

# SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP COMPONENTS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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## Abstract

*There has been very little research on leadership using the qualitative approach in the Arab world. The current study aims to explore and examine the perceptions of a sample of non-Kuwaiti leaders work in Kuwait toward the effective and successful leadership components. A qualitative approach using semi-structured interview was chosen for capturing the perceptions and attitudes of non-Kuwaiti toward the effective leadership. Participants indicated that personal traits, culture awareness, communication, human-task oriented, and participation and empowerment are the main components of a successful leadership in Kuwait work environment. The results may help top managers and human resource managers in selection and recruitment processes by examining the best candidates to be hired or promoted to hold a leadership position which in turn will increase organization effectiveness.*

**Key words:** Successful Leadership, effective leadership, expatriate leadership, Kuwait Organizations.

## 1. Introduction

Leadership has received a great deal of attention and examination from researchers for the last couple of decades. The influence of leadership on organizational outcomes is now clearly recognized and acknowledged in related literature, with evidence suggesting that effective leadership improves individual, team and organizational outcomes (Avolio et al., 2009; Sarros, 2009). Organizations nowadays need strong leadership style that is responsive to the dynamic changes of business environments and to be more customer-focused. Leaders in organizations are faced with prominent challenges of adapting to new models and paradigms of leadership while leading employees from diverse backgrounds. Leaders should not select their leadership style haphazardly and arbitrarily, but a clear attention to culture is required since it will influence how followers will react and respond (Maloney, 1982, Imber, 1987). Furthermore, the long-standing success of leadership development initiatives calls for an organization culture that considers developing future leaders as a long-term strategy priority (Block and Manning, 2007).

According to Deng and Gibon (2008), Daft and Lane (2005), over 350 definitions exist for the term leadership. Effectiveness of leader refers to the ability of supervising and managing subordinates (Enshassi and Burgess, 1991). To achieve high organizational outcomes, there is a growing tendency towards examining and testing the main traits of a successful leader. Research on the traits of leaders has not been able to demonstrate that any combination of physical and psychological characteristics guarantee an individual will be an effective and good leader in all situations (Jabeen et al., 2012). However, it seems that there is a set of traits and characteristics that differentiate successful leaders from the less successful. For example, Schermerhorn (2000) and Yukl (2002) argue that the general set of personal traits of successful leaders is enthusiasm, industrious energy, persistence, integrity, and intuition. In addition, Donald et. al (2006) have suggested that effective leadership involves characteristics such as self-awareness, ongoing communication and reinforcement, shared future vision, and motivating action. Although possessing these characteristics and traits do not guarantee that the leader will be effective. However, recently Hackman and Johnson (2013) confirmed that possessing these characteristics and skills have a stronger basis for developing prowess and proficiency which in turn enhance leadership effectiveness.

The national culture has been considered as a crucial and significant factor in deciding the most effective leadership style and components of a successful leader. For instance, one study revealed that Asian managers preferred leaders who were competent decision makers, supportive and caring of employees, and effective communication, both task- and people-oriented, and participation to direction (Swierczek, 1991).

Another study in Malaysia showed that successful leaders are expected to show compassion while using more of an autocratic than a participative style (Kennedy, 2002). However, according to House et. al (2002) a number of traits and characteristics are associated with successful leader regardless of what country the leader is in. These include

trustworthiness, vision, dynamism, positivity, foresight, proactiveness, and providing encouragement. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Carl and Javidan (2001) that successful business leaders in any country are expected to guide the company with a powerful vision, effective motivational skills, and excellent planning skills.

There have been several programs and projects to explore various dimensions, competencies, and aspects of leadership in the developing countries. However, there is relatively very little empirical evidence about the main characteristics of the successful leader in the Arab world. For example, a review of the literature revealed that Arab researchers have paid little attention to examine leadership in the Arabian Gulf cultural context (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001). A major reason of this is somewhat due to difficulty of studying cultural values and beliefs and their relation to organizational behavior norms and practices. Furthermore, there are relatively very little qualitative studies of leaderships in international contexts and mainly in the Arab world. Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) examine the definition of leadership as perceived by a sample of non-Kuwaiti participants working in Kuwait using a qualitative approach; and (2) explore the effective and successful leadership characteristics/traits in Kuwait as perceived by participants.

Based on the above literature, there is a clear need to significantly conduct a systematic research to unpack leadership phenomena using the qualitative approach. Such a research would explore leaders' perceptions toward the main traits and characteristics in contributing to leadership effectiveness. The analysis of proposed research questions would then be examined in such a way as to add to the scant and limited literature on successful and effectiveness of leadership. Consequently, a qualitative approach was chosen as it was viewed as the most appropriate method for capturing the participants' feelings and attitudes on the topic of effective leadership. Also, this approach helps in exploring the leadership phenomenon by providing rich information, since it collects data from professional and practitioner leaders using their words. Therefore, the current research will contribute to the emerging qualitative literature on the perceptions of effective leadership by examining the case of Kuwait.

