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ROLE OF CULTURE ON LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE IN SAUDI ARABIA

Mohammed Abadi

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Saudi Arabia**



¹*Mohammed Abadi

King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Corresponding Author's E-mail:

abdi.moha@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to analyze the role of culture in leadership and governance in Saudi Arabia

Materials and Methods: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The results show that culture has a profound influence on the ways in which governments are structured and the decisions that are made. It affects the types of leaders that are chosen, the values and goals that shape policy outcomes, and the institutional context in which leaders operate. This suggests that culture is an important factor to consider in any discussion of governance and leadership.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practices and Policies: The cultural-level theory, cultural relativism theory and cultural-contextual theory may be used to anchor future studies in the leadership and governance sector. The study results will also benefit other stakeholders such as the policy makers as well as researchers and scholars from different parts of the world. The top management of corporate companies in the country will also use the study findings to improve the culture and ensure high and stable performance in all their activities and programs. The study recommends that the adoption of effective cultural policies in the leadership and governance sector will help to improve efficiency in their major operations and activities.

Keywords: *Culture, Leadership, Governance, Saudi Arabia*

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize a society or organization. It is an important factor in leadership and governance as it affects the way decisions are made and how people interact with one another. Culture influences how leaders and managers make decisions, how they interact with each other and how they perceive the environment in which they work. It also affects how people think, feel and behave in a particular organization or society. Culture has a significant impact on the way leaders think, act and lead (Joseph, 2018). Leaders are shaped by the culture in which they live and work and their decisions and behavior are largely determined by the values and norms of their culture. For example, in an individualistic culture, a leader may be more likely to make decisions independently, while in a collectivist culture, a leader may be more likely to consult and involve others in decision-making. Culture also influences the way leaders interact with other people.

Leaders in a collectivist culture may be more likely to emphasize relationships and cooperation, while leaders in an individualistic culture may emphasize competition and individual achievement (Akuno, 2017). Culture also plays a role in governance. In some societies, power is centralized, while in others, it is more decentralized. The way power is distributed within a society or organization is largely determined by the culture in which it exists. Culture also affects the way decisions are made and implemented in a society or organization. In a collectivist culture, decisions may be made through consensus and involve input from a variety of stakeholders. In an individualistic culture, decisions may be made more quickly and independently by a small group of individuals (Sheedy, 2018). The role of culture in leadership and governance in Saudi Arabia is an important issue to consider when examining the country's current and future development.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a unique nation in the Middle East, having a long history of monarchy, a strong cultural identity, and a rapidly changing society. The country's culture has played an important role in shaping the leadership and governance of the country and this is reflected in the way the government operates, the way the people view their leaders and the way the nation interacts with the world (Khan, 2013). Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud since 2015. The country is ruled by a single family, the Al Sauds, who have been in power since 1932. The Al Sauds are adherents to the Wahhabi school of thought, an ultraconservative form of Sunni Islam. This has had a major influence on the culture and values of the Kingdom, and has also been reflected in the country's leadership and governance. The Al Sauds have used this influence to ensure that their rule is unchallenged, and that their values are upheld throughout the country (Alomiri, 2016).

This has been achieved through a combination of political, social, and religious control. The most obvious example of the role of culture in leadership and governance in Saudi Arabia is the role of Sharia law. Sharia is the Islamic legal system, which is based on the Quran and the Sunnah. Sharia law is the basis of the legal system in the Kingdom, and is enforced by the Islamic courts. The laws are interpreted and enforced by religious scholars, and are strictly enforced. Sharia law is seen as the cornerstone of the Kingdom and it is seen as a way of maintaining the values and beliefs of the nation (Garvin, 2021). This has had a major impact on the way the country is governed, and has made it difficult for reformers to challenge the status quo. In addition to the role of Sharia law, culture has also played a role in the way the government is structured. The country is divided into 13 provinces, each headed by a governor appointed by the King. The governors have considerable autonomy, and are responsible for ensuring the laws are followed in their provinces.

