

# Business Leadership Styles and Workplace Assessment by Example of MENA

Caroline Akhras

**Abstract: Objective:** *The purpose of this qualitative research paper is to evaluate business leadership styles and workplace assessment in the Middle East and North Africa.*

**Methodology:** *The survey was administered to 159 participants employed in local industry. Three research questions were posed: (1) In your work context, with respect to your company's cultures of assessment, which constructive steps have business leaders taken in workplace assessment? (2) In your work context, with respect to your company's cultures of assessment, is workplace assessment more efficient when led by directional leaders rather than participative leaders? (3) In your work context, with respect to your company's cultures of assessment, is workplace assessment more effective when led by directional leaders rather than participative leaders? ?*

**Results:** *Based on the qualitative data drawn and assessed, the descriptive findings may seem confounding. Given that the main objective of this study is to evaluate local business leaders and their impact on workplace assessment, the results show that 69 % of MENA business leaders took constructive steps to initiate workplace assessment. Moreover, the results show that participative rather than directional MENA leaders were more efficient and effective in business-related workplace assessment.*

**Implications:** *Additional research is strongly recommended to better understand how business leaders practically use workplace assessment to manage change and successfully lead their businesses. The result of the study and its main limitations imposed by time and space indicate that more comprehensive research is required in this area in order to better understand the impact of indigenous assessment in the Middle East and North Africa, focal emerging countries.*

**Index Terms: Keywords:** *Business Leadership Styles, Workplace Assessment, Change, Business Management,*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Business modernity is a whirlpool of innovation in environments marked by learning, change, and complexity. The nature of the business workforce in developing countries, its social trends, technology, economy, competition, geography, law, politics, and globalization all seemingly reflect ongoing development. Outcome-orientation, results-based leadership, and strategic change based on performance assessment are calls for a new direction, all numerical in nature and all change-centered. Turnarounds, joint-ventures, mergers, strategic alliances, re-engineering, re-framing, and re-structuring are based on creativity, in essence, meeting stakeholder expectation, primarily customer expectation.

**Revised Manuscript Received on December 22, 2018.**

**Caroline Akhras**, Associate Professor, Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Business Administration and Economics, Notre Dame University, Lebanon, [cakhras@ndu.edu.lb](mailto:cakhras@ndu.edu.lb)

Given the uncertainty and complexity that are the norm in one local market in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the main objective of this paper is to analyze the impact of business leadership styles on workplace assessment. The paper explores whether leaders who adopt workplace assessment play an efficient and effective role in leading change. To answer the study's research questions, the paper is organized as follows: In the literature review, existing research on leadership, assessment, and management is covered; then, the research methodology adopted is noted; next, results are discussed; finally, key contributions, limitations, and recommendations are presented in the conclusion.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The 21<sup>st</sup> century business landscape is typified by creativity and entrepreneurship. Given this vortex, many business leaders are investing heavily in change expecting a return on investment & Dante, 2016[50], [39];[51],[53] In what follows, the literature review covers leadership in the business context, cultures of assessment, and change management.

### A. Leadership in the Business Context

Key indicators of business success in the vortex of change might include leadership whose management of change to improve efficiency and effectiveness of organizational goals is critical in the day-to-day business of workplace context. Researchers assert that business leaders tend to use cultures of assessment [30] Pearce, 2015; Feger & [14] ThomasHofstede, They bring about constructive change because they influence, guide, and support the human and social capital in change management by addressing meaningful questions as Who are we? Where are we? Where are we going? And how will we get there?

Researchers posit that leaders develop their employee by continually enhancing their ability 'to create what they want to create' because in building a sense of self, confidence is nurtured, and employees become self-directed and enabled to participate in setting individual and group organizational goals [21] Moreover, researchers posit that there are business leaders who manage change well once they become change agents because they have acquired the skill and power to motivate, influence, and coordinate the change effort (Ahmed & Abdullahi [48];[9] [7] Such business leaders deal with scarce input and strive to attain low resource waste in goal attainment.