Furthermore, Abdalla and Al-Homoud (2001) argue there is a clear lack of locally valid Arab theory of leadership. Accordingly, findings of the current study may provide rich information that might help in the development of leadership theory that is sensitive to the local culture. In addition, the findings might provide policy makers and human resource managers in selecting the most qualified and competent candidate for a leadership position which in turn enhances the organization effectiveness and performance. Results of this study also help top managers to develop training programmes for their expatriates by recognizing the cultural and social impact on practicing leadership. Also, findings of this research would contribute to academic research in terms of emphasizing the limits of generalization of assumptions about the effective leadership characteristics. A description of the work environment in Kuwait is presented next; then the research methodology will be introduced. Finally, results of the interviews, discussion, limitations and future research will be presented.

## **2. Work Environment in Kuwait**

Before the oil discovery, Kuwait economy was depending on fishing, general trade, and diving for pearls. The discovery of oil in the 1940s influenced the economic and social environment in Kuwait. Kuwait is considered as a major oil producing country that has a crucial strategic standing in the world affairs. The current socio-economic situation in addition to other historical factors have influenced the Kuwait work settings and leadership thoughts and practices (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001). Among the main influential factors are: Islamic values and beliefs, tribal norms and traditions, the oil fortune, and international and globalization exposure.

In Kuwait, public sector is the leading sector in the economy, while private sector entails primarily of small and a few medium size organizations (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001). Kuwait economy relies heavily on expatriate workforce (Egyptians, Jordanians, Palestinians, Lebanese, Indian, Bengalis, etc.). Expatriate employees have introduced their own traditions and values, bureaucratic, and power stratified practices to the Gulf countries. Workforce in Kuwait is highly culturally diverse. Such work environment requires a competent leader who can adapt to this complex work setting and to deal with differences of values, norms, language, culture, etc. in a more effective leadership style. Although the leadership principles are universal, the approaches and procedures of adaptation to each culture and work setting explain their success and failure (Hundal, 1971).

Hofstede (1984) found distinct differences across countries towards the view and preference for leadership style. According to several researchers, Kuwaitis prefer to work for public sector instead of private sector for several reasons (Abdel-Halim and Ashour, 1995; Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001). The public sector in Kuwait is considered

as lenient, provides high job security, and pays good salary and fringe benefits compared to the exerted level of work effort. Although it is suffering from over-employment in most jobs, the public sector is highly committed to hire Kuwaiti employees as a practice of the nationalization government strategy. However, employees in the private sector are employed based on their competencies, knowledge, and abilities. The fast nationalization of jobs and the influence of increasing education and international exposure have clearly changed the texture of the Kuwaiti organizational environment.

In a qualitative study of a five Kuwaiti female leaders, Al-Suwaihel (2010) found the influence of Kuwaiti culture on female leadership and the commitment of these female leaders to have a positive impact on their culture. Employees' tribe affiliation enhances the collectivistic culture which profoundly influenced the Arab leadership style. The tribe leaders are called (Sheiks) who generally shoulder all the responsibilities and centralize authority. They have to be protectors, caregivers, and fathers of their tribe members. Tribe leaders often consult with their tribe members but might be relatively aggressive and authoritarian with members of other tribes who are considered as rivals (Mahjoub et al., 1997). Ali (1988) found that Kuwaiti managers showed strong preferences for tribalistic and manipulative values. He argued that the preference for these values finds its roots in the social and economic aspects of Kuwait. Besides to the tribalism influence, the non-native employees', mainly the Arab expatriate, bureaucratic norms and values have clearly influenced the work practices and Kuwaiti managerial styles (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001). Accordingly, the Kuwaiti managerial style is a combination of bureaucratic and traditional tribal practices. According to Barakat (1991), Arab societies normally work through hierarchical relations. Followers often seek guidance and direction of their leaders based on either fear or respect and admiration.

Several studies have been investigated in Kuwait work environment. For example, Abdalla and Al-Homoud (2001) conducted a study for a sample of 140 managers and found a high degree of similarity between Qatar and Kuwait with regard to the general profiles of outstanding leaders. The most important outstanding behaviors are administrative competent, diplomatic, visionary, integrity, performance oriented, and inspirational. On the other hand, the leadership traits believed to inhibit leaders' success are non-participative, autocratic, autonomous, malevolent, face-saver, and self-centered. The same study reported that respondents believe that the concepts of "leader" and "manager" are basically identical. In another study, Ali (1989) found that Kuwaiti managers are pseudo-consultative in their decision making that they prepare subordinates to accept decisions that have been already made. In the same vein, Al-Jafary and Hollingsworth (1983) reported that managers in the Gulf countries operated within management system that was described as consultative. Al-Kazemi and Ali (2001) found that the most important managerial problems in Kuwait are: primacy of personal relationships over work relationships; favoritism and personal loyalty at work, unwillingness to shoulder responsibility, too much centralization, and reliance on heredity relations.