The governors are also responsible for implementing the King's directives and have considerable influence in their provinces. The governors' power is limited, however, and they are ultimately answerable to the King. The role of culture in leadership and governance in Saudi Arabia is also evident in the way the nation interacts with the rest of the world (Alsaif, 2014). Saudi Arabia is a conservative country and is wary of the influence of foreign cultures. The country has long been an ally of the United States, but it has also sought to maintain its independence from the West. This has been reflected in the way the nation interacts with other countries, particularly in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has sought to maintain a neutral stance in regional conflicts, and has avoided getting involved in direct military action (Humphries, 2017). This has been seen as a way of preserving the nation's cultural identity, and ensuring that its values are not compromised by outside influences. Culture has also played a role in the way the people view their leaders. The Al Sauds have a long history of absolute monarchy, and this is reflected in the way the people view their leaders. The monarchy is seen as a symbol of stability and tradition, and the people have a deep respect for the monarchy. This respect is based on the belief that the monarchy is the embodiment of the Kingdom's values and beliefs. This has allowed the Al Sauds to maintain a strong grip on power, and has made it difficult for reformers to challenge the status quo.

Statement of the Problem

The role of culture in leadership and governance in Saudi Arabia is a complex and multi-faceted one, and can be seen in the country's history, its political and economic systems, and its social and religious values. The culture of Saudi Arabia is shaped by the Arab-Islamic tradition, which influences its political and economic structures, as well as its social and religious values. This culture has played a major role in shaping the country's leadership and governance, and has resulted in a number of challenges and issues. The country is governed by Islamic law, which is based on the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. The rulers of Saudi Arabia are considered to be custodians of the faith and are therefore responsible for the protection and promotion of Islamic values and principles. This has led to a strong emphasis on the importance of religious and moral values in the country's leadership and governance.

The culture of Saudi Arabia is also heavily influenced by the tribal structure of its society. One of the major issues that has arisen from the culture of Saudi Arabia is the lack of freedom of expression and the lack of civil liberties. This is because the country's political system is highly centralized and authoritarian and does not allow for the free exchange of ideas or the open discussion of political issues. This has resulted in a lack of political representation and participation, and has made it difficult for citizens to express their grievances or to seek redress for any grievances that they may have. This has been a major obstacle to the development of a more democratic and open political system in Saudi Arabia. Another major issue that has arisen from the culture of Saudi Arabia is the lack of gender equality. This is because the country's political and legal systems are heavily influenced by Islamic values, which are highly patriarchal and reinforce traditional gender roles. This has resulted in a system of gender discrimination, which has resulted in women having fewer rights and opportunities than men. This has been a major obstacle to the development of a more equitable and just society in Saudi Arabia. Finally, another major issue that has arisen from the culture of Saudi Arabia is the lack of economic opportunity. This is because the country's economy is heavily reliant on oil, which has resulted in a highly unequal distribution of wealth. This has resulted in a large number of citizens living in

poverty and has made it difficult for them to access the resources and opportunities needed to improve their lives.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study will benefit from the cultural-level theory which was proposed by Geert Hofstede (1980), cultural relativism theory by Franz Boas (1887) and the cultural-contextual theory by Vygotsky (1962).

Cultural-Level Theory

Cultural level theory is used to explain the role of culture in leadership and governance. Cultural-level theory argues that culture is a shared set of values, beliefs, and norms that is passed down from one generation to the next. As such, the culture of a society can shape the values and beliefs of individuals and organizations (Geert, 1980). For example, if a society has a culture of respect for authority, then individuals and organizations are likely to be more likely to follow rules and regulations and to be less likely to challenge existing policies. Similarly, if a society has a culture of openness and tolerance, then individuals and organizations are likely to be more open to change and to be more willing to challenge existing policies. Thus, cultural-level theory can be used to explain the role of culture in leadership and governance by showing how the culture of a society can shape the values and beliefs of individuals and organizations (Safe, 2020).