In effect, much research on business leaders who sustain stakeholder needs through distinctive competitive advantage,

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high financial performance and employee engagement found that such leaders have had early stretch experience, strong beliefs about leading, and have exhibited certain behavior. These business leaders are said to have had early formative experience that allowed them to learn on the ground, gain self-confidence, humility, and empathy. They learned how to get the job done by doing the job themselves, using operational efficiency ( [43] allocating the input resources such as assets, subsidies, and personnel to produce output (Bassem, 2008, p. 344). Moreover, such business leaders remain committed to their followers by a powerful set of core guiding beliefs. Third of all, these leaders display engaging behavior and develop their operational capacity by networking internally but also with their local community and government (European Commission on Growth, Internal Markets, Industry, and Entrepreneurship,;[13] [40] Furnham, Similar research studies were noted in Canada and the [15] [26] Scarlatescu, 2013) though the concept of networking was singled out in the U.S., p. 129). A noteworthy researcher grouped these ideas under four different leadership styles that are commonly adopted in order to successfully achieve organizational goals in complex uncertain times: directive, participative, supportive, or achievement oriented [23], 1996 in Robbins & Judge, 2018).

### B. Cultures of Assessment in the Business Context

Key indicators of business success in the vortex of change include hard evidence seen through cultures of assessment, measurement which verifies that the business is moving towards its targeted objectives. “A cultures of assessment is an organization environment in which decisions are based on facts, research, and analysis, and where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes and impact customers and stakeholders. A culture of assessment exists in organizations where staff cares to know about what results they have produced and how these results relate to customer expectations. Organizational mission, vision, values, structures, and systems support behavior that is performance and learning focused” A culture of assessment refers to deeply ingrained values and beliefs that impact the assessment practices. Moreover, a culture of assessment is the primary framework, a system of thought and action, as well as the reinforcement of good conduct on site (Fuller, 2013; Banta, 2002). It follows then that numerical data is important. Evidence on how to process and effectively manage assessment is complex. Researchers have shown that given the complexity and the sense of urgency of the change factor in the marketplace, many pragmatic business leaders have opted to instill a learning organization that strategizes change and change management [3]; [38]

Research studies show that many business leaders have adopted cultures of assessment to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of internal processes, collecting data to make decisions and benchmark costs. Cultures of assessment tend to craft the culture and frame the organization to assess and serve customer needs through ongoing communication: by educating, selecting resources, providing access to information, negotiating with those who resist change, and supporting the challenges of human capital implementing change ([4] [31]; & Cohen, [27] To remain viable and sustain

excellence consistently in terms of products and service delivery and in terms of satisfied stakeholders, a culture of assessment may need to be changed—re-crafted and reframed-- across time as companies evolve in line with communicating and servicing their customers. Culture may need to be re-crafted to accommodate change when either a threat to survival or when an opportunity for growth and development is perceived. New cultures are formed in response to external threats and/or internal integration that is facilitated by member commitment. Within this culture shift, systems are established that train all the members on the chain of command, from the top levels of the hierarchy downward, on the new cultures of assessment because not everyone is on board. Not all readily accept cultures of assessment or changes in that culture of assessment [8] As such, the imbalance between leadership and operational efficiency of an organization may hinder its performance and success [24] Bassem, 2008).

In short, cultures of assessment refer to deeply held values and beliefs held by an organization influencing assessment practice in that organization; moreover, cultures of assessment is the undergirding framework of assessment practice in terms of thoughts, action, and good conduct.

### C. Change Management in the Business Context

Key indicators of business success in the vortex of change might include change management, a strategic plan that has assessment as means rather than ends.

Change management is planned change, proactive and purposeful. Planned change seeks to improve the ability of the business and its employees to adapt to change in its environment starting with the change agent, who could be company insiders or outsiders responsible for managing change activities. Change agents know what the critical components are and how they affect the environment (Van Den Bosch, & Mihalache, 2014[49] Furthermore, business leaders who are change agents know that environments differ in terms of what is termed environmental uncertainty--the degree of change and complexity in the organizations environment—whereby change measures how often components change across time, and complexity refers to how many components are perceived in the external environment. Research studies posit that organizational change management is centered on people (Dessler, 2015 [28,29]

Successful change in organizations follows three steps that are people-centered: unfreeze, movement, and refreeze [45] Research shows that to successfully move an organization from a state of equilibrium, the unfreezing process, the problem is identified and planned human-centered action is well thought out. At that point, driving forces and restraining forces are identified. In order to be successful, a core part of the business leader’s job is to help others overcome the inherent very humane fear of change by maintaining that status quo. First, business leaders need to first identify the sources of acceptance, the driving forces, and the sources of resistance, the restraining forces. Second, once the sources of resistance have been identified, business leaders then need to understand why stakeholders resist since there may be substantive reasons,.[16] Once these two steps are taken, business leaders then properly assess the human and cultural context of



change.