It has been suggested that culture heterogeneity of employees in the Middle East has a considerable impact of on manager's effectiveness (Rabbat and Harris, 1982; Maloney, 1982, Imber, 1987). The study of Enshassi and Burgess (1991) in six Arab countries (Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates) found that managerial effectiveness is related to the style of managers. The successful manager is one who recognizes and comprehends cultural differences of employees and combines both leadership dimensions; task and employee orientations. Using questionnaire, El-gamal (2012) found that female leaders in three Arab countries (Egypt, Kuwait, Tunisia) were perceived as superior as male leaders with respect to the following characteristics: cooperation, aggressiveness, competitiveness, and concern about interpersonal relationships. Metle (2001) found that Kuwaiti women working in the private banking sector who have a business education are dissatisfied with their supervision level since they perceive supervision practices and the way their supervisors control them do not match their expectations. They feel that their supervisors treat them as if they have not had any business education. In another study using a questionnaire of a random sample of employees working in 4 private and public hospitals in Kuwait, Al-Mailam (2004) reported that the transformational style of leadership was linked to high level of employee perception of leadership efficacy. This leadership style is directly related to quality, employee satisfaction, increased productivity, and employee perception of leadership efficacy.

There has been very little research work on leadership using the qualitative approach in the Arab world. In the following a presentation of the methodology and data analysis will be provided.

### **3. Methodology and Data Analysis**

There is a considerable amount of research conducted in the Arab World using quantitative approach (ex. Nusair et. al, 2012; Enshassi and Burgess, 1991; Shahin and Wright, 2004; Yassen, 2010), however there is a clear limitation using the qualitative approach. Accordingly, the current study used a qualitative approach that allows participants to provide more information, including feelings, attitudes and thoughts and reactions of the covered subject. This approach is an appropriate method when the research question is exploratory in nature. This approach involved the identification of significant themes, data collection in an open and unstructured manner, and theory development based on the collected data.

The data for the present research were collected using a semi-structured interview with a sample of participants from private and public sectors in Kuwait. A purposive sampling approach was implemented and the selection of participants was based on those jobs and positions suggested that they might have very rich source of information on the topic under investigation (Sanders, 1982). The sample size of 19 non-Kuwaiti participants was chosen as some researchers indicated that the average of 10-30 interviews to reach data saturation (Sandelowski, 1995). The current study is an exploratory in nature since no previous research was conducted in Kuwait specifically regarding the perception of non-Kuwaiti managers of the examined topic. Accordingly, the aim is to explore the practice of leadership rather than to generalize the findings. The researcher starts recognizing the repetition of the same ideas and points by participants approximately in the ninth interview and not that much worth ideas and points were raised later. Accordingly, the research reached the saturation of the interviews. Participants, from both public sector and private sector, were interviewed separately. The participants were American, Canadian, South Korean, Danish, Syrian, and Lebanese. The participants work in different organizations types (Banking and investment, sales and customer services, trading and contracting, housing, university, engineering, consulting). All participants occupied high-ranking positions in their organizations such as general manager, senior vice president, HR manager, dean of college, 5-star hotel manager, sales manager, etc. Of the total sample 5 respondents were from Lebanon, four from USA, three from Egypt, two from Syria, and one from Jordan, Tunisia, Canada, South Korea, and Denmark. All interviewees either educated in American or European universities. The author did his best effort to diversify the sample aiming to have more realistic and clear description of the study topic and to reduce the bias of nationality. The criteria for the selection of participants were basically based on several factors; namely 5 years of experience in leadership position, two years of work in Kuwait, supervising of at least three members, and still holding the position while conducting the study. Accordingly, it is suggested that the participants have a rich source of information on the phenomenon under investigation. Respondents were mainly male and each participant holds at least a bachelor degree and the majority work in private sector. Furthermore, the average age and years of work experience were about 46 and 17 years respectively. The average number of years working in Kuwait was 6 years, which makes participants familiar with the business environment in Kuwait.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted. Some of the interviews took place in interviewees' office while the others were in public locations as requested by the participant. Most of the interviews were tape-recorded after being approved and gave consent by each participant. For anonymity, interviewees' identities and organization affiliations were omitted from any records. The participants were openly assured that their answers would remain anonymous and confidential. Fictitious names were given to each participant when reporting results. All interviews were conducted in English. The interviews involved open-ended questions related to the leadership topic. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes to 50 minutes depending on the participants' interest in the leadership phenomenon in their organizations. The interviews began with a short description of the research objectives and the rights of the participant during the interview, and they were given an opportunity to ask questions when needed. The interviewees were asked to provide as much details as possible of their perception of leadership practice in their organizations. The study aims to answer the main questions which are: "What is your definition of leadership?", "What are the main characteristics/traits of a successful leadership in Kuwait?" Describe in more details your leadership experience? In addition, participants were highly encouraged to raise and discuss related topics as well to capture the big picture of leadership in their organizations. The questions were designed to tap into participants' perceptions of good and effective leadership based on their experience in Kuwait. In addition, participants were given the freedom to use their own words and to mention any situation, case, or example that might support their description of the leadership practices in their organizations.

All interviews were transcribed by the researcher and double checked by a third party who warranted inclusive and unbiased recording of interview content (Eisenhardt, 1989). Each interviews' content was coded according to

terms/concepts related to leadership. The interviews notes were transcribed verbatim and analyzed sequentially according to the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The long interview approach proposed by McCracken (1988) was adopted in this paper. The first stage is called “open coding” were data examined and reviewed line by line to identify the participants’ descriptions and explanations of actions related to the raised topic in the interviews. The codes derived were articulated and labeled in terms close to those mentioned by the participants. Then, codes and labels were compared to verify their descriptive content and to confirm that they were based on the collected data. At the second stage of data analysis, the codes were classified into different categories. Then, the resulted categories were grouped into related superior categories using the constant comparative method. Similar themes were combined and aggregated into micro themes and subsequently, micro themes were grouped into macro themes.