Cultural Relativism Theory

Cultural relativism is a theory that suggests that all cultures should be seen as equal and that there should be no value judgements made about one culture over another. This theory suggests that all cultures share certain basic values and beliefs that are necessary for survival, and that each culture should be respected for their differences (Boaz, 1887). This theory is often used to explain how different cultures have different approaches to leadership and governance. For example, in some cultures, leadership is seen as a matter of personal power and authority, while in other cultures, leadership is seen as a matter of consensus and cooperation. This theory is also often used to explain how different cultures have different approaches to decision making, with some cultures relying on consensus and cooperation, while others rely on a more hierarchical system. Theory of cultural relativism suggests that different cultures should be judged on their own terms. This theory suggests that a particular culture should not be judged by the standards of another culture, as each culture is unique and has its own set of values and norms (Alsaif, 2017). This theory suggests that people should strive to understand and appreciate the values and customs of a given culture before they attempt to make judgments or draw conclusions. In terms of governance and leadership, this theory suggests that leaders should be aware of the cultural norms, values and beliefs of their constituents and strive to understand and respect them.

The Cultural-Contextual Theory

The cultural-contextual approach is a theory that suggests that culture is shaped by the context in which it exists (Vygotsky, 1962). This theory suggests that the environment can influence the way that a culture behaves, thinks, and develops. This theory is often used to explain how different cultures have different approaches to leadership and governance. For example, some cultures may be more open to change and innovation, while other cultures may be more conservative and traditional. This theory is also often used to explain how different cultures have different

approaches to decision making, with some cultures relying on consensus and cooperation, while others rely on a more hierarchical system (Khan, 2013).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Frieda (2020) examined the impact of leadership on the organizational culture of the NCSs head office. An explorative design of self-completion questionnaire (OCAS) was used to collect qualitative data from 45 respondents using non-probability of a purposive sampling method. Data was analyzed qualitatively. Results indicate that supervisors were task-oriented then personal wellbeing of the staff; transformational leadership was found to be dominant; leadership and follower's behaviors were found to be negative as well as the organizational culture; while the regulatory management approach was confirmed to be bureaucratic.

Tahseen (2018) researched on the issue of how organizational innovation can be accelerated with the support of leadership structures and the organizational climate, specifically taking into account the top innovative universities of the world, which has not been found in previous empirical studies. A survey, based on a deductive approach, is adopted since the questionnaire for organizational innovation is designed for organizations in order to measure organizational innovation. A complete online questionnaire was developed for collecting data, and the PLS-SEM statistical technique is used for analysis and results. Finding showed that top innovative universities of the world mostly have a transformational leadership style directly triggering organizational innovation which is consistent with the previous studies, while transactional leadership is having a positive relationship with organizational culture and innovation, but the results were statistically insignificant.

Safe (2018) assessed the organizational culture of governmental hospital in Jeddah. Non-probability quota sampling was used to select the employee from two governmental hospitals including different professions. The data collection tool was used is the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) that based on Competing Value Framework (CVF) as a data collection tool (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). Result: Hierarchal culture (Mean = 3.314 ± 0.741) is the dominant type of Organizational Culture in the governmental hospital in Jeddah city over the other culture types was Hierarchy culture, followed by Clan culture (Mean= 3.296 ± 0.757), and the Adhocracy culture (Mean= 3.241 ± 0.707) was with equal result to the Market culture (Mean= 3.245 ± 0.729).

Oriedi (2016) examined the influence of policies and practices that govern appointment into leadership, patriarchal culture, domestic responsibilities of female teachers and marital status on achievement of gender parity in secondary school leadership in Siaya Sub County. The study used questionnaires and interview schedule to obtain information. Qualitative data was organized in themes and presented as narratives. Analyzed data was presented in tables, charts and graphs. The study revealed that the existing policies and practices governing appointment of secondary school teachers in leadership were not effective because they did not solve the problem of gender disparities conclusively; The Patriarchal culture discouraged many qualified women in applying for leadership positions in secondary schools as they viewed leadership as a preserve for men; Domestic responsibilities negatively influenced gender parity as it mainly affected more women than men and marriage was a great hindrance to women teachers taking up leadership roles in secondary schools.