The cultures of assessment for change need time. Human resources need to be respected, especially if they have served the company for many years and understand its history and culture; [35] [36] Al & Komor, 2015). [1] Moreover, organization needs time to adjust since not all can quickly move into a new status quo. Furthermore, research also notes that once the organization has moved then business leaders within the organization ought to stabilize this change by balancing the driving and restraining forces in the refreezing step in order for change to be successful established [52 [28], 29]

In brief, given the business context, this case study evaluates the impact of business leadership on workplace assessment in MENA

### III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology covers the purpose of the study, research questions, participants, procedures, research design, analysis and rubrics used in the study.

#### A. Purpose

The case study is an evaluation of the impact of business leadership on workplace assessment in local indigenous business contexts. The purpose is three-fold: to determine whether local business leaders are actively engaged in workplace assessment; to determine whether workplace assessment is more efficient when conducted by directional leaders rather than participative one; to determine whether workplace assessment is more effective when conducted by directional rather than participative leaders.

#### B. Research Questions

Three research questions were generated in order to explore leadership and workplace assessment in the local business context:

- Research Question One: In your work context, with respect to your company's cultures of assessment, which constructive steps in workplace assessment have business leaders taken?
- Research Question Two: In your work context, with respect to your company's cultures of assessment, is workplace assessment more efficient when conducted by directional leaders rather than participative leaders?
- Research Question Three: In your work context, with respect to your company's cultures of assessment, is workplace assessment more effective when conducted by directional rather than participative leaders?

#### C. Participants

The participants for this case study whose age ranged between 19-37 years and were 159 young men and young women attending university courses. They were Business Administration students and employed in the business industry. Mature and pragmatic, they understood the concepts being assessed.

#### D. 3.4 Instrument

A survey was constructed. The survey began with an

assurance of confidentiality related to information shared and a request for honest information related to workplace practices. Preliminary demographic questions were included. Four questions were posed related to the content area. Three open-ended question required reflection and discussion. The fourth question asked the participants to rank variables on the Likert type scale from 1-5 where 1 had the weakest value and 5 the highest.

#### E. 3.5 Procedure

The survey was handed out in nine different graduate and undergraduate courses in two Schools of Business on five different campuses in four different geographical districts. With 20 minutes to respond and assured of confidentiality, the 159 participants were asked to be open, honest, and explicit.

#### F. 3.6 Research Design, Survey, Analysis of Data, and Rubrics:

Four topics are explained below.

##### 1) Research Design:

The research design applied is a case study evaluating leadership styles and workplace assessment in a localized context in the MENA.

##### 2) Analysis of Data and Rubrics:

Descriptive statistics, t-tests for equality of means, and Levene's test for equality of variance were used to analyze the data collected and to study the participants' knowledge and awareness of the local workplace context on a normal distribution curve. As a result, five variables were assessed: workplace assessment, directive and participative leadership style, and efficient and effective leadership style.

- Cultures of Assessment: the participants were asked to elaborate on constructive steps taken by their leader(s) in workplace assessment.
- Directive and Participative Leadership Style: the participants were asked to elaborate on the genre of the leadership style adopted in their workplace.
- Efficient Leadership: the participants were asked to rank two variables from 1-5.
- Effective Leadership: the participants were asked to rank eight variables from 1-5. The eight variables represent the combined effectiveness index, the two major criteria of management theory and practice—(1) getting the job done through high quality and quantity standards of performance and (2) getting the job done through people with their satisfaction and commitment. Moreover, the eight variables were then paired into four categories: quality of performance, quantity of performance, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization (Luthans, 1988, p. 130).

Two Rubrics were developed to assess managerial leadership:

- Efficiency Rubric: The efficiency rubric is made up of two ranked variables--abiding by rules and regulations and being accountable.
- Effectiveness Rubric: The effectiveness rubric is made up of four categories--quality of performance, quantity of performance, job satisfaction, and commitment to the

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organization.

In short, given the noted methodology and the reviewed literature on the modern business context in terms of leadership, cultures of assessment, and change management, in what follows, the discussion is centered on an evaluation of

the impact of business leadership style on workplace assessment in the MENA.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study were relatively positive. Results show that the participants found modern business leadership style in the MENA impacting workplace effectiveness--leadership used cultures of assessment. The study also showed that the operational efficiency of developmental organizational systems allocated input resources and transformed it into products and services on time and with quality to the end-customer, efficiently and effectively. The sample asserted that leaders engaged in change management to attain organizational goals in the MENA, very much like in post industrialized countries in the developed and developing world [41] & [32]

##### A. Workplace Assessment

With respect to the first research question, "In your work context, with respect to your company's cultures of assessment, which constructive steps in workplace assessment have business leaders taken?" the results reflected that 69 % of the participants held that their business leader took constructive steps to assess the workplace. According to the participants, their leaders who were supervisors, heads of department, and middle level manager in the companies in which the participants worked, took meaningful steps in workplace assessment to reflect an underlying framework: a set of values, behavior, and attitude.