The process of data analysis was not strictly sequential; rather it was moving backwards and forwards frequently by re-reading and reviewing collected data, codes and labels, and categories, and the main concepts of leadership. Several actions were taken by the researcher to increase the accuracy and reliability of the data collected during the interviews. Such actions included neutral probing of answers, rephrasing the answers of the questions, promises of anonymity, and the preparation of informants prior to interviews. To validate data, the researcher conducted the following actions: (1) using field notes, (2) transcribing each interview and analyzing the interview transcripts using templates; and (3) inter-rater reliability. The following section presents the main results of the current study, followed by a presentation of the discussion and future research.

#### **4. Results of the Study**

##### **4.1 Leadership Definition**

Nineteenth non-Kuwaiti higher and middle level managers from several public organizations and private businesses were interviewed individually. The participants were asked to provide their perception and attitudes about their leadership practice in organizations. Table 1 presents sample definitions of leadership/leader and management/manager as reported by the participants. Interviewees reported that leaders are influential, goal oriented, visionary, decisive but fair, diversity sensitive, and example to followers. Leaders drive their power on basis of personal qualities and ability of convincing, while managers drive their power from position. Scholars and writers have suggested different definition of the leader and manager. Based on the provided definitions, participants appear to consider the concepts of leadership/leader and management/manager are generally similar, however, they reported clear differences also. The following is a typical remark from one of the participants about the difference between leaders and managers: “There is a big difference between a leader and a manager, not all managers can be leaders and not all leaders can be managers.” Another interviewee also illustrated the difference between the leader and the manager as: “Most of the time people in higher positions tend to think that they are leaders but in fact they only have the power of their positions.” According to Daft (2011), leader should have an influence relationship with their followers to achieve real changes, shared purpose, and take personal responsibility to make things happen. In the opposite, manager aims to attain organizational objectives in effective and efficient manner through the functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling organizational resources. The review of table 1 confirms the subjectivity of participants in their definition of leadership and the confusion between who is leader and who is manager.

**Table 1. Sample Definitions of Leadership and Management As Reported By the Participants**

Leadership is how to pursue people to do things you want them to do, it is the ability to convince them to follow you. Leadership is related to influencing people while management is more about using authority and orders.
There is a big difference between a leader and a manager, not all managers can be leaders and not all leaders can be managers. The leader should acquire heavy knowledge and should be considered as an example for his followers in order to follow him.
A person becomes a manager by virtue of his position but a person becomes a leader on basis of his personal qualities. The leader cares about his subordinates and at the same time he should be decisive and try to control his followers to achieve the shared goal.
A leader should control everything big or small...a leader should not be personal but always be fair.
A leader sets goals to achieve them throughout training and coaching. A leader is someone who passes on knowledge to his followers via communication and practice.
A leader is someone who has the ability to influence others through an inspiring vision, employee motivation, and genuine concern.
Leadership is a sacrifice and the leader usually influences others but it's a position of lonely job that needs to bring all people in the way that you as a leaders want and then take care of everything from A to Z.
Leadership is taking anyone who is reporting to me and I will show them what they will do, so it means showing, teaching and developing.
Leadership is how a person leads and directs people and how to manage them.
Leadership is the ability to make people perform beyond their expectations.
Leadership is the ability of an individual to have strong personality, along with good and positive influence on the employee's behavior.
Leadership is adding creative and productive thing to the organization and developing people's skills and abilities, also by putting diversity together in order to have a suitable atmosphere in the organization.
A leader is somebody whom people follow; somebody who guides or directs others.

## 4.2 Characteristics and Traits of the Successful Leader

The 19 non-Kuwaiti participants reported a long list of the most crucial traits, behaviors, or characteristics a successful leader should possess. The interviewees reported 57 different traits, behaviors, and characteristics of the successful leader. These traits, behaviors, and characteristics were categorized and grouped according to their relevant and consistent dimension. Based on the data analysis process which was explained in the methodology and data analysis section, five major different dimensions were revealed covering; personal traits, culture awareness, communication, human-task oriented, and participation and empowerment. In the following a detailed explanation of each dimension is presented.

### 4.2.1 Personal Traits and Characteristics

Traits are related to distinctive personal characteristics of the leader such as intelligence, honesty, self-confidence, and appearance (Daft, 2011). The participants of the present study reported a long list of the main personal characteristics such as charismatic, ability to manage diversity and being sensitive to culture, inspiring, visionary, self-confidence, optimism, honesty and integrity, enthusiasm and energetic, desire to lead, responsible, fair, etc. In the following a description of the main traits emphasized by the participants is reported. Participants stressed that a main personal characteristic of a successful leader is charisma.

