
Original Research Article
Leadership Development in Government of the UAE: An Article Critique

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ABSTRACT

This critique is for an article entitled “Leadership development in government of the United Arab Emirates: Re-farming a wicked problem” Written by professor Mathias in Journal of Teaching Public Administration. Leadership development programs are a focal point in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Federal and local governments as well as different business sectors focus on developing leadership. Thus, leadership development programs should aim to allow potential leaders to think out of the box permitting participants to develop a vision and find how they can serve people and develop the country. This can be achieved when potential leaders participate in the development process of leadership program including the design and get engaged in formulating the vision of the country through encouraging their hearts, and enable them by learning and practicing without fear.

1. Introduction

This critique is for an article entitled of “Leadership development in government of the United Arab Emirates: Re-farming a wicked problem.” Written by professor Mathias in Journal of Teaching Public Administration.

The Background of the article is that the leadership development programs are a focal point in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The federal and local governments as well as different business sectors focus on developing leadership. This heavy focus on developing leaders is due to the UAE unique circumstances. UAE citizens total about 1.4 million equal to 16% of the country population. UAE citizen are heavily dependent on government entities in all their life aspects including work. Both sides; the government and the citizens are in need of each other. In addition, the change in environments i.e. rapid growth of the UAE economy and the ambitious political – social agenda of the UAE government makes leadership development a strategic concern. This strategic concern influences the pipeline of both current and future leaders at local and national levels. Several federal and local entities are implementing leadership development programs. However, there is a huge demand for leaders and challenge for Governments developing them. This challenge is due to several factors related to the nature of the programs. The expectation from participants of the programs after finishing it is to play major roles inside the organizations and at the community levels as well as at the national level. The author has provided a description of social change that leads individuals, mainly new generations, to become more individualistic, selfish, thinking to maximize personal benefit. UAE different government entities designated a huge budget (the amount not declared) on developing governmental employees. But the new generation employees looking for how fast they will occupy CEO positions (Mathais, 2017).

2. Purpose and Question

The purpose of this article is to examine the challenges that UAE is facing in leadership development by considering two viewpoints of old and new employee’s perspectives as it is called by the author a “wicked problem” (Mathais, 2017:158). After examining the problem, the author provides suggestions on the concept of leadership, especially the concept of public leadership. The article has two objectives which are; diagnosing the challenges of leadership development programs and reshaping the current programs in light of the concept of public leadership. The author has defined the meaning of public leaders as managers who should considers the needs and the values of UAE community. The main question is how might re-

framing government leadership development programs in the concept of public leadership that contributes to the UAE's strategic challenge? The focus of the study is leadership development programs, because it seems currently unsuccessful in developing leaders at the national level. However, the author acknowledges the development at organization level and tries to suggest a perspective, a guide line for developing public leaders at national level to serve UAE; the country, citizens and their values.

3. Research Design

For the research design, the article is built on secondary data using hundreds of articles and report of interviews conducted by the school (Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government) where the author is working. Names are kept anonymous to allow interviewees to say more (Mathias, 2017),

4. Doubt on Development Achievement

The author finds that leadership development program is a strategic matter. Its tied to the prime minister's office, the UAE cabinet of ministry, the Dubai government, and all the seven local governments in the UAE (Mathias, 2017). Leadership is a very important concept, the government needs to appoint sufficient and effective leaders at all positions in response to government needs to manage organizations, and also react to citizen needs. At the time these leadership programs are important, there is a doubt about what it has achieved. The implementing programs as explained in the article are more professional- technical type and usually benefit more the participants and their organizations at micro level. Thus these programs do not prepare participants to become public leaders at the national level. In addition, another reason why leadership programs have failed because it has developed from the base of western resources and perspective. It is copied programs from the western experience and transferred from western consulting firms without localizing it. The nature of the programs, which is more classroom based, does not help much in the contribution of developing public leaders (Kamali, 2018).