From the data, it can be deduced that the cultures of assessment were either new born or evolving. Workplace assessment is work-in-progress [17],[5] communicative [47] evolving as the company matures [10] affirmed by one of the participants who remarked in reference to a newly opened popular franchise, "When the restaurant wanted to open a new branch, the owner consulted his employees about the menu, location, and design of the restaurant." Her example shows a leader-follower relationship[18]) developing, step-by-step. As an entrepreneur, the business leader actively listened to what was happening inside and developed new standards of performance, new good conduct, and new cultures of assessment with his employees stepping forward with the *driving forces* and taking them on board *to move* the company into a newly established *status quo* (Lewin, 1951).

Even inside tall centralized structures, workplace assessment was held to be receptive to feedback. Despite one bank's history in the market, it seems that contemporary leaders were reaching down the hierarchy, receptive to lower-level feedback that might help meet customer needs. One participant affirmed, "In banks, these change agents are leaders, respected heads of enterprises. They encourage their employees and provide them with the necessities to be involved and improve their productivity." A more inclusive

example of assessment cultures can be seen in the next two examples. A participant reported that her leaders built a motivating culture, an entourage, and then they were able to take decisions together related to their work and business. She said, "The place I work had weak motivation and weak performance of its employees and then it improved to the better level due to the new plans and strategies and it became successful." Another participant reflected that, "A friend of mine works in an Import/Export company that changed its whole shipping system due to an employee suggesting a different way. This saved the company millions of dollars."

From the results, it seems that many of the local business leaders were constructive. Not all business leaders who were referred to by the sample had learnt the value of assessment in terms of business growth and self-development, but some of those referred to have taken workplace assessment seriously. These leaders were interactive, taking constructive steps, using management by walking around to monitor performance and to learn from the bottom-up, listening to their colleagues, followers, and customers, and building responsive workplace assessment: unfreezing, movement, refreezing. They listened to what their stakeholders shared and some began to embed it into their cultures of assessment-- new sets of values, new attitudes, and new benchmarks of performance In short, it seems that in some contexts, assessment was the status quo; in others, local business leaders were taking constructive steps to initiate cultures of assessment.

##### B. Efficient Leadership Style

With respect to the second research question, "In your work context is workplace assessment more efficient when led by directional leaders rather than participative leaders?" the results are as follows. It was found that the participative leaders who were actively involved in workplace assessment were more efficient than those who were directive. Based on Levene's test for Equality of Variances  $F = 2.361$  &  $SIG = 0.127 > 0.05$  level of significance, equal variances are assumed. For  $Sig = 0.001 < 0.05$  level of significance there is a significant statistical difference in the means of measures of efficiency between cultures of assessment and participative leadership and cultures of assessment and directive leadership. As a result, the participants perceived that efficient leaders were participative and actively engaged in workplace assessment.

The results reflect the inception of change led by efficient forward looking leaders who follow strategic and operational guidelines and abide by organizational rules and regulations concerned with optimal performance from the least investment in resources (Volberda, Van Den Bosch, & Mihalache, 2014; Yang, Huang, & Wu, 2010). In effect, 62 % of the participant were involved in a new genre of participative leadership, a consultative approach, one aligned to a learning organization and cultures of assessment while 38% perceived directional leadership, where leadership lets subordinates know what is expected of them, schedules work, and provides guidance on how to accomplish tasks.

These results are confounding because, in the MENA, cultures of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and individualism tend to be paramount;[11] [22] Tall centralized leaders dictate; Hierarchical leadership tends to be

entrenched in the past and preach centralization. Change does not tend to be processed when the organization is strictly driven from the top. A culture of assessment may be seen as standing in contrast to a culture of control. One participant stated the following, “Due to the religious and political diversity in this country, a leader cannot be

participative.” Nonetheless, the results of the case study show that change was taking place inside local companies. Local business leaders brought about commitment because they were participative.

In brief, the results show that local participants perceived in the value, relevance, and impact of efficient participative leaders who “improve the situation” because they are “actively changing the vertical structure” and “using the best resources” to “efficiently” facilitate change.