According to Klein and House (1995), charisma is "a fire that ignites followers' energy and commitment, producing results above and beyond the call of duty." Charismatic leaders apply impression management aiming to cultivate a

productive relationship with followers. Charismatic leadership influences followers based on personal qualities rather than on formal authority and position. The following quotation by one of the interviewees represents this opinion: “Leaders don’t use authority as they change their followers’ behavior through influence.” Also another interviewee said: “the leader should have a unique personality which distinguishes him from others, in addition to having personal responsibility and integrity.” Another participant explained the role of the charismatic leader in the organization by saying: “As a great leader, history should be created in the lives of the followers so that they can have something to talk about and something that has been shared. This is the glue that makes people together. And the glue is what makes people excel.” Effective leaders should “influence” in order to accomplish organizational goals. One participant said: “Not all employees like their job, but the leader role is to influence followers to make them like their job.” It has been mentioned also by another participant that “the leader should acquire heavy knowledge and should be considered as an example for his followers in order to follow him.”

Another way in which the highly charismatic leader influences followers is that he or she becomes the symbol of the organization (DuBrin, 2013). It was found that self-confidence is essential for charismatic leadership (Kets de Vries, 1994). Self-confidence refers to having a positive attitude about oneself (Daft, 2011). People with high level of self-confidence are more likely to challenge difficult tasks (Kouzes and Posner, 2008); that self-confidence makes the difference between effective and ineffective leadership in crisis and critical situations. Self-confidence was among the first leadership traits scholars reported, and it currently receives tremendous attention as a major contributor to leadership effectiveness and success (Bass and Bass, 2008). Some leadership researchers conclude that the mastery of the art of leadership comes with the mastery of self (Kouzes and Posner, 2008). Interviewees of the present study reported self-confidence as a crucial characteristic of a successful leader. One of the interviewees said: “the good leader should have self-confidence.” Another participant stated that “a leader should teach the follower how to succeed by showing him confidence, zeal, and dedication.” One participant also stressed that “the charismatic side of the leader evolved through energetic and enthusiastic personality. This contributes majorly to my employees by having trust in me at critical times especially when objectives were not met.”

Fairness was reported as a crucial quality of a successful leader while dealing with followers. It was emphasized by one participant that “a leader should control everything big or small.....a leader should not be personal but always be fair.” Another participant said “one should treat all employees fairly and accepts the blame for any mistakes an employee makes.” Also fairness quality was confirmed by one participant by saying “I always treat them (employees) equally, and that’s why they like me.” Also it has been mentioned by one participant by saying “for sure, I try to apply policies, punishment and rewards in fairness way.” The above mentioned traits, behaviors, and characteristics are the main ones reported by participants but not limited to that, since the list is a long one. Next culture awareness will be presented as a second dimension of the successful leader should possess in Kuwait.

#### **4.2.2 Culture Awareness**

Culture has a significant impact on leadership effectiveness and every society has its own perspective and attitudes, and thoughts of good and effective leadership. The image of how a leader should behave and act cannot be disconnected from the cultural and social contexts within which such an image is shaped and formed (Robbins et al, 2011). As mentioned before, Kuwait economy relies heavily on highly culturally diverse expatriate workforce who have introduced their own traditions and values to the business environment. Such work environment requires a successful leader to deal with this complicated diversity. The participants of the present study considered work culture sensitiveness and awareness as a main competency of a successful leader in Kuwait. One of the participants was working in USA before coming to Kuwait. He emphasized that his leadership style has been changed to adapt to the Kuwaiti culture. The following is a typical remark from that participant to describe the impact of culture on leadership: “Organizational culture differences between USA and Kuwait are huge! In US in general people speak their minds and the structure is more mature. Rules and etiquette are understood. In Kuwait, it is more of a family environment as people are tied. I’m limited to follow certain path for managing. You have to take into consideration the Wasta (people connections) factor; the connections people have. You have to deal with it, that what is promoted in the country.” For example, the following reference to the culture awareness was made by one of the interviewees: “my employees are from different cultures so I have to read and search about that, they are mostly Indians whom from the third nation, so money is the best thing to use as a motivation, and I know they liked to be asked about families’ circumstances.”

Understanding the business culture and environment is crucial for leaders to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. One of the participants explained a distinctive approach to deal with culture differences among employees in the organization. He said “I have many departments in my company, and in each department I bring employees from the

same nationality. It means that I create one culture in one place by hiring a leader from the same nationality in each department to avoid conflicts.” In such environment, leaders can work as facilitators and supporters to manage diversity in their organizations. This can be done by providing training and development programs as stated by one participant “about 30% of my employees do not know English and Arabic. So in order to communicate well we provide them with language courses.” Adapting to the organization or society culture is also firmly important to leadership effectiveness. This opinion was introduced by one participant who said “every organization has its own culture that everyone needs to follow, no matter where you come from or what color, religion and race, being part of this organization should make you adapt to the Kuwaiti society and try to be more realistic.”

Diversity is a major challenge in current organizations. Diversity of labor enhances the creation and innovation in organization by having several opinions and perspectives in dealing with issues. An example of that was reported by one participant reported “leadership is adding creative and productive thing to the organization and developing people skills and abilities, also by putting diversity together in order to have a suitable atmosphere in the organization.” As mentioned previously, culture awareness is a major component of leadership success. In the next part communication will be presented as substantial and considerable dimension of the successful leader in Kuwait as reported by participants.