Sarah (2016) explored how CRM implementation is impacted by the organizational culture and leadership in Saudi Arabian organizations. Data as collected using semi structured interviews. Findings from case study indicate that leaders adopted transactional and autocratic leadership styles in implementation of CRM. These leadership styles have resulted in a number of problems in coordination, communication and implementation of CRM as well as low levels of interaction between top management and the employees working at the front end. This study finds that an autocratic leadership style negatively influences customers' experience in customer-oriented industries. Moreover, organizational culture plays an important role in implementation of CRM system. It shapes how employees interact with each other and how they interact with their superiors and subordinates and guides employees about what to do and what not to do, including practices, values, and assumptions about their work. This study also found that organizational culture plays an important role in planning implementation and effectiveness of CRM systems in organizations

Yonsinta (2016) explored how organizational culture influences civil service performance and identify other organizational factors that may also influence civil service performance in the provincial administration of Thailand. The research used a mixed methods approach of questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews, based on the Competing Values Framework (CVF). Questionnaire surveys were carried out with 480 civil servants within 16 provinces. Semi-structured interviews in-depth and focus group were conducted within four provinces. A distinction was made between the low and high KPI scoring provinces. The findings of the research suggest that there was no dominant type of culture in the low and high KPI scoring provinces. Instead, a strong culture was found to be important in gaining high KPI scores, supported by participative leadership and appropriate management. Leadership style appeared to influence whether the public services performed to a high level, which seemed to be achieved through a balance between task focused and people focused. Therefore, a transformational cultural shift may not be required, but instead more effective leadership and management.

Alomiri (2016) investigated the impact of leadership styles on e-Government use in the service industry in Saudi Arabia. The research was conducted through the sampling of employees in private and public sectors. While the data for the leadership styles, organizational culture and national culture were collected through the use of questionnaires designed for employees, the e-services were measured through organizations' official websites. All data were processed and analyzed using computer software (WarPPLS) and SPSS. The results support the hypothesized relationships proposed in the theoretical model, wherein all constructs under study (except for the mediating effect of National Culture (NC) on the relationship between leadership styles and organizational culture) positively affect e-services implementation, including Individualized Influence (IINF), Intellectual Stimulation (ISTIM), Individualized Support (ISUP), Contingent Reward (CR), Management by Exception (MbE), Servant Leadership (SL), Bureaucratic Culture (BC), Involvement Culture (INVC), Mission Culture (MC), Innovative Culture (INC), Task Culture (TC) and Future Culture (FC) and the mediating effect of National Culture (NC) on the relationship between organizational culture and e-services implementation. The results also indicated that specific leadership styles have direct and positive impacts on e-services implementation and indirect influences through a mediating organizational culture and a moderating national culture. The empirical findings bring new evidence in support of this proposal, indicating that specific leadership styles play crucial roles in influencing processes and outcomes

within organizations. According to these results, e-services differ from one organization to another, and these variations were correlated to leadership styles and organizational culture

Anna (2015) investigated the relationship between senior management team culture and clinical governance in the public health care organizations of three Italian regions. The assessment of senior management culture was conducted using the Competing Values Framework and a corresponding instrument adapted for the Italian context. Clinical governance was assessed using an ad hoc instrument focused on the senior management team's perception and attitude toward clinical governance. The results of four different models demonstrate that organizations characterized by different dominant cultures are associated with significant differences in attitudes toward clinical governance. In particular, on average, dominant cultures with a prevailing external focus are associated with a more positive attitude toward clinical governance.

Obara (2015) determined the influence of school leadership, assessment tests, community involvement and supportive learning environment on performance of students in KCSE. The study employed a descriptive survey design and used structured questionnaires for teachers to collect data. The study targeted 250 teachers in 50 sampled secondary school teachers within Manga district, Nyamira County. The study established that the prevalent leadership style in the sampled schools was both participative and transformational. Schools with higher rating for extent to which its leadership was participative had higher KCSE mean scores in the year 2013 and 2014 as compared to those having lower rating of school leadership consistency with participative style. Regarding influence of assessment tests on student performance in KCSE, the study established that the schools held an average of 5 tests each term, vetted by Head of Departments or/and examination committee. The schools with higher rating as regards quality and sufficiency of assessments had higher KCSE mean score for the years 2013 and 2014 as compared to those with lower ratings.