### C. Effective Leadership Style

With respect to the results of the third research question, “In your work context is workplace assessment more effective when led by directional rather than participative leaders?” the results show that the participants perceived that participative leaders who were taking constructive steps to initiate a culture of assessment were more effective. Based on Levene’s test for Equality of Variances  $F = 0.123$  &  $SIG = 0.726 > 0.05$  level of significance, Equal variances are assumed for  $Sig = 0.039 < 0.05$  level of significance. There is a significant statistical difference in the means of measured effectiveness between cultures of assessment and participative leadership and cultures of assessment and directive leadership.

The results show that some of the participants perceived that the leaders who were effective were participative because they actively engaged in workplace assessment [25] & Dulewicz, 2008): [20]first of all, work performance was systematized with leaders actively engaged in the quality and quantity standards of performance, and, second of all, leaders worked with them as people. A participant said, “They want optimal decision making process in order to maximize profits and minimize costs of the company”. Another participant added, “Leaders encourage a lot their followers to contribute in decision making.” One participant asserted, “Taking into account different points of view since they encourage new ideas. For example, her leader gets help from inside or outside the organization to focus on effectiveness, improvement, and development.” It seems that some participants held their leaders were pragmatic and effective because leaders made them part of workplace decision-making process by listening to them, supporting them, and giving them value; as such, the participants claimed to be satisfied and committed. Moreover, such leaders embraced the business vision and were personally committed to the organizational values as standards to abide by. Furthermore, their leaders reached out to satisfy the needs of other stakeholders, like investors, “They seek profit.” Therefore, these leaders were seen as effective because as one participant claimed, “In a country that barely works, they try to lead as best they can.”

In brief, the case study provided copious evidence to substantiate that local leaders mainly adopted effective

participative constructive leadership styles that are grounded and adaptive rather than applying the *Roman Emperor, Great Man* dictum of rules, regulations, and compliance. Moreover, the results also clarified why cultures of assessment seem to fail: many times, the human factor is ignored or overlooked, whether internally or in the local community or government. Directive leaders in developing countries, as elsewhere, expected compliance rather than commitment (Turner & Muller, 2005).

For change to be successful, business leaders need to take to account of critical contextual factors in workplace assessment and business leadership. It is necessary to identify and define the needed professional knowledge, skills, and attitude required by each job holder contingent on their position within the organizational chart. Not all leaders have not been taught nor learnt the value of assessment in terms of institutional growth; not all leaders create a positive workplace context; develop relationships; foster knowledge; strive for coherence; pursue moral purpose, and understand the change process. Not all business leaders readily accept cultures of assessment or changes in that culture of assessment, especially those who perceive that their professionalism removes the need for assessment. Many who lead business organizations have not been taught or have refused to learn the value of assessment in terms of institutional growth and development. Third millennium leaders need to strategize a broadened responsive approach in which the whole company is operationally onboard. Like toddlers at preschool, leaders need to engage in learning [42]; James, 2014) to improve. Education ought to progresses down the chain of command, from the top levels of the hierarchy downward, hierarchical level by level whereby each effort to unfreeze, move, and refreeze (Lewin, 1951 in Robbins & Judge, 2018), each short term win & Cohen[26] that is effectively;[6][34] in [46]attained across the long haul of strategic change management ought to be celebrated and positively reinforced.

## V. CONCLUSION

Surprisingly, this case study showed that despite the uncertainty and complexity of the MENA, organizational success is born and bred through intelligent motivated business leaders that adopt business leadership styles and workplace assessment aligned to their business context. In spite of an external environment marked by political instability and economic recession, the results were relatively positive. The study showed that indigenous leadership balanced style and operational efficiency to ensure organizational performance and success. 69 % of business leadership was aligned with a more open team-based workplace context. Moreover, many of the millennial participants perceived their business leaders as participative rather than directive, purposefully and proactively involved in initiating impactful communicative cultures of assessment, adopting contingent leadership styles, taking efficient and effective steps to build a new status quo of operational efficiency as has been done in many post industrialized nations (Kutznetsova & Kuzetsova, 2017; & Abdullahi, 2017)[2] .

### A. Limitations

Given the scaled nature and relatively small size of the convenience sample as well as the content and scope of the survey, the study had a number of limitations.

## VI. RECOMMENDATION

The MENA is marked by geo-political instability, socio-economic complexity, and overriding self-interest

(Deresky, 2017; Martocchio, 2015;)[12]. Nonetheless, the MENA is also marked by bright engaged business people who are “cultures of engagement” (Princeton University [44] p.1; Hofstede, 2010). Additional research is essential to reap wider more comprehensive knowledge on how local business leaders impact workplace assessment to improve operational efficiency.

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