### 4.2.3 Communication Championship

Today’s organizations are clearly dependent on information sharing and on all managerial levels collaboration. Accordingly, the need for professional interpersonal skills is more crucial than before to enhance organizational performance. Effective communication contributes tremendously to the leadership success and achievement. Without effective communication, leaders would find it impossible to carry out their functions and tasks and to attain followers’ collaboration. One participant reported that “managers should listen to their employees and then judge, and all the problems are from miscommunication.” Another participant explained the importance of communication as follows: “Communication is essential in building trust and commitment to the organizational vision.”

Utilizing and using different communication methods is influential in leadership effectiveness. A participant from education background stated that “I use many methods and ways for communication with my followers such as weekly meeting, emails for general announcements, student evaluations, face to face meeting, contribute and engage on social activities within the organization.” Also this was very much prevailing by the participants of the present study as another participant reported that “I use a lot of communication methods like weekly meetings, e-mails, memos,...etc. However, face to face is my favorite method. It is not only good for discussing things but to see the reaction.” Similar to that, one participant mentioned that “talking is the best way to make employees accept my strategies.” On the contrary, another participant said that he relies mainly on written communication as he stated that “I use paper communication to make sure I have a proof if there is a lawsuit.” Another participant considered listening to employees as a key to success in organizations. He reported that “I believe that listening to employees is the key to employee commitment, my office is always open to any employee who has a problem.”

Effective leader should provide full picture of the communicated message and to be sure that followers understood the message correctly. One interviewee used the following example to describe that “I make sure the information is effectively communicated to the responsible people by giving them background of the issue and the possible consequences so that they understand what and why they are doing what I asked them to do.” Another participant confirmed this idea by saying “leaders should provide all types of information to all levels of employees. Communication is the only way to understand each other. Every leader should deliver information to his employees the same way he wants them to deliver.”

Based on the participants’ responses, several observations are worth reporting in regard to effective leadership communication. First, communication is a crucial factor in being a good and effective leader. Second, participants indicated that using different communication methods (written, verbal, electronic, etc...) is crucial of leadership success. Finally, two-way of communication is a key in achieving the goals of the organization. Daft (2011) called the leaders who is immensely successful in communication as a communication championship.

Communication championship is a philosophical grounded in the belief that communication is crucial in building trust and gaining commitment to the organization vision. In addition to communication, participants reported that human and task oriented is an ample component of successful leader in Kuwait. Accordingly, this component will be presented next.



#### 4.2.4. Human-Task Oriented Leadership

Researchers in leadership have developed two major types of leadership behavior; employee oriented and task oriented. Employee oriented leader displays the human needs of followers such as emotional support, social interaction, minimize conflict, etc. One participant reported the significance of the human side of the leader by saying "if a leader does not treat his employees well, there is no way that he or the organization will succeed." It was stated also by another participant "good leadership requires deep human qualities, beyond conventional notions of authority." Another participant mentioned that "staff must be satisfied with their job because they are considered as the main input of any organization." Another participant confirmed this opinion by saying "I developed my relationship with followers because I believe that people are the most important part."

The successful leader uses different motivational methods to retain qualified followers. The following reported by one of the interviewees represents this opinion; "there are many approaches that could be followed by the leader to motivate staff. According to our organization, there are programs of rewards such as the special bonuses, star reward, and flight tickets." Some participants emphasize the human side of motivation clearly. An example of that is mentioned by one of the participants stating that "sometimes the staffs need something more than rewards; an emotional and moral incentives such as thanks and appreciations." The contingency approach of motivation was clearly reported by participants in dealing with followers. One participant mentioned that "I choose the appropriate motivation approach for each individual, some employees are satisfied with rewards and others are satisfied with the increase of their authority and power." Having a productive relation with followers is crucial to accomplish organizational goals. One participant reported that "I have a good relationship with my team members."

In contrast of employee oriented leadership behavior, the task oriented focuses mainly on productivity, accomplishing tasks and assignments, achieving efficiency and effectiveness, directing work toward scheduling, etc. Leader should care of followers' feelings and social side, but at the same time he/she is concerned about results and performing tasks effectively. One of the participants emphasized the idea of people consideration but it should not be at the cost of accomplishing the organizational goals by saying, "leader should care about subordinates and at the same time should be decisive and try to control followers to achieve shared goals." Another participant emphasized the human-task balance by reporting that "being relationship leader is not enough, leader must control his followers in order to get a great outcome." One participant described how he can balance the human-task approach by saying "I tried to balance between employees and the task by establishing mutual trust and respect and listen to employees' needs and control employees and direct them to achieve the goal." Employees consider trust as a crucial trait of a leader since research revealed that trust in leadership is significantly related to job performance, organization citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (Mayer and Gavin, 2005; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). One participant reported, "Trust can be built with time, and I trust my followers until proven guilty." In summary, participants indicated a successful leader should treat employees with dignity as a human and focus on achieving and accomplishing task simultaneously according to the other factors related to the situation. Participation and empowerment would improve employees' satisfaction and loyalty that in turn would improve performance and productivity. Next part will present participation and empowerment as a major component of a successful leader in Kuwait.