Current UAE development programs that are more technical allow managers to know how to handle their jobs, but not create leaders at the national level. For this a new modification of the federal leadership programs have happened, in which the government has added many elements to these programs. The federal development programs have now further methods such as: innovation labs, mentorship, meeting with leaders, case studies, and field trips. The reason for such methods is to provide programs' participants with both technical and public policy competencies. In addition, the author finds that there is a need for UAE managers to act like community leaders who should keep strong relationship with the people. Playing two roles might have contradictions between administrative values and community - relationship values, which requires a solution. The article concludes the important of leadership development programs strategically for both federal and local governments. Also, it closes with the need to reshape public leadership by studying and discussing several perspectives from both young managers and old officials who are involved in managing organizations at different levels. The article recommends further discussion and studies on public leadership concepts by obtaining empirical data on UAE values to be integrated with future public leaders.

5. Effect of Monarchy System

The article is very informative and directly linked to few important fields, mainly leadership, leadership development, organizations and public policy. Having reviewed this article, I disagree with part of the author's designation of the effect of environment on UAE and the leadership status, including leadership development programs. While the writer has illustrated some elements in the environment (Mathias, 2017), I noted that some other elements were lacking in explanation, such as the political system of monarchy (Common, 2011) in the country and examining an existing major leadership development programs in one of Dubai School of Government, a sister organization Dubai Government Human Resources Department (DGHRD). Despite the leadership development program at DGHRD does include mentorship, reading books, case studies, field trips outside to the USA. However, there is very little when it comes to strategic thinking, public policy, and localizing the concept in the frame of UAE context.

The UAE organizations respects all programs from various well recognized consulting firms, thereby collaborating with different foreign consultants. The international firms are mainly used in the UAE due to the lack of local expertise, and that leads to incorporation of western designs into the UAE organizations (Ghalia et al., 2012).

The purpose of this article can be presumed to be a form of advertisement promoting the development of institute programs in the organization of the author. To support this point, the writer ignores examining the DGHRD leadership programs and states that there is a need for academic programs build on researches. However, few years ago there was a program that

tried to push forward public policy and administration on leadership known as Gulf Executive Master of Public Administration (American University of Sharjah Website, <https://www.aus.edu>). This program could not succeed due to local competition and envy among the seven emirates since the start of the program in the emirate of Sharjah.

Furthermore, the ambitious political and economic agenda led the UAE to find more ways to generate revenue by implements tax over residents. Although, UAE states with pride that there are advantages of living in the country with no tax. However, there are taxes collected from the people who are residing in UAE mostly expatriates. In addition, there is a huge fee that expatriates pay to the government; fees that can be equated to taxes. An example, Dubai Budget shows that about 85-90% of its revenue is coming from fees and all Dubai investments do not reach 5% of total revenue (Atef, 2017). UAE launched many initiatives and interfering in several countries' conflicts in order to play regional and political roles, this brings about the question, how does this affect leaders, leadership and leadership development programs? Is this the UAE official vision which should be imposed over the countries and allow leaders to adopt it?! In contradiction for imposing the shape of leadership, there is an approach drawn from the concept of effective leadership in which includes innovation in the development programs (Hao & Yazdanifard , 2015). Innovation here means creativity and localization of the learning system, process and tools that are adopted to achieve goals as away for developing leaders.

6. Conclusion

The writer mentioned that the social structure reflects on the managers (Mathias, 2017), which I do agree with. The managers and directors are seen as a community leader because they are close to ruling government (Sheikhs) and they are followers to him by the necessity. Thus, ordinary people who wishes to reflect, express and deliver their needs, should be heard and have fulfilment of their requests by these managers. The UAE's government attempt to dominate local politics forces potential leaders to support UAE policy unequivocally or be cursed. The leadership development programs should aim to allow potential leaders and leaders to think out of the box allowing participants to develop a vision and find how they can serve people and develop the country. This can be achieved when potential leaders participate in the development process of leadership program including the design and get engaged in formulating the vision of the country through encouraging their hearts, and enable them by learning and practicing without fear.

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