region--not only just in the capital city--to make it easier for women to attend such courses, especially with the restrictions on women's travel in Saudi culture. In addition, women's views have to be given equal consideration in the university council, rather than always following what is imposed on them by the male section. Universities have to provide equal opportunities for women and ensure the removal of barriers that hinder their development and involvement.

It is recommended conducting more qualitative research to acquire original insights into higher education in Saudi Arabia. The use of qualitative approaches can provide a valuable addition to the methodologies in higher education studies which have been mostly conducted using quantitative methodologies. Most researchers who have studied this topic have either developed their own surveys or used someone else's leadership survey. Surveys, and purely quantitative studies, are limited in their abilities to delve into the participants' own insights regarding the effective and desirable practices of department chairs. Providing the participants the opportunity to express their views through interviews allowed them to ground the data on an authentic platform of relevant experience.

In regards to the practices of department chairs, the following lists are recommended:

1. Department chairs need to have an understanding of the policies, rules, regulations, and their rights and responsibilities.
2. Department chairs need to use the rules and regulations in making decisions.
3. Department chairs have to be able to explain and justify their decisions because justifying the decision taken fosters a sense of trust.
4. Department chairs should have a vision for their department.

5. Department chairs should be able to clearly communicate the vision they have for the department.
6. Department chairs need to know their faculty to get the best out of them.
7. Department chairs need to be able to engage with their faculty members, listen to them, let them know that they appreciate them, and motivate them.
8. Department chairs must be willing to consult with faculty members and delegate particular tasks appropriately.
9. Department chairs need to balance faculty members' workloads.
10. Department chairs need to be fair, flexible, patient and well organized.
11. Department chairs need to ensure that they are skilled in time management, problem solving, and conducting meetings.
12. Department chairs need to lead by example, and walk their talk.
13. Department chairs have to accept change confidently, and be creative. A willingness to accept and welcome change assists the department to improve.
14. Department chairs should not hesitate to learn by asking questions.
15. Department chairs have to realize that the position requires particular skills, knowledge, behaviors and attitudes if they are to be effective.

Department chairs' awareness, and applications of these findings, can contribute to reducing the stress which is associated with the position, increasing their effectiveness, and refining their leadership.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to identify effective leadership qualities, characteristics and practices for department chairs, which can be proposed for current and potential department chairs in universities in Saudi Arabia. To reach answers to the research questions, former and current department chairs, as well as faculty members', perspectives of the qualities and behaviors needed to be an effective chair were obtained and examined. Face to face interviews and phone interviews were used to acquire the perspectives of the study participants. The analysis of the data showed that many skills, knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes distinguish effective department chairs.

Comparing the findings with the literature in Islamic views of leadership and Saudi culture indicated that Islamic values and Saudi culture infuse the approach to departmental leadership among the respondents. However, although Saudi culture is considered a high power distance culture with bureaucratic systems in most organizations, today's leadership approaches, and the fact that many faculty members graduated from international universities, appear to have begun to transform some of

the traditional approaches to leadership. For instance, the findings indicate the need for more collegial and cooperative behaviours in leadership.

This study is a contribution to better understanding of departmental leadership. The study is also valuable to the position of department chairs, as it provides potential guidance for department chairs to work effectively, whether they are current or potential chairs.

The information that emerged from this research can help future, as well as current, department chairs to fulfill their responsibilities and lead their departments more effectively. Furthermore, information from the study may prompt higher education policymakers to establish training programs that prepare prospective faculty members for the position of department chair.

Giving department chairs adequate preparation will assist in creating effective leadership at the departmental level, which in turn will ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia in the 21st century.

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