#### 4.2.5 Participation and Empowerment

To deal with current business environment challenges, leaders are shifting their behavior from strict control to providing followers with information, openness, power and empowerment. Empowerment refers to power sharing and authority delegation of top managers to help followers make decisions. Empowerment does not mean that leaders are no longer responsible of the consequences and outcomes of followers' decisions. One participant explained this point as follows "Responsibilities can never be delegated; leaders delegate tasks only after assessing the capabilities of their subordinates." Another participant confirmed this point saying "managers delegate tasks but they never delegate responsibilities, because in the end it's always their responsibility to get things done."

"Another participant describes how decision is made in his organization applying participation and empowerment by reporting that "I don't tell people what to do, I let them take their own decisions after discussing the information at hand. People will do much better job if they believe they are part of the decision."

Many of today's organizations are implementing empowerment programs, but with a varying degrees (Daft, 2011). At some organizations empowerment means encouraging employees' ideas, while managers retain the final

authority for making decisions; at others, it means give employees relatively full authority to make decisions. Leaders might assume that their followers can have full authority to make any decision related to their responsibilities. One participant who works in a bank said “followers could take decisions for example issuing ATM cards or replacement cards without the need of big approval.” In some risky organizations, it would be difficult to delegate authority to employees as it has been mentioned by a participant works in a bank also by saying “the work process in making decisions is a management issue, I rarely involve followers in taking decisions because of the bank procedures. In each case followers should go back to get the approval. There are restrictions in delegating authority.” Another participant relatively has the same experience who reported that “I identify the exact framework for the employees to execute the project. I would follow their progress in every detail while paying attention to small details on how they are performing to ensure the work is being done.” Similar to that, one of the participants emphasized the contingency approach of empowerment practices saying that “delegation is the best decision when employees are able and willing to perform the required tasks.” Another participant confirmed this opinion by saying “Before delegating tasks, I assess people capability and then decide to whom I’m delegating.”

Empowerment has been considered as a crucial tool to enhance employees’ motivation, commitment, flexibility, and performance. One of the participants explained the reasons behind delegation of authority in his organization as follows “I delegate the authority to a capable staff in order to motivate them, build self-esteem and trust, and to enhance the leadership concept in the department.” Another participant showed the impact of empowerment by saying “I believe the more employees feel they are a part of the company, the more they’ll achieve.” The leader should train and prepare his followers to take his position in some exceptional cases such as being absent or being sick. In such situation, the leader is unable to practice his authority which asks for authority giving up to those who are qualified and capable to take his position. The following statement of one of the participants supports this idea “some leaders if they want to take vacation or travel they would send a memo to inform everyone and he would think millions of times before he takes his vacation. If I want to take a day off I just call the organization and ask whose there and would take my place.” Some leaders consider empowerment as a learning opportunity for both the leader and followers. One participant reported that “I give my employees 100% freedom to make decision. If any employee made a bad decision it would be a good for him to learn from mistakes and be well qualified for any situation if I am not there.” Another participant works in a bank said “I try to involve followers in making small decisions in order to train them how to take decisions. Some of these decisions are opening accounts and transferring salaries.” After reporting the main results of the current study primarily by focusing on the crucial and considerable components of a successful leader in Kuwait, discussion and practical implications will be addressed next.

## **5. Discussion and Implications**

The current qualitative study aims to explore and examine the perceptions of a sample of non-Kuwaiti leaders in Kuwait toward the effective and successful leadership components. The present study is different compared with related previous research by focusing on the non-Kuwaiti managers. The participants reported a clear confusion between who is leader and who is manager. This confusion will impact the level of influence the manager/leader possesses while running the organization which in turn impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of operations.

In theoretical terms, the findings of the current study reinforce the view that, without basic effective personal traits and characteristics, culture awareness, communication, human-oriented, and participation and empowerment, leadership would not be possible (Yammarino et al., 2001). Moreover, the findings provide credence to general leadership literature as they clearly described characteristics and traits of the more effective and successful leaders in Arab culture by having the Kuwait State as an example. The findings confirm previous research (Avolio and Bass, 2002; Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001) which reported that the characteristics and traits of charisma, visionary leadership, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration reflect the success of leadership. The present study also supports findings that effective leaders are classified as charismatic, participative and humane and kind (Ashkanasy et al., 2002).

The results of the study indicated that most successful leaders tend to be high in both human and task orientation. That is to say, a successful leader is one who is equally emphasized with technical aspects of management such as planning, organizing, and productivity; and simultaneously is focused on human aspects such as kindness, trust, respect, and understand culture differences. This finding confirms the work of Enshassi and Burgess (1991) based on the Blake and Mouton's (1964) postulation. A possible interpretation for this finding is that leaders are often need to be kind, trustworthy, and understanding of their subordinates' personalities as differences in culture may entail

more sensitivity on the communication and relationship with employees. Leaders also have to be task oriented in order to plan, control and achieve the organization objectives effectively and efficiently.