Alsaif (2014) analyzed the problems associated with the low response of citizens to the adoption of e-government in developing Arab countries, with a predominant focus on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study has validated the UTAUT in Saudi Arabia and has extend the theory by including further variable such as the trust, compatibility, awareness and the service quality which proposed to influence citizen's adoption of e-government in Saudi Arabia. As the adoption consider as an efficient method to evaluate the success of the implementation. It is necessary for this new innovation to be tailored to citizens' wishes, and taking into account the religious, cultural, traditional and other beliefs to ensure the widespread adoption of this innovation. The finding reveals that performance expectancy is the strong predictor of the intention to use e-government followed by the trust of the internet.

Njuguna (2013) explore what teachers think are the characteristics of an effective Principal (leader) in Kenyan Secondary Schools in Muranga and Nairobi Districts. These schools are in rural and urban regions respectively. The study was conducted in two Phases. In Phase one, Secondary school teachers (N= 100) in Nairobi and Muranga districts were asked to list the ideal characteristics of an effective educational leader. They were also asked to identify one educational leader who they thought was effective and explain why they thought so. On the basis of the characteristics, a checklist of effective leaders was prepared. In Phase two, Principals in the two Districts were rated by a sample of 349 teachers using the checklist of effective leaders. Teachers were asked to respond to the statements about effective leaders on a seven point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The data were coded and factor analyzed. Factor

analysis of these ratings yielded six factors which were labeled as “nurturing orientation”, “decision-making”, “conventional personality”, “ethical leadership”, “empowerment” and “communication”. This set of factors was unique to the Kenyan schools as they had not been combined like this elsewhere in research. This clearly showed that assessment of leadership effectiveness cannot be meaningful and accurate if the assessment tool is constructed in another culture. It also implies that there are as many tools of assessment of leadership effectiveness as there are cultures.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive’s time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

RESULTS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, methodological and geographical gaps.

Conceptual Gaps

Studies by Frida (2020), Tahseen and Safe (2018), Oredi, Yonsinta, Alomiri and Sarah (2016), Anna and Obara (2015), Alsaif (2014) and Njuguna (2013) had conceptual framework gap in addition, all the mentioned studies did not establish the challenges of culture on leadership and governance. The studies did not outline the challenges in a clear manner. Therefore, the current study seeks to address these conceptual gaps.

Geographical Gap

Studies by Frida (2020), Tahseen (2018), Oredi, Yonsinta and Alomiri (2016), Anna and Obara (2015) and Njuguna (2013) had geographical gap because they were not conducted in Saudi Arabia This implies that the results may be inapplicable in Saudi Arabia since the social economic environment of Saudi Arabia and other countries differ. The current study seeks to address this gap.

Methodological Gap

A methodological gap presents itself in this study, for example, Obara (2015) conducted a study to determine the influence of school leadership, assessment tests, community involvement and supportive learning environment on performance of students in KCSE. The study employed a descriptive survey design and used structured questionnaires for teachers to collect data purposes of collecting data to analyze data while our study will use a desk study literature review methodology.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Culture has had a major impact on governance and leadership in Saudi Arabia. The country’s culture is heavily influenced by its religion and its geographic location, and has resulted in a system

of governance that is resistant to change and innovation. The country is beginning to open up to the outside world and is slowly becoming more progressive in its attitudes and values, but its culture still has a major impact on its governance and leadership. The trend towards globalization has urged leaders to become more talented and experienced in cross-cultural awareness and practice. All in all, today's leaders need to acquire a challenging set of competencies if they intend to be effective in present-day global communities. The role of culture in leadership and governance in Saudi Arabia is likely to remain important in the future and will be an important factor to consider when examining the country's current and future development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that governmental endeavors should focus on the development of legislation and regulation in facilitating employee-firm relationships, maintaining health and safety standards in workplaces. The ability of government providing a framework for regulation and the means by which to monitor compliance could possibly improve corporate social responsibility standards and encourage large and small companies to improve their performance. This study will be used as a starting tool for future empirical research on this unique topic. There is a need for further empirical studies for extended generalizations. Available information on culture and leadership can be also used to build culturally sensitive websites, design new employee orientation programs, conduct programs in relocation training and improve global team effectiveness.

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