A major contribution to this study is related to the consideration of culture awareness by non-Kuwaiti managers as a crucial component of the successful leader. This study supports previous literature findings (Swierczek, 1991; Carl and Javidan, 2001; Enshassi and Burgess, 1991; Al-Suwaihel (2010) regarding the importance of culture awareness and the need for more understanding of differences. Culture awareness has been cited by the participants as a crucial element in effective leadership. The comments of the interviews illustrate the difficulties the participants experienced when trying to explore, understand, and adapt to the organization and country culture. Leaders should use diverse array of rewards to motivate and encourage employees from different cultures. Culture diversity of subordinates would cause poor communication and most likely intensify the difficulty and complexity of the managers' task as they lead others and try to create an effective work strategy for the team (Enshassi and Burgess, 1991). Accordingly, more acknowledgment should be focused on the culture awareness in how leaders should examine and understand the existing organization's culture and modify its objectives in a way that helps the leaders in making more rational decisions and practices.

In practical terms, the current study has major and significant implications for leadership development and effectiveness. First, leaders in Kuwait organizations need to recognize what characteristics and traits of effective and good leadership in order to craft appropriate leadership developmental and training programmes. Thus, leaders could be trained to particularly promote and encourage the practice of those effective leadership behaviors. Second, leaders should facilitate communication and use different methods in the workplace since diversity of labor is dominant in Kuwait. Third, leaders should understand the country culture and diversity of employees' cultures. Fourth, leaders should ensure that employees' participation and involvement is crucial in the creation of their goals that helps in increasing commitment and performance. The results of this current study may help the top managers and human resource managers in selection and recruitment by examining the best candidates to be hired or promoted to hold a leadership position which in turn will increase organization effectiveness. Results of the current study can be used in training and development when trying to enhance leadership competences in organizations mainly staffed by expatriates mainly in Gulf Cooperation Council. The findings of the current study suggests initiating leadership and personality development programs to help in developing the leadership capabilities in need of improvement, and furthermore the need for more appropriate and applicable succession planning within organizations.

The following figure shows the main five dimensions of successful leadership as indicated by the participants.

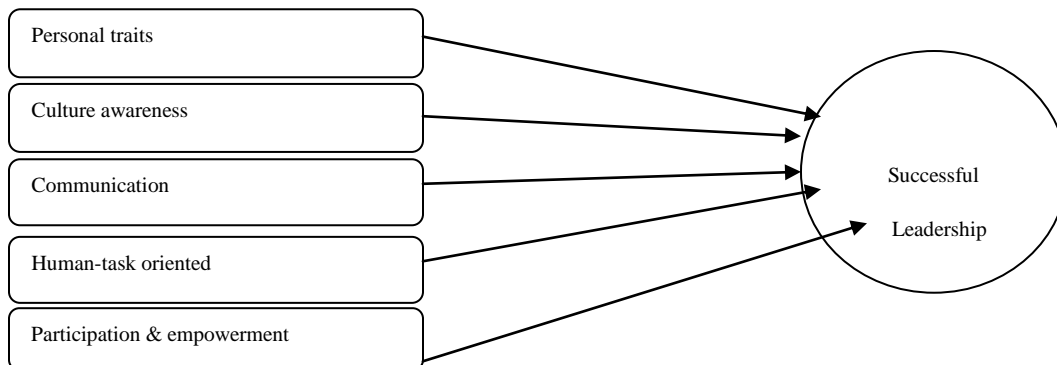


Fig. 1. Dimensions of successful leadership

## 6. Conclusion and Future Research

As with any research, there were some limitations to the current study. The current study aims to explore the practice of leadership rather than to generalize the findings. This research only investigated non-Kuwaiti leaders work in Kuwait. Since participants reported confusion between managers and leaders, it is highly vital to offer a training program aiming to enhance their awareness of the role of each in the attainment of organizational objectives

by creating a supportive climate that would influence employees' attitude and performance. It is important to compare the perceptions of Kuwaiti leaders and non-Kuwaiti in future research. Furthermore, it is crucial that these findings are replicated in other Arab countries, industries, occupations and contexts. Social, environmental, and economic conditions would play an active role in shaping the behavior of the successful leader. More research about the successful leadership components in other Arab countries is highly needed.

This would help in generalization and provide more reliable and constant information to decision makers in developing appropriate selection policies and training programs. Future research is highly needed to examine the impact of the reported characteristics/traits on other factors such as performance, productivity, job satisfaction, job commitment, etc. Self-report of leadership effectiveness is a subjective matter that often is a source of bias. Therefore, it is highly recommended to conduct a 360 degree evaluation to acquire more representative and accurate data of main components of the successful leader.

Future research might explore how demographic factors such as gender, age, job title and experience influence employees' perceptions of effective and good leadership. Examining the difference in perception of Arab and non-Arab expatriates is also a significant future contribution in the understanding of leadership since the former is more familiar with the Kuwait culture and language. In addition, future researchers should give more attention to the similarities and differences between male and female leadership styles, private and public sector, and leaders' behaviors in Arab countries, especially the Arabian Gulf states in general and in the State of Kuwait specifically. In summary, this research explored and provided significant information from which to understand leadership effectiveness. This will lead to better appropriate leaders' assessment, selection, training, and career improvement programs